

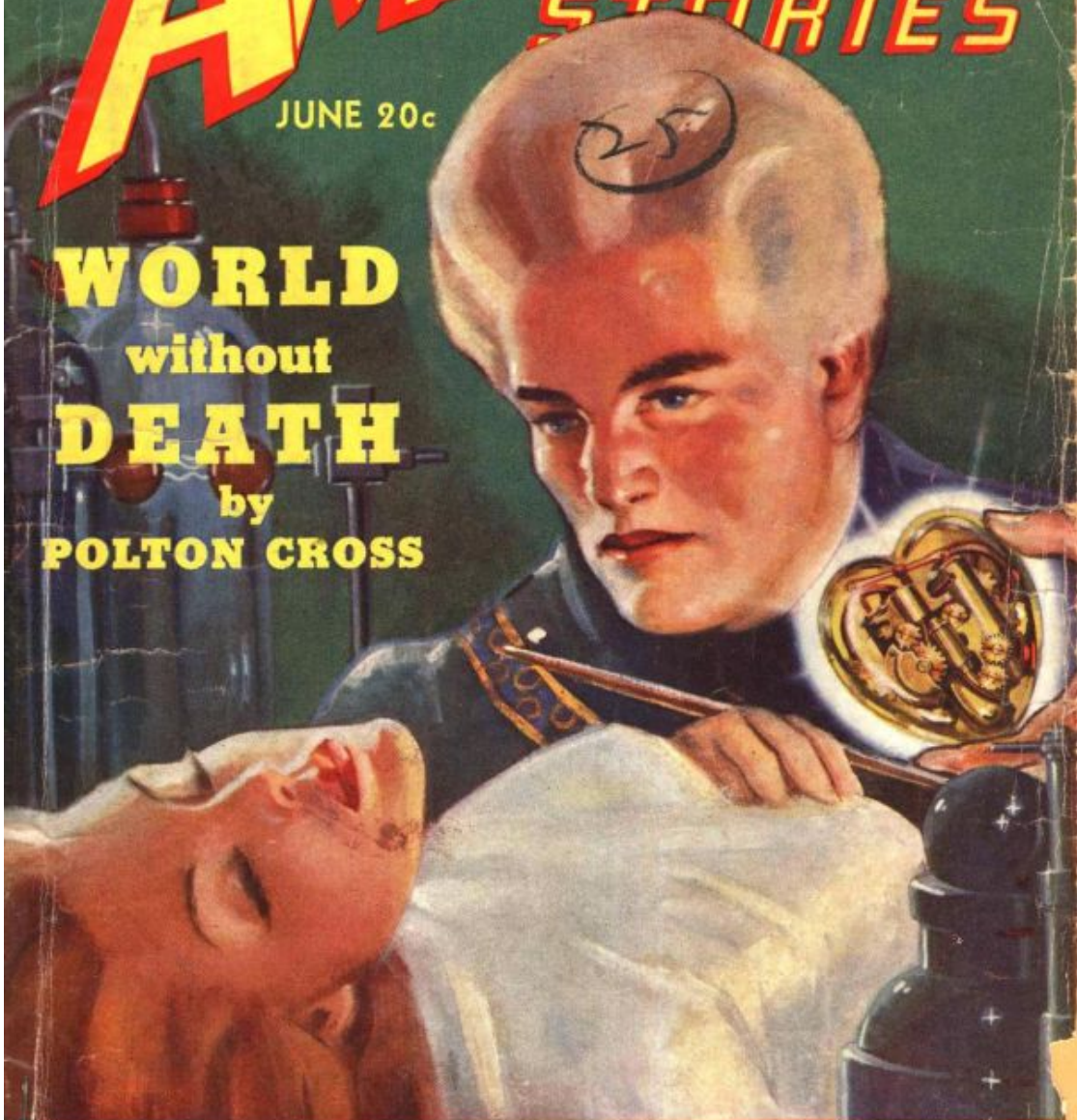
THE DEADLY SLIME by F. A. KUMMER, JR.

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# AMAZING STORIES

JUNE 20c

**WORLD**  
without  
**DEATH**  
by  
**POLTON CROSS**



**GREAT  
STORIES  
BY ...**

**ED EARL REPP \* ABNER J. GELULA \* THORNTON AYRE  
ROBERT MOORE WILLIAMS \* RALPH MILNE FARLEY**

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**5000 people disappeared in space on their way to Saturn. On Earth death took a holiday, and Graham Doone sought the answer.**



“Hang them!” came the shout. “String ’em up, the traitors!”

# WORLD Without DEATH

By

John Russell Fearn

Writing under the pseudonym Polton Cross.

First published *Amazing Stories*, June 1939.

*5000 people disappeared in space on their way to Saturn. On Earth death took a holiday, and Graham Doone sought the answer.*

## CHAPTER I

### A Scientist's Secrets

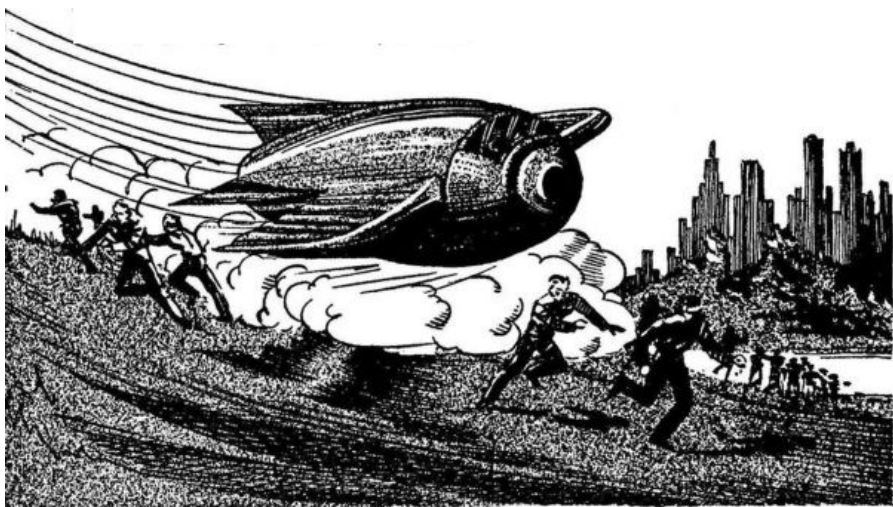
It was the weeding out of scientists and inventors that brought to light the quiet, slender Janice Milford—scientific theorist par excellence, a girl who had apparently crammed into her youthful life more scientific knowledge than a clever man could manage in a full lifetime.

In the Judgment Hall, presided over by Abel Dodd himself, the girl revealed no trace of fear as she was ordered to step out from the ranks of the brilliant captives around her.

With majestic calmness she walked forward to the little raised dais, became the focus for the eyes of the grim faced, specially selected jurors, and particularly the glittering, snaky orbs of Dodd.

For a long time he studied her in silence, allowed his gaze to encompass her from the fluffed golden hair round her shapely head to her trim little feet. He eyed her blue silk dress, rent and torn with the rough handling she had received, brooded on the white flesh that peeped through the gaps. Then at last he came back to the oval face with its steadily gazing azure blue eyes. He frowned a little at the tiny glow of contempt he saw therein, the twisted, cynical smile on her finely molded lips.

“Janice Milford,” he said slowly, his thin, cruel lips hardly moving as he spoke, “you are, we understand, an inventress? A scientist? You have been cited as America’s foremost woman thinker. In three years you have forced yourself from obscurity to acknowledged scientific authority. Back of most scientific enterprises in this country are your ideas. Correct?”



The ship zoomed down, and frantic crowds fled its rocket blasts

The girl did not answer. She stood perfectly still, her small white hands on the bar of the dais.

Dodd scowled, resumed with menacing slowness.

“Some little time ago you stated that you had the secret of atomic force—even space travel. Also you have ideas about the cosmos which are far beyond normal science. You are a mathematician and physicist. . . . Janice Milford, we demand every one of your secrets and order that you shall work entirely for our benefit. Is that clear?”

The girl slowly shrugged, asked in a soft voice.

“And if I refuse?”

Dodd’s lips twisted into a sensual smile. “If you refuse, you will be forced through physical suffering to give up your secrets. Either way we shall win: it lies in your hands whether you choose the easiest or the hardest way.”

“I see.” The girl’s faintly cynical smile broadened a little. “This seems to be as good a time as any to speak my mind. I tell you right now—tell all of you murderers sitting around me—that not one of my secrets shall pass into your possession. Do what you will with me, torture me until death if you wish. . . . But I will never speak!”

There was a little gasp of amazement from the assembly. Abel Dodd stared blankly for a moment: this was unheard of! A mere slip of a girl defying his edict.

“Do you realize,” he breathed viciously, “that it is in my power to—”

“I know all you can do,” the girl interrupted coldly. “I think it would be better if you stopped wasting time!”

She was sublimely calm and unmoved, so much so that Dodd felt irritated. A woman of acknowledged genius locking her secrets up so securely was more than he could tolerate.

“Later, perhaps, you will have learned sense!” he barked, making a motion to the guards. “Take her away, and when she is more tractable notify me . . . I’ll break you down, Janice Milford, if it’s the last thing I ever do!”

He watched her half dragged, half carried from the hall to an ominous black door on the right, then he turned to survey the remaining victims of his merciless inquiry.

---

The closing months of 1959 were destined to be written down in American history like a catalogue of horrors, as a period when for the time being the progress and peace of the United States was interrupted by civil war.

Nobody quite knew how it happened: it just *did* happen. A sudden determined march, and back of it all as champion of the oppressed and bearing the torch of liberty loomed one Frederick Marden. He precipitated the revolution which only had its equal in the fargone dark days of Russia’s remaking.

Unquestionably Frederick Marden believed in his cause, was out for justice. He could not be altogether responsible for the lawless hordes who operated under his banner, who defeated police and army alike in their savage uprising against civilization itself.

In October, 1959, the trouble started, until by the end of November, through violence and open murder, the Frederick Marden party had established itself in control of the entire country, had so far avoided open civil war by very reason of overwhelming numbers. But the civil war menace was by no means over. Somewhere in America there still remained the Graham Doone, implacably determined to rout Frederick Marden no matter what the cost. Until Doone was found Marden could not possibly rest content.

By December, 1959, the threat of Graham Doone was less tangible. Marden was in power, was to all intents and purposes the new President of the United States. But unhappily Marden was not alone. His Minister for Control, Abel Dodd, was a flint hearted and merciless

scoundrel. He it was who instituted a reign of terror over America that would have done credit—had all the true facts been revealed to the world—to the Spanish Inquisition.

Abel Dodd terrorized men and women alike. Other countries, gathering drifting details, were up in arms over Dodd's methods, but because interference might mean war they stood aloof, and America went on suffering. But somewhere, still unfound, Graham Doone awaited his opportunity to strike. . . .

One by one, former celebrated master minds, men and women, began to disappear, their wealth and knowledge going to swell the Marden party's resources. The cleverest brains in the land were forced under torture or pain of death to supply their services to the new regime. Inventors were compelled to give up their every secret in order that the regime might gain sufficient scientific knowledge to one day make an attempt to master the world itself. . . .

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When his work was at last finished he lost no time in visiting the basement below the hall, paused as he entered the grim looking place replete with the heinous machinery by which he usually forced prisoners to obey his will.

In bitter silence he glowered down on the half stripped, silent figure of Janice Milford, lying against the wall on a pile of straw. Savagely he seized her arm, swung her over, stared down into her bruised, blood streaked face. Her blue eyes looked back at him in dumb contempt. He noted her blackened nails where hot iron had seared them away, the torn flesh beneath her arms where pincers had done their deadly work.

"Well, will you speak?" he demanded at last, standing over her. "Or would you like more?"

"Kill me if you wish," she replied quietly. "I'll never speak . . ." Then she turned over again and lay silent.

Dodd's brutal jaw set squarely. He swung around savagely on the half stripped guards by the doorway.

"Why the hell didn't you make her speak?" he snarled.

One of the men shrugged. "Guess I never saw a dame so tough, chief. We tried most things—and slowly too. All she did was to smile, until we beat up her face a little—"

"Get her secrets or suffer the same medicine!" Dodd snapped. "That's final! One thing only have you got to remember. Not one vital faculty must be destroyed: she'll be needed later. Advise me how you go on. . . ."

He glared round, then went back up the steps into the main hall, turned sharply as the head office visiphone came into being on the wall. The square, rugged face of Frederick Marden appeared on the screen.

"Come up to the office, Dodd!" he snapped. "Immediately!"

Dodd nodded insolently, walked up the great staircase from the hall and entered his superior's great office. Marden eyed him with steady gray eyes across his desk.

"It might interest you to know, Dodd, that while you have been so busy hunting down inventors and scientists, Graham Doone has been busy," he said slowly. "Yes, you can stare! If you'd taken the trouble to direct your attention to vital matters it would never have happened. As it is, Doone has succeeded in commandeering an entire army unit in Chicago, complete with airplanes and munitions. Obviously that is where he has been hiding out all this time. What is more, thousands are rallying to his banner."

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“Well?” Dodd asked sourly. “Doone doesn’t scare me none. We can thrash him and his whole army—”

“We *may* do so!” Marden broke in bitterly. “If I know anything of Doone he will not stop until one or other party is extinct. It’s too late now to stop him. That was your job, only you were too busy torturing men and women.”

“As far as Janice Milford is concerned, it’s necessary!” Dodd retorted hotly. “You know as well as I do that she has marvelous inventions, and—”

“I know it, and if you’d have had intelligence instead of brute emotions you’d have won her cooperation by a proper outline of the cause we stand for. Instead you use barbaric cruelty that goes right back to the medieval.” Marden got to his feet, his face set in relentless lines. “Dodd,” he said slowly, “your brutality has got to stop! We’re working for justice, not power through inhuman cruelty . . . Through that very reason, your panderings to it, we stand now with a civil war on our hands. Beyond any doubt Graham Doone means to strike at us—and hard!”

“Well, what do you want me to do?” Dodd’s face was sullen after the upbraiding he had received.

“Marshal all your forces and man power immediately. Drop everything except military preparations. Release all prisoners and use them to swell your man power.”

“What! Even Janice Milford!” Dodd’s face was a study.

“Even Janice Milford,” Marden nodded coldly. “She’ll be useful somewhere. We’ll return to the matter of her secrets when the war’s over.”

“But, damn it all—”

“Get going!” Marden snapped, and watched in grim silence as Dodd went slowly from the office.



## CHAPTER II

### Civil War

On January 3, 1960, a week after the general mobilization call had gone forth from Marden, Graham Doone marched to the attack. He was commander-in-chief of his own army, an army made up of men and women of whom only a minority of the former were professional soldiers. The rest was made up of business men, even women, now more hard bitten than any old campaigner.

Unquestionably, Graham Doone's personality had had a lot to do with his present uprising. Successfully hiding himself from Marden and Dodd, he had gathered together an army of pretty formidable proportions which had taken over vast quantities of fighting material from the new regime, even though it had demanded a small war in itself to accomplish it.

Abel Dodd, so intent had he been on gratifying his own vicious desires, had not the time to marshal together his own army. He had labored under the idea that he was impregnable. He got the shock of his life when Graham Doone's first onslaught by bombing airplanes and guns caught him utterly unprepared.

Determined to defend what he believed was the only right form of Government until the end, Marden himself went on with the organizing, became commander of his hastily gathered armies and launched a counter attack.

By January 12 America was in the throes of a desperate civil war, the battleground covering the entire area from New York to Los Angeles, the air thick with hurtling planes as brother man hurled himself against brother man, as demonic forces blasted innocent thousands to destruction, thousands who only knew the whole business had started because two factions could not somehow agree. True, that was the basic cause, but in the fashion of all wars the upheaval rapidly degenerated into filthy slaughter and destruction in which the vast majority lost all idea of what they were fighting for. Only Marden and Doone, on opposite sides of the fence, knew that—and each was determined to win.

Marden had the hardest task. For one thing, Abel Dodd was dead with a bullet through his brain: that deprived Marden of a good field expert, one that he had not the time to replace if even he could have found the right man. Doone for his part was well supplied with experts, master minds of business whose job it was to organize and plan—and, in wartime with devastating results on the enemy.

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Then toward the close of January something peculiar happened.

A whole day's hand to hand fighting in the civil war failed to produce a single casualty on either side! People who had been trapped in fires had walked out unburned: those directly fired at with rifles had not been scratched.

Nor was the astounding happening limited to unhappy America: the whole world reported the mystery over the radio. Only in cases where absolute smashing of a body had occurred had death resulted. Otherwise, thousands of everyday accidents the world over had failed to produce any deaths or serious injuries.

When Marden received the news he did not know what to think. For his own part he felt no different; a little tired perhaps, but that was not to be wondered at. And yet, there *was* a subtle difference, now he came to ponder it. Alone in his great office, pondering over the vast

map from which he was planning his attack, he took a few seconds from harassing details to study himself. His gaze dropped to his hands. They were changed in some way—the skin was thicker and darker than it had been—coarser.

Frowning, he got to his feet and pressed the light switch, flooded the room with a brilliance that paled the single desk light. He went to the mirror and stared at the grim face reflected to him. Undoubtedly there was a change! For several weeks he had hardly been outside—even when he had only met the icy cold of the New York winter. Yet now he was as brown as though he had been exposed to free ultra violet radiation. Again there were the evidences of coarsened skin. Puzzled, he rubbed his cheeks. They were curiously sensationless.

He shrugged, felt unable to cope with the intricacies of his condition. More important matters demanded his attention. Baffled, he went back to the map, switched on the visiphone and issued further instructions to the field of action.

But little by little both he and Doone began to realize they were up against an inexplicable problem. For unless they scored direct hits at human beings—and that with high explosive—their efforts were useless. Bullets made no effect whatever. For some unknown reason all human beings were getting incredibly tough and resistant to attack. Everywhere it was the same.

Death roll from the civil war dropped amazingly: armies fought against armies with little result beyond waste of time and money. Neither side accomplished anything. War was suddenly and mysteriously stalemated. There was nothing for it but to declare a truce, so for the first time, on the evening of February 2, Marden and Doone met face to face in the former's office.

---

In silence, both surrounded by their respective experts, the two men faced each other. Marden stood stiffly at his desk, his ruggedly chiseled face turned into a mask of shadows by the desk lamp. Appraising him stood Doone, thirty-two years old, dark headed, even handsome, carrying his powerful frame with all the erectness of still youthful purpose. His black eyes, the deep set eager eyes of a dreamer and doer, stared coldly back across the desk.

"Marden," he said quietly, "it's time to end this carnage. Time we reasoned the thing out like sane men. I'd have done so long ago only you—"

"I have always been open to negotiation," Marden answered curtly. "Isn't it rather strange that you arrive at this time with the idea of a truce, when the real reason is that war is becoming impossible for both of us? How can there be war when human beings are becoming invulnerable. That's the real reason, isn't it?"

Doone hesitated briefly, then nodded his dark head.

"Yes, I guess it is. The only thing we can do now is cooperate—even as we should have done in the first place. We must begin again on a new footing. You and I must work together for the common good, pool our respective ideals."

"Possibly that can be arranged," Marden conceded, thinking. "And I want you to understand right now that I never agreed with this civil war. I intended to cooperate in the very manner you have now suggested—but power was not altogether in my hands. Abel Dodd, for instance. He did untold harm to the cause. When you justifiably fought back, the only thing to do was to hold my ideals above all else and retaliate. You understand?"

Doone slowly nodded. "I think I do—and I believe we can get together. In any event hostilities must cease forthwith and an immediate investigation of this strange deathlessness

must be instituted . . .” He paused, looked at Marden long and earnestly, then added, “Tomorrow the terms of the new deal will be officially drawn up. Then, if we can, we will try and write a better page in American history. . . .”

Marden’s stiffness relaxed a little. He gave the slightest of acknowledging bows, watched in silence as Doone turned suddenly and departed with his advisers.

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The world breathed more freely with the end of the American Civil War. The danger of incidents and international complications were removed. Trade restarted: America turned to the task of rebuilding after the struggle. By degrees, Marden and Doone, working in collaboration, achieved a satisfactory basis of understanding. Even as early as the close of April, 1960, a definite balance of relations was being established.

And still the world faced its new problem—the still ever present mystery of deathlessness. Through the months following the close of the war the strange transformation of humanity had gone on—that slow, hardly perceptible thickening of the skin, a general toughening of all organs, a metamorphosis in the epidermis of men and women alike which had gradually given them the power to defeat death itself, except in cases of violent accident.

Nor was that all. Newly born children possessed the same peculiarity! Disease and death in the ordinary sense had mysteriously evaporated from the world. Death only existed in circumstances where an entire body was destroyed. Injuries healed with incredible rapidity and minimum of blood loss. Births were unchanged in number, but the death rate dropped 75 per cent below normal.

Scientists the world over began to study the problem industriously, but beyond producing highly technical treatises on skin thickening arrived at no convincing conclusion. Governments began to urge them to investigate more closely. The absence of normal death rate was beginning to have grave effects. Population was increasing by leaps and bounds all over the world.

Doone and Marden, co-Presidents of America, were faced with this same problem. Day by day the special census returns revealed the startling increase in humanity. There were dozens of births to only one death. Marden, at his wits’ end to know how to tackle the mystery, suddenly remembered Janice Milford.

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“I believe,” he said thoughtfully, as he and Doone pondered the matter, “that she’s the one person to get to the root of the mystery. Maybe you’ve heard of her?”

“Few people haven’t,” Doone answered quietly. “But I’m also remembering the brutal treatment she got by your former Minister of Control because she wouldn’t give away secrets. What makes you think she’ll help now?”

Marden shrugged. “I can only put the question to her. I think she realizes I had no part in her torture. In fact I had her immediately released on the outbreak of war, and during that time she did a great deal of good in the nursing line, invented the most amazing remedies for our fighters. However, no harm in seeing what she can do for us.”

He switched on the visiphone, said briefly, “Send a fast car over to Miss Janice Milford’s place and ask her to be good enough to come here immediately.”

He switched off, turned to resume his study of the situation with Doone. Some twenty minutes passed, then they glanced significantly at each other as the clerk announced the girl. Janice Milford came in quietly, attired in a neat blue costume and bewitching hat.

"I believe you wanted me, gentlemen?" She looked from one to the other with her clear blue eyes.

"I sent for you, Miss Milford." Marden held out a chair for her, dismissed the clerk. "There are one or two matters afoot which I feel only you can understand," he added smoothly.

"Such as?" The girl's voice was by no means compromising; rather it was cold and unyielding. Clearly the memory of Abel Dodd and his cruelty had by no means departed.

"We believe," Marden said slowly, sitting down again and clasping his hands on the desk, "that you can solve the present world mystery of deathlessness where other scientists have failed."

---

The girl was silent for a time, unaware of the unwavering gaze of admiration she was getting from Doone. From the instant she had entered the room he had never taken his eyes from her lovely face.

"You really mean that because all other scientists have failed to solve the mystery I'm about the last resort?" she asked dryly, her lip curling. "Very flattering, gentlemen. Last time, as I remember it, there was no such request. I was ordered to assist you and because I refused I was tortured. Perhaps I hardly need to add that such brutality is not easily forgotten?" she finished bitterly.

"Of course not." Marden coughed a little. "But—but, Miss Milford, that was the work of Abel Dodd: you must realize that. I had you released. In these days you are back where you were—a much respected scientist. All we ask is your aid. Whatever you desire will be given in return for your services, be it honors, money— Whatever you wish! A crisis is rapidly approaching through this steady increase in population, and we have got to have a solution somehow. Please believe that I speak truth."

The girl's perfect face softened a little: she even smiled faintly. Curious, Doone reflected, how little changed she seemed compared to other people. There was on her skin no trace of the thickening effect so noticeable in others. He remarked too the perfection of her manicured nails, remembered they had once been charred. He frowned a little, felt a slow surge of hatred against Marden who was, at the root, the cause of that brutality.

And suddenly the girl's eyes were upon him, studying him silently. He smiled at her, rather uncertainly. That seemed to decide her. She turned suddenly back to Marden.

"Very well, I'll believe you," she said briefly. "I'll get to work and see what I can find out. Probably by tomorrow morning I will have arrived at some conclusion. One or other of you had better come round to my laboratory. It's so much easier to explain there, with all the instruments around me—"

"I'll come!" Doone interrupted eagerly, as Marden was about to offer. "About what time?"

"Oh . . ." She demurred. "About ten tomorrow morning. I'll be expecting you . . ."

"We cannot thank you enough, Miss Milford," Marden said, shaking her slim hand. "Rest assured that I have always admired your powers, and still do—that I had no part in that recent dreadful business. And now, whatever your fee may be for—"

"I rather think the fee can be arranged at the close," the girl broke in softly, smiling in an enigmatical fashion. "I have my own ways of working, you know, and probably I'll be amply repaid in the end . . . even without money." She paused, turned to the door. "Tomorrow at ten?"

“Without fail!” Doone eagerly held the door open for her, was rewarded by her quiet, feminine smile as she passed out into the corridor. Once he had closed the door he turned.

“There, Marden, is a woman!” he declared in admiration, dark eyes shining. “Brains, beauty, poise—”

“She’s a scientist,” Marden said curtly. “And we are working for the good of the people. Don’t start mixing your ideals with other emotions or we’ll soon find trouble. . . . Come and sit down, man; see if we can’t figure this matter out.”

Doone sat down, but for the rest of the day he was curiously listless. His mind was definitely not on his work. He simply could not get Janice Milford out of his thoughts. Every woman he had met or handled up to now had failed to make his heart alter its rhythm in the slightest, but now. . . .

Definitely Janice Milford was a woman!

## CHAPTER III

### The Mystery of Janice Milford

At 10:00 next morning Doone presented himself in the huge research laboratory attached to the girl's rebuilt New York home. The laboratory astounded him with its completeness, its air of clean activity, the men and women in spotless overalls moving to and fro amongst benches and machinery. In silence he looked along the rows of great windows, with their automatic steel shutters for producing artificial darkness when necessary, gazed round on the instruments catching the bright spring sunshine.

Then he turned with a little start as a soft voice fell on his ears.

"Good morning, Mr. Doone! Right on time, I see . . ."

The girl was behind him, the sunlight turning her golden hair to a halo. If anything, the white belted smock she was wearing served to enhance the soft curves of her figure, reflected an added light to the perfection of her features. Doone was aware as he eagerly greeted her that the cynical light in her blue eyes had disappeared. He read only friendliness as he shook her small but capable hand. He rather wished he was not a co-President with business ideals. A laboratory technician's post would have suited him much better.

"Well, did you find anything?" he asked quickly, trying to remember the dignity his position demanded.

"I think so," she nodded briefly, and turning led the way along the laboratory to yet another department, entirely empty of assistants but filled with a mass of highly polished, intricate machinery. Doone followed her into the place, glanced at her in puzzlement as she closed the door.

"I guess you've enough assistants and apparatus in here to run a high powered business," he commented. "Am I asking you to betray secrets if I ask what it's all for?"

"Not at all," she smiled back. "Science happens to be my business, that's all. It was my work before the war, and it is now. Back of almost all patent medicines, drugs, health tonics, new electrical gadgets, explosives, and so forth, you will find the name of Janice Milford. I am, I suppose, the head of a great supply factory. Most of the things are my original invention, perfected and manufactured by this trained staff of men and women chemists and scientific experts. Finally the ideas are marketed through the appropriate channels. That I suppose is the blessing of having a good brain," she finished enigmatically.

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She turned aside suddenly, paused before a glass globe filled to the brim with a curious sticky fluid. Floating within it was a mass of tissuelike substance which made Doone stare in amazement.

"What on earth is it?" he gasped, somewhat horrified.

"Synthetic flesh," Janice replied calmly, eyeing it critically. "It is simple enough to manufacture. The hard part comes in when you try to infuse it with life. I haven't done that, of course, but as it lies there in the fluid it reacts—by very reason of the fluid—far more quickly than normal flesh to external stimuli. Look at it closely. See anything wrong with it? It was manufactured and put in the globe yesterday afternoon after my talk to you and Marden."

Doone studied it thoughtfully. "Looks kind of—of thick," he said at last. "The difference between this stuff and ordinary flesh is about the same as that between raw and cooked meat."

“Exactly. In other words, it is in a state of progressive anabolism. There is no normal breaking down of cells with consequent age and finally death. The same thing is happening to it as is happening to all living things in this world. Anabolism alone is present, and the opposite state of cell breakdown—ketabolism—has disappeared entirely. What is the result? Skin thickens upon itself: there is no breakdown of cells. Little by little flesh and blood beings—in fact all living things—are becoming invulnerable in a shell of hardness through which not even a bullet can pierce. Hence no ordinary accidents can cause injury: only direct hits to a vital center, and that with great force. Even normal death rate is down because death is normally the outcome of ketabolism in its final stages. Is that clear?”

“Clear enough,” Doone nodded. “But the reason is not!”

“The reason,” the girl said slowly, “is almost incredible. I can give it in a few words—cosmic rays have ceased!”

“But how can—”

“So far,” the girl went on steadily, “scientists have concerned themselves with studying the mystery by examining human beings. They have neglected to look at outside sources. I have examined the problem from the interstellar angle, have found that Wilson cloud chambers reveal no sign of cosmic rays emanating from outer space. Normally, as you know, the cosmic rays produce a shower of electrons and positrons when stopped by matter. The Wilson chamber traces these showers individually and the energies of production can be measured. . . . But now there is absolutely nothing. That in itself explains the mystery of the sudden deathlessness sweeping the earth.”

Doone looked puzzled. “Just how?” he asked, thinking.

“Well, it is generally known that cosmic radiation falls on earth in considerable quantities from a source in space unknown. Consider its powers of destruction! Every second it breaks up twenty atoms in every cubic inch of atmosphere, millions of atoms in each of our bodies. It is also admitted that this radiation, falling on germplasm, may produce the spasmodic biological variations which determine evolution. . . . In other words, instead of the gradual breakdown of our bodies under cosmic waves, the breakdown has ceased. Complete anabolism reigns instead and, so to speak, time and evolution have halted insofar that we are not actually ageing while no disintegration of our bodies is occurring.”

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Doone was silent for a long time after the girl had finished, then he asked slowly,

“But *why* has this happened? What could produce such an effect?”

The girl shook her head. “That goes beyond me, Mr. Doone. I only know the effects, not the cause. . . .”

She turned aside, meditating, went over to the bench. Doone joined her, waited for her to speak.

“I realize one thing very clearly,” she said slowly, “and that is the terrible danger which threatens through the absence of natural death. Take even a small instance—say, oysters or sea urchins. They produce millions of eggs annually. If all those eggs are destined to reach maturity our seas will be clogged from end to end within a year! Everything that lives is doomed to increase at top speed! Plants, trees, even lowly bacteria, human beings. . . . If this condition continues for even six months the earth will be crammed with living things of varied sorts from end to end. In a year there will not be room for everything. Seas overloaded, lands crammed tight. . . .”

“High explosives can still destroy,” Doone reminded her.

“True—on animals, bacteria and plants. But what of human beings? After all, every one of them has a right to live. That we shall stoop to wholesale massacre is unthinkable.”

“Then what *can* we do?” he demanded helplessly. “We have only earth to move about in—nothing more.”

“We have outer space—other worlds.”

Doone laughed shortly. “Forgive me, Miss Milford, but isn’t that rather a wild dream? Space travel isn’t practical. You may remember Brandon Hurst’s mighty effort to reach the moon about four years ago? He failed utterly—was lost in space.”

The girl slowly nodded. “Yes, I remember him. He invented the first supposedly practical rocket ship and aimed for the moon, taking his wife and daughter with him. That’s right, isn’t it?”

“Yes—but he never landed on the moon: that’s the point I’m trying to make. The failure of his invention proves space travel to be impracticable.”

“Yes. . . .” Janice reflected for a while, said presently, “I had a great admiration for Brandon Hurst. He was a scientist in a million. At that time, unfortunately, I was not sufficiently well known to be connected with him, otherwise I’d have offered to go with him —”

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She broke off, made a little gesture. “I’m afraid this isn’t getting us anywhere, Mr. Doone! The problem we have to solve is a method of space travel far more effective than that of Brandon Hurst. Unless this cosmic ray blockade breaks down very quickly we will be overwhelmed by a rampage of growth. Space travel is the only way out. . . .”

“As co-President,” Doone said slowly, “I could of course give orders that all marriage must cease. If not marriage, then at least children. Birth must stop until matters equalize.”

“Your orders will only apply to America,” the girl remarked. “Other countries may not agree with the idea, despite its logic. Even if it did become a world order it still would not stop human nature having its fling. Children will go on being born in spite of whatever orders there are. . . . No, Mr. Doone, exodus from earth to other worlds is the only course open at the moment.”

“Another thing!” Doone exclaimed suddenly. “If this cosmic ray failure is universal, or at any rate limited to our particular system, the trouble will be the same on any world plants, that life of any sort on other planets, that life too must be deathless and multiplying, even as it is here.”

Janice shrugged. “With the possible exception of Mars and Venus, I am quite convinced that all the other worlds are totally dead,” she said quietly. “No life has ever been on their surfaces, probably there never will be—unless we put it there. The cosmic ray failure will make no difference to them. If we can conquer space we will move some thousands of Earthlings to the world of our choice—a world where there is at present no life—and once we have established them there your system of controlling birth from the very beginning can be brought into effect.

“You will have a new and fixed community to control—new laws. That will be very different to interpolating new laws into the present order of things. That law will stand until cosmic rays return—if they ever do. We must thin out the people of Earth—divide the population over two or more worlds if possible, then take the necessary steps to prevent birth and destroy all other growing things as fast as they appear. A ceaseless war against nature, and a truce can only come when cosmic rays return.”



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Doone nodded slowly and smiled. "You've got the right idea all right. You even talk as though the secret of perfect space travel is just around the corner. I wish I could believe that."

"Perhaps you can. . . ." She smiled at him mysteriously. "I may be wrong, of course, but I think if Brandon Hurst could manage what he did—badly though he finished up—I can do likewise. Without egotism, my knowledge of science equals his."

"I'm the first to admit it. . . ." Doone fell silent, looking at the girl's lovely face, then presently his gaze dropped to her slender white hand resting on the bench. His brows knitted a little. "Odd, isn't it," he murmured, "that with everybody else turning brown and thick-skinned you retain a smooth, satiny perfection of appearance? It's puzzled me a lot."



She sliced vigorously with a sharp knife

“Has it?” She seemed almost amused. “Well, of course, the brownness and thickening of skin is caused by cellular increase. Skin is somewhat reflective of light: a deeper epidermis produces less light reflection and a consequent dull brownness akin to that produced by ultraviolet. As to me. . . . Well, I’m the inventor of all manner of drugs and medicines, as you know. One particular formula keeps my skin as I like it to be. Just the same, I’m as tough as anybody else. See. . . .”

She reached forward and took a sharp, glittering knife from its rack. Calmly she sliced the vicious blade across her extended white palm. Doone winced involuntarily, expected a welling up of blood, so fragile and dainty did that palm appear. But nothing happened. Not even a mark. He took the knife and ran the blade across his own hand, but as he had expected its toughened state prevented any injury. But the difference between his hand and the girl’s was about the same as between leather and tissue paper. He looked up suddenly to meet the calm scrutiny of her blue eyes.

“I guess you’re a good deal tougher than you look,” he murmured, handing the knife back.

“Yes. . . .” She nodded slowly, added bitterly, “So Abel Dodd found out when he had me tortured—”

She stopped suddenly, surprisingly so, switched the subject with an obvious haste.

“I think the only thing to do is to try and locate Brandon Hurst’s plans for his original space ship,” she said rapidly. “Then I’ll try and improve on them. That’s where you come in. Use your authority to make it possible for all data on Hurst’s work to be submitted to me without delay. There will be records of his work with the patent offices, I expect. Secondly, I want all first class astronomers to make a detailed study of the planets. I will do likewise and see how far my observations check with theirs. That can be done?”

“Immediately,” Doone promised, and turned to go. Then with a hesitant movement he turned back again, shook the girl’s hand gently. “I—er—I’ve enjoyed every minute of this,” he murmured. “It’s such a pity we’re faced with such world wide issues, otherwise perhaps. . . .” He broke off, shrugged. “Forget it! I’ll notify you the moment I get results.”

He released her hand, turned to the door. But as he left the laboratory he was haunted by a curious remembrance—something the girl had said that somehow did not fit into the general scheme of things, a statement at variance with truth. What it was he could not for the life of him recall.

Only one fact remained predominant before him. For all the curious air that hung about Janice Milford she was not *a* woman, but absolutely *the* woman.

## CHAPTER IV

### Nature Gone Mad

Doone lost no time in putting the girl's demands into effect. The patent offices were immediately tooth-combed, all newspaper files and scientific journals containing the vaguest hints of Brandon Hurst's space ship, together with color photographs of the inventor, his wife, and daughter were gradually produced, to be immediately rushed to the girl.

A week passed and she made no observations—a week in which the trouble in the deathless world grew to alarming proportions. The oceans, even as the girl had predicted, were already becoming difficult to navigate. Algae, seaweed, together with multimillions of small sea creatures, were multiplying with such terrific rapidity that they got entangled in ships' screws, impeded the passage of passenger and commercial sea traffic. Prices for foodstuffs began to soar through the very difficulty in obtaining them—and when it arrived half of it was rotten through the festering increase of bacterial basis.

In the air a tremendous increase in bird life began to harass pilots: the skies were thick with flying life of all types. . . And down on the earth vegetation crawled along at a steady, inevitable pace, snaking its way so rapidly into buildings that armies of men, specially employed for the job, found it traveled far quicker than knives and burnings could destroy it. Parks overflowed with bursting masses of green, aided by the summer heat. Grass sprang up through solid roads. Windows smashed under inquisitive tendrils. Utterly bewildered, mankind found himself blundering around in a world where Nature had utterly gone mad.

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Doone was thankful when at last Janice visiphoned him to come over to her laboratory. He found her as cool and collected as ever, with still that hint of mystery about her steady eyes.

"Well, found anything?" he questioned eagerly, the moment he was shown into her presence. "Matters are getting to a pretty desperate pitch even in this short time. . . . Still, I've held off issuing any special orders until I had your observations."

"Just as well, perhaps," she smiled. "I've got the reports of the various astronomers, together with their spectroscopic and other tests of the planets, density, atmospheric records, and so on—a pretty complete mass of data which checks exactly with my own notes. . . . But more of that later. What chiefly concerns us right now is that I believe I can improve on Brandon Hurst's space traveling formula far enough to produce foolproof effects."

"You can!" Doone gazed at her in wonderment. "Say, where do you get your knowledge from?" he breathed.

"I guess that doesn't really matter, does it? Now, see here."

Moving to the bench she pointed to the blueprints lying flattened upon it—faultlessly drawn blueprints exact to the last detail. In silence Doone listened to her as her long index finger traced across the prints to explain her meaning.

"These plans are my own, based on the original idea of Brandon Hurst's plans at the patent office. He used a rather clumsy system of rocket control which demanded a large generating plant and a great amount of space for fueling chambers. That maybe is why he failed in his attempts. . . . I shall use a similar method, but with a far greater degree of certainty. I shall use atomic power."

"The secret Abel Dodd tried to extract from you?"

“The very same. You see, a beam of power derived from smashing atoms generates a terrific recoil kick. For instance, you know how even an ordinary cannon hurls itself backward after each shot? Yet an ordinary gun is just a peashooter compared to atomic force blast. The recoil is correspondingly higher. Therefore, by firing atomic force blasts instead of ordinary rocket explosive I believe I can drive a vessel across space with tremendous speed, great safety, and surprisingly low fuel consumption. A cube of steel three inches square will be quite sufficient to drive a good sized vessel to Pluto and back again. Remember that once the actual gravitational fields of the planets are overcome it is all plain coasting. Between planets one can achieve perpetual motion: ether of course offers no resistance—or if there is any it is quite immeasurable.”

“And you are really sure you can manage it?”

“Quite sure. Reports from independent engineers prove the idea to be sound. The only thing I have not divulged is the method of obtaining atomic force—nor do I intend to. There are too many power-lusting fools in the world to turn that secret loose. The fact remains, I can do it by a system of gradually built up pressures and heat inside a small matrix. . . . What I shall need, Mr. Doone, is a Government grant of unlimited finance to construct one hundred large sized space machines immediately. I’m leaving it to you and Marden to conscript factories for the purpose. I’ll supply the plans and nominate the engineers.”

“With matters so urgent there won’t be any opposition,” Doone replied quickly.

“If there is, crush it,” the girl said, her lips tightening for a moment. “We can’t afford to have slip ups at this time. I underestimated the ravages created by stopped cosmic rays. And now to these other observations.”

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She picked up a wad of notes fastened with a wire clip.

“Does it surprise you to know,” she asked slowly, “that the best possible planet for migration is Saturn?”

“Saturn!” Doone echoed, staring. “I’ll say it surprises me! The vast distance for one thing—it’s uncertain surface for another. I should have thought Venus—”

The blonde head shook firmly. “No, not Venus. It has both internal warmth and great nearness to the sun. The heat would overcome earth beings with great rapidity. Besides, according to the new 400-inch reflector at Mount Wilson its surface is probably 75 per cent liquid mud, with hot oceans. Utterly useless—But in Saturn, strange to say, we have a unique planet. For one thing its huge size will make for plenty of room: for another, exhaustive tests reveal that some 50 per cent of its surface is passably solid, and 50 per cent of a planet 75,000 miles in diameter is a good deal. Other details are that the atmosphere, originally believed to contain hydrogen and nitrogen only also contains a considerable amount of oxygen, enough for earth beings anyway. Sunlight, though only one hundredth of Earth’s, is still sufficiently strong enough to produce a fair degree of light, together with very necessary ultra violet radiation. The day lasts about ten hours, roughly half an earthly one, and the night will be well illumined by the rings and ten moons. Even gravity will be no handicap because Saturn’s density is two-thirds that of water and surface gravitation is therefore about one-fifth greater than earth’s. Any human being, any object, will therefore only gain one pound in five. . . . Again, unlike Jupiter, Saturn is warm. His distance from the sun is counterbalanced by considerable internal heat which should give a general average of around 60 to 80 degrees Fahrenheit. . . .”

"I see," Doone said thoughtfully. "I don't pretend to know how you can be so certain, but if the reports all check I suppose it's O.K."

"Quite," the girl said decisively. "The only difficulty as I see it will be in navigating through the asteroidal belt and Saturn's rings. However, I think that can be mathematically worked out ahead for the pilots to understand."

"Suppose," Doone mused, "nobody agrees to the idea of being hurled to another world? What then?"

"I rather think that plenty will agree. You cannot order them to go, of course. Call for volunteers. There are quite enough venturesome spirits in every walk of life to answer the call. It doesn't worry me."

"Well, we can but try. Now, if I put the factory conscription order into force immediately how long will it take you to produce the hundred machines?"

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Janice considered for a moment, finally answered, "Working night and day in relief shifts the first batch of twenty-five machines can be produced in a month. I'll see to that. Each ship will hold about thirty people, including crew. A first class scientist will go with each vessel so that all details as regards landing and so forth can be attended to. Engineers will be given plans for the erection of temporary cities until proper cities can be erected. Later, of course, when the migration is over, you will go and take control, put your ideas into effect."

Doone nodded slowly. "And you?"

"I shall be one of the last. I shall have to remain to the end to supervise the ships."

They both became silent for a moment, regarding each other. Then Doone spoke again, quietly.

"You're a most amazing woman, Miss Milford. You know, with my control of men and your bewildering scientific knowledge we could—"

"You'll arrange everything, then?" she broke in, almost curtly. "I'll keep you in touch with my part of the business."

The plain dismissal made Doone smile wryly. Quietly he shook hands, went out with the vision of that perfect face and its blue eyes hovering before him.

## CHAPTER V

### Suspicion

The general conscription order of men and materials was by no means welcomed—but it had to be obeyed. Fortunately, the obvious evidences of distress stalking the world forced most men and women to the realization that Doone and Marden were doing what they considered was the best for them.

By radio they were gradually informed as to what was intended: people were given a free choice as to whether they chose to start a new life on another world or stay behind and die, paradoxically enough, because of life. Scientists then added to the propaganda by their own descriptions of Saturn's possibilities.

The idea caught the public fancy. Several times the girl herself spoke over the radio, was televised to the remote corners of the world. Other countries, desperately pushed for some means to relieve the rapidly growing population and perpetual increase of all living things, begged for her services, which she freely gave. She deputized international scientific experts to carry out her instructions, telling them every needful detail except certain vital secrets which she still kept to herself.

In the weeks of flurry and bustle during which mankind turned to the task of space ship building—for the inclusion of other countries entirely altered the girl's original 100 machines plan—it became gradually obvious that nobody seemed of such importance in the world as Janice Milford. Already a great scientist, she became elevated to almost demigodic proportions as a great savior in time of distress. The people were willing to obey her every suggestion. Her quiet charm of manner, her beauty, the intangible air of mystery that hung around her, swayed the minds of both men and women.

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The whole world listened to her address a month later when, right on time, the first twenty-five space machines were ready to depart from New York into the void. She gave a speech on the possibilities of Saturn, reaffirmed her faith in the engineers who had been trained to control the vessels in their flight. Though Marden and Doone were beside her on the speaker's platform at the departure grounds they seemed to have little significance in the proceedings. They sat on either side of her, backed by famous public officials, and watched her speaking into the microphone, faced by thousands of interested people and the already sealed space machines containing the first batch of 750 volunteers.

Doone's gaze toward the girl's slim back was one of complete admiration as she went on talking—but not so Marden's. His brows were down, his cold gray eyes narrowed with impatience. This complete usurping of his authority, over the United States at least, anything but pleased him. Never in his whole life had he believed that a woman should take prior place over a man; it enraged his naturally arrogant spirit. Obviously he could take no action now, so he sat and glowered, drummed impatiently on his chair arms.

At last the girl finished, raised her arm over her head in a signal. A blasting roar boomed from the assembled twenty-five ovoids with their glittering windows. One by one they rose with the smooth ease of a bird, swept with effortless acceleration toward the clouded morning sky. One by one, guided by the perfectly trained pilots.

They were lost in the clouds. The last machine vanished from sight amidst the echoing shouts of the people—Seven hundred and fifty men and women, first pioneers of the earth, had gone out into the unknown. A solemn little hush fell on the crowd. The thing was over. There was a general movement toward departure.

Janice turned, smiled at the men on the platform, then with a little nod of farewell she descended to the grass and headed toward her waiting car, accompanied by the cheers of the milling throngs. Marden's eyes followed her suspiciously, until at last he saw her car begin to move away through the press.

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"I don't like it!" he growled. "That woman is doing just what the devil she likes! I sometimes think we should have investigated her past history more closely before putting everything so completely in her hands."

"What on earth for?" Doone demanded, staring in amazement. "Hasn't she provided the only possible way out of our difficulties?"

"I suppose so. . . ." Marden made the admission grudgingly. Turning suddenly he faced Doone squarely. "Frankly, Doone, I'm beginning to distrust her!" he snapped. "She's definitely a scientific freak, and I don't like the way she's lifted power right out of our hands and captured the public imagination. Has it ever occurred to you how magically she derived an atomic force system of space driving from Brandon Hurst's anything but lucid plans? I know far more of engineering than you, Doone, and I can't even begin to fathom how the devil she did it! And successfully too!" He stared up at the cloudy, empty sky.

Doone gestured impatiently. "Distrust her all you like, Marden, but I admire her intensely. I'm prepared to do all she says—anytime and anywhere. I can understand the people feeling likewise. Dammit, man, haven't you got any responsive feelings at all inside that armor of yours?"

"In love with her?" Marden's rugged face was cynical.

"Supposing I am? What difference does it make?"

"Plenty! It might blind you to her real motives. I've more than a hunch that there's something unnatural behind all this. The deathlessness, her extraordinary ingenuity in finding a way out of the difficulty, her choice of Saturn above all other planets and her ability to persuade other astronomers that her ideas were right."

"Observations checked exactly!" Doone retorted hotly.

"I know. She worked very logically, convinced them of everything. They stated facts and she built up on them. . . . *But why Saturn?*"

"Because it's the best planet! Don't start making a fool of yourself, Marden!"

Marden smiled rather twistedly. "I'm going to make it my business from now on to find out all I can about this young lady," he stated calmly. "If she's all she claims to be, all right. But if she isn't. . . ."

He turned away, his lips compressed, descended from the platform. Doone stared angrily after him. Not for a single instant would he have openly admitted he felt the same way. Janice Milford *was* extraordinary, and none but a fool could deny it. If indeed she did have an ulterior motive in all this, it was well hidden. So far she had apparently acted only for the good of all concerned.

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Following the departure of the first twenty-five space ships there was an exodus of machines every week, not only from America but from other countries, all of them taking the



long trail into infinity. Before very long the first space machines would return for a second load, together with the first full story of conditions in space and on the ringed planet.

In the interval, in a determined endeavor to make things more habitable on earth, international agreements were drawn up for concerted bombing raids on vegetation infested areas, the destruction of enormous carpets of choking weed smothering the bosoms of the seas. United mankind started on a war against Nature, knowing that upon his activities rested the only hope of maintaining Earth as a habitable planet. Unless the cosmic rays returned. . . .

Weeks passed—weeks of incessant work on the part of every man and woman, with occasional encouraging radio talks by Janice Milford. The ships would soon return, she said; and finally the time limit had elapsed for the round trip. Mankind waited eagerly for the first sign of the returning vessels. Every telescope was at the ready. The girl herself even predicted the approximate hour at which they would appear. But they failed to arrive!

Anxious hours passed into days and no space machines put in an appearance. For the first time production on further space vessels was halted. Something had gone wrong somewhere. If space too only offered death—as was beginning to seem probable—there was no sense in making an effort to die. Inevitably that would happen on Earth in the long run. Death because of the cramping spread of perpetual life.

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Frederick Marden was coldly malignant about the new situation. In the past weeks he had kept to his promise and had had the girl's entire life and history investigated—nor did the results cheer Doone very much when he heard them.

"I tell you, Doone, this girl is playing a dangerous game, with human lives as pawns," Marden breathed, pacing the huge office. "Janice Milford, eh? Would it interest you to know, my lovelorn friend, that nowhere in all the birth records of the United States is there a record of her birth? Much less so in West Virginia, where she claims she was born. There *are* many Janice Milfords, of course—but none that apply to her. Nor is there a record of family tree or possible ancestors.

"In fact, from every investigation I've made she only made herself really apparent about three years ago—two years or so before the civil war began. From that point onward there are records of her having bought great quantities of scientific machinery from various firms, and of the gradual build up of Milford Industries Incorporated. That, I presume, is the normal business which she controls."

Doone swung moodily to and fro in the swing chair. "I can't understand it," he muttered, brooding.

"No?" Marden came to a stop, rested with his knuckles on the desk and stared at Doone deliberately. "Well, I do!" he said bitterly. "Some five thousand people of different countries have been fired into space—and God alone knows where they've gone or what's happened to them! Think, man, of the incredible way in which everything coincided! First the world went deathless and provided a perfectly sane reason for sending people from earth. Mysteriously enough, this girl had just the right ideas! She tells a cock and bull story about the first space machines returning—but they don't! What's the answer to that one?"

"Summon her here and find out."

"I've already spoken to her over the visiphone but she seems entirely unmoved by the occurrence. All she's done is to put a stop order on space machines until the first ones come back. If they don't come back I suppose we're expected to calmly accept the whole thing as a failure! But not with me, Doone! I've got the people's interests at heart and this woman isn't

going to get away with it! It's—it's mass murder! Deliberately she has hurled five thousand men, women and children into space in those insane space machines of hers—just the same as Brandon Hurst threw himself, his wife and daughter away!"

"But maybe it really *is* misfortune!" Doone insisted quickly.

"Misfortune!" Marden smiled sourly. "That cuts no ice with me, Doone. Women like Janice Milford don't make mistakes—or if they do they're *deliberate!* I'm not saying yet that she's deliberately killed five thousand people—but I do say she got rid of them for a reason. . . ." He broke off, took a deep breath. "I believe," he said slowly, "that Janice Milford doesn't belong to this earth at all! I believe she's a denizen of another world—and more likely than not that world is Saturn!"

"Bunk!" Doone snorted.

"No it isn't. She has vast knowledge: she could easily make herself look like an Earth woman if she had a plan to work out. Saturn, for some reason, required five thousand Earth people and it was up to her to get them. She did—very effectually. That's my guess."

"And a damned rotten one!" Doone snapped, glaring. "I suppose she caused the deathlessness? Stopped the cosmic rays?"

"Possibly. A brilliant scientist could even do that."

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Doone stared incredulously, got to his feet. "But good Heavens, man, you can't be *serious?*" he cried. "You just can't be! Why, it would be even more logical to say that—that she's Brandon Hurst's daughter than a Saturnian!"

"I had considered that," Marden nodded calmly. "Here—take a look at these pictures of Eva and Mrs. Hurst from the photographic Bureau . . . that isn't the answer."

Doone picked up the prints from the papers on the desk. They were in natural color, depicted a robust woman of middle age, the tall, handsome Brandon Hurst himself, and then a young girl of perhaps twenty, dark haired and brown eyed, round faced, inclined to be stoutish—as utterly unlike the slender, beautiful Janice Milford as it was possible to imagine.

Doone tossed the photographs impatiently away, his mind running back over all the recollections of the girl he had ever had. Most of them were pleasant. Despite the shadow cast over her possible identity he still believed in her— Then suddenly, unexpectedly, he remembered something. It had been trying to struggle to fruition in his mind for weeks—the memory of a statement she had once made, afterward changing the subject so suddenly she had obviously been aware she had made a mistake.

"Good—Lord!" he ejaculated abruptly.

"What is it?" Marden's gray eyes were keen.

Doone stared at him wonderingly. "I—I just thought of something," he whispered. "Recently, Janice demonstrated to me that although she looks normal—where everybody else is obviously coarsened—she is actually as tough as the rest of us. I remarked on that fact and her answer was 'So Abel Dodd found out when he had me tortured . . .' But, when she was tortured the deathless anabolism had *not arrived!* She saw the mistake immediately after, and I was left trying to figure out what she'd said that wasn't right."

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"So!" Marden breathed exultantly. "That implies she was as impervious to injury before the anabolism as after it—and the fact got out by accident. No wonder she was so stoic under torture and gave nothing away. Though the torturers managed to tear her skin and burn off her nails, she probably hardly felt it. It's the only possible explanation—normal flesh and blood

could never have stood that—and a girl too—without some hint of breaking down. She’s inhuman—unnatural!”

Doone looked harassed, rubbed his dark hair anxiously. “I—I still can’t believe it, Marden. I—”

“There’s one certain way of proving all this, I think,” Marden said slowly, thinking. “If we assume that she is a masquerader from another world, it is distinctly unlikely that every one of her bones will be in the identical place of a normal earth woman, isn’t it?”

“I should say most unlikely. Different worlds must have different life. Why?”

“We’ll ask her to submit to an X-ray examination!” Marden cried triumphantly. “If she is a normal woman she’ll raise no objection, but if she is a Saturnian with a cleverly modeled earthly structure she’ll know the X-ray will give her away and she’ll refuse!”

Doone’s face cleared. “O. K.—that’s a swell idea. I’ve not the least doubt she’ll agree to —”

He broke off and turned as the main radio speaker suddenly came into action.

“World report! Cosmic rays are reported to be prevalent again in Europe! Flash! Cosmic rays reported returned to various parts of America. . . . Astronomers and scientists, please verify!”

The two men stared at each other for a moment.

“They’ve returned!” Doone breathed at last, his eyes shining. “Good Heavens, Marden—that means the earth is saved! Normalcy will come back and—”

The door opened suddenly and a clerk entered.

“Miss Janice Milford,” he announced dispassionately.

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Marden’s eyes narrowed again.

“Show her in,” he ordered briefly, and stood with his hands clasped behind him regarding the girl as she quietly entered.

She gave Marden a puzzled glance, smiled at Doone as he held forth a chair for her.

“Probably you’ve heard the news,” she said presently. “The cosmic waves have returned almost simultaneously to all parts of the earth? I rather hoped I’d bring the good news first, but I hear the radio forestalled me. Not that it matters. The fact remains that at 10:12 this morning deathlessness passed from Earth and things will go back to normal. I thought a few personal observations might help, so I hurried along here.”

“Very interesting, I’m sure.” Marden took a chair opposite her and surveyed her coldly. “I suppose, then, that the five thousand or so people sent into space need never really have gone?” he asked icily.

“We could not have foreseen this.” Her own blue eyes were perfectly frank and steady as she stared back at him.

Marden drummed his fingers on the desk. “So normalcy now returns?” he murmured. “Very, very convenient, I’m sure! Almost as convenient as the cosmic ray blockade in the first instance! You sent five thousand people into space for a reason, Miss Milford—and we demand to know why! Where are the space ships that were to return?”

“Either they met with some accident, or have been delayed.”

“Damnably unconvincing, Miss Milford! Where did those five thousand people go to? *Why* did you send them into space? I do not believe for a single instant that your reason was genuine, though it sounded logical enough at the time. What was your real motive?”

The girl got suddenly to her feet, clearly offended.

“I did what was my duty in a world wide emergency!” she retorted. “You can place your own construction on that!”

“And by Heaven I do!” Marden roared, leaping up and gripping her arm. “You’re nothing better than an imposter—a scientific genius who by clever trickery took five thousand innocent souls from Earth into space, probably to Saturn, for some ghastly reason best known to yourself!”

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Janice snatched her arm free, stared angrily.

“Whatever put that insane notion in your head, Marden?”

“Insane, is it? I’ll go further and say that you are really a Saturnian creature made to resemble an earthly woman.”

“Such ingenuity!” the girl observed icily.

“All right then, are you willing to prove your earthly origin?”

“Certainly I am. How?”

Marden smiled triumphantly. “If you are constructed exactly identical to a woman of earth, I’ll believe you belong to this planet and will try and find the motive for your actions in some other way—but if you’re not normally constructed your unearthly origin will be taken as a certainty and I can’t answer for what may happen to you!”

“We want you to stand for a complete X-ray,” Doone told her quietly. “You won’t mind, of course? Medical experts will soon know what the plates reveal—”

“X-ray!” the girl gasped; then suddenly she swung round on Marden savagely. “Say, what do you think I am?” she demanded furiously, her eyes blazing. “Do you think I’m a specimen to be examined at will? You’re both mad! Crazy! I won’t submit to an X-ray or anything else like it! Think what you like, but I won’t do it!”

Doone’s expression changed. Marden grinned maliciously.

“After all, it’s only to prove—” Doone began, but Marden cut him short.

“Save your breath, Doone—it’s already proven! Miss Milford, your very refusal to such a simple test is proof of your guilt. The Hall of Justices will have plenty to say about this, and —”

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“Wait a minute!” Doone suddenly sprang in front of the girl, held Marden back with a powerful arm as he strode forward. “Wait a minute, Marden! I still believe you’ve gotten this all wrong. Janice—I mean, Miss Milford—acted from the best principles, and nothing will convince me otherwise. Not even X-rays!”

The girl shot him a grateful glance and Marden scowled.

“Don’t be such a damned fool, Doone. This is no time for heroics! Hand that girl over!”

“When she’s good and ready, not before!” Doone snapped, his jaw squaring. “The least you can do is to give her a chance to clear things up without jumping to conclusions. I’m going to see that she gets that chance. If you publish your crazy Saturnian idea to the people they’ll tear her limb from limb. Five thousand people sent to doom by a Saturnian woman in disguise—! Think how it will sound! People will have no mercy! They never have.”

“Why should they have when it’s true?” Marden demanded. “I’m going through with this, Doone, and you can’t—”

He broke off as Doone suddenly whirled round and picked the surprised girl up in his arms. In an instant he had flung the door open and raced out with her into the corridor.

“Quickly—your place!” he panted, dropping her to her feet. “I know Marden; he’ll stop at nothing! Let’s go—we can talk later.”

She nodded quickly, raced down the broad stairway as fast as she could go, with Doone immediately behind her. The instant the automobile door slammed the vehicle pulled away, moved swiftly into the swirl of traffic.

Two minutes later, breathless and scowling, Marden arrived on the steps of the Presidential building. At last he turned back, lips set in a thin line of decision.

## CHAPTER VI

### Besieged

Once the girl's home was gained, she and Doone went immediately to the laboratory. The girl gave a brief dismissal to her surprised staff, then pressed a series of switches which closed the metal shutters over the windows. Lights came up in the resultant darkness. Yet another series of switches slammed home bolts across the main door leading to the exterior.

"It almost looks as though you had anticipated trouble," Doone remarked at length, turning. "Am I right?"

"Not entirely—but I believe in being prepared." The girl regarded him with frank eyes. "You did a very wonderful thing this morning, Graham. . . . Don't mind me using your first name will you? You used mine this morning. Without knowing the real circumstances you had faith enough in me to protect me from Marden."

"I've always had faith in you, Janice," he answered quietly. "Even more than that. Several times I've tried to show you that I love you—"

"I know; and if I've seemed indifferent about it it has been because I can't let anything interfere with my work."

She turned aside for a moment and switched on the radio, smiled twistedly at the outpourings from the speaker.

". . . and I tell you, people of America and the world, that this woman is a traitor! Another world visitor using her knowledge to our detriment! We do not know how she stopped cosmic rays or caused them to resume. We do not even know her purpose: but we do know that she fired five thousand innocent people into space for no good reason. I call on you to seize this she-devil before—"

She switched off again, her eyes somber. Then she looked up and glanced round the laboratory.

"Well, they'll have a pretty hard job getting in here!" she commented. "It's explosive proof. . . ." She glanced at Doone as he stood quietly before her. "Do *you* think I killed five thousand people?" she asked slowly.

"I wouldn't have stood by you if I'd thought that. But I do think it's time for you to tell the truth. I've shown my trust; now you show yours by giving me the real story. You realize what Marden is doing? He's fanning the public to a frenzy against you. You will be attacked, and though I love you enough to die for you if need be, it won't avail me much if I've never known the real reason. What *is* the reason?"

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The girl shrugged. "Well, even if I told you the truth I hardly think you'd credit it. Everything is so utterly against me—there is such a lack of evidence until I get support from my father—that I dare not tell the real truth. That's why I've hidden it! If only those space ships would return I'd be vindicated. I can only assume I underestimated the time for the journey. Until they do come I've got to hold out against those who want my blood."

"Your father?" Doone's brows knitted. "Who is he?"

"Brandon Hurst." Janice made the statement quietly, with a faintly amused smile.

Doone eyed her coldly. "I thought you promised to tell the truth," he remarked disappointedly.

“That *is* the truth! You see how quickly you disbelieve me—and you’re one who trusts me. How would those others react? You’ve seen my photographs as I used to be, I suppose? Well, who would think Eva Hurst and Janice Milford are one and the same?”

“It’s impossible!” Doone gasped. “How on earth—”

“I *am* Eva Hurst!” the girl reaffirmed. “Janice Milford is an assumed name, and therefore there are no records of my birth or ancestors. When we three set out into space four years ago, father intended heading for the moon. But something went wrong. For one thing, the awful pace at which we shot into the void made us unconscious for days on end. When we recovered the ship had stopped accelerating and had reached a steady velocity. But we were nowhere near the moon. Gravitational cross currents had pulled us away from our objective and we were heading out towards the asteroids. We could either return to the moon, or take advantage of our far flung position and go outward.

“Father set about making tests of the planets, and being so much nearer to them than on earth, and unhampered by any atmosphere, he made a perfect analysis of each surface. Of the four outer worlds—or rather five if you include useless Pluto—Saturn appeared to be the best. After some difficulty with the rings, we landed . . .”

Janice—Eva—paused and frowned. “Our landing was violent,” she muttered. “One of the forward blast tubes had cracked on coming through the Rings and we were without its very necessary braking assistance. I remember nothing of the landing except a terrific pain as I was flung among the instruments.

“The next thing I knew I was recovering consciousness amidst the smell of sweetish ointments, antiseptics, and so forth. I could hear deep, strange voices. I was utterly unable to move. Bandages covered every conceivable part of my body.

“As time passed I learned what had happened. The fall to Saturn had scrambled me up entirely. My limbs were broken, my skull crushed, my eyes torn out with splinters of glass. No earthly surgery could possibly have saved me . . .”

“Then?” Doone whispered, listening with wrapt attention.

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“Saturn is inhabited,” she said quietly. “Vast areas of its surface—about fifty percent—are populated. There are cities there, tenanted by a brilliant and kindly people—rather repulsive to look at but remarkably kind and gentle. It was these people who found the fallen space machine. My poor mother was killed outright, but father only suffered slight concussion. To all intents and purposes I was practically dead when the Saturnian surgeons took me to their laboratory.

“What they did, or how they did it, I shall never know. I only remember weeks of lingering pain, of utter darkness, of hovering between life and death—then I began to mend. When at last I was able to see again I realized what they’d done. They had entirely remodeled me! Grafted new skin, given me artificial blue eyes like their own color, even set new hair roots of blonde color like their own. They had changed me from a rather ordinary looking, plump brunette into a blonde with vivid blue eyes. I personally liked the change enormously, but poor father couldn’t at all get used to it. Much that they did was, in truth, only an advanced form of the work a plastic surgeon can do on earth today.

“One thing they had done, however, and that was to replace several of my shattered organs with new metal ones of a golden color. My heart, for instance, is metal. That was why I refused Marden’s demand for an X-ray. The defects in structure would have shown clearly on the plates and he’d have jumped to the wrong conclusion.”

“So that was it!” Doone murmured, nodding. “I’m beginning to see light at last. What happened next?”

“I found other things connected with that surgical operation. The Saturnians had given me eternal life and invulnerability—from all ordinary forms of injury that is—under the belief that I would desire it.

“The flesh process had made me invulnerable to all ordinary injury, therefore when Abel Dodd had my nails burned off and the flesh slowly torn with pliers from under my armpits I hardly felt it. That condition still remains. I made the mistake of revealing my eternity to you, you may remember?”

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Doone nodded, remained silent as she went on.

“In time we learned the language. Father could not be grateful enough to the scientists for saving my life. He offered anything he could in return. Then we learned that in making themselves eternal the Saturnians had altered the course of Nature. Eternal life, once it gets beyond a limit of about two hundred earthly years, destroys the power of reproduction. Saturnian men and women cannot reproduce their kind, nor can they create life synthetically. When they realized the tragedy that had befallen them they searched desperately for—and found—an antidote. They mated again, but it was useless. Their hundreds of years of eternity had changed them utterly. There would never be a birth again. What was even worse, the finding of the antidote had produced disease. Impregnable body structure, after so long a time, began to deteriorate rapidly. In another fifty years, perhaps, not a Saturnian will be left.

“So father and the Saturnians decided on a plan. Earth being the only populated planet in the system beside Saturn, there was no reason why Earthlings should not have the secrets of Saturnian science, together with its cities, as an interplanetary gift. The Saturnians were quite satisfied as to the desirability of the idea after seeing dad and I. Ultimately they would perhaps have taken Earth people by force and given them the legacy, only that would have meant hostility and by no means welcome to their peaceful ideas.”

“So you came to Earth and put the plans in action?” Doone asked.

“Finally I did, yes, without anybody being aware of it—but first other matters had to be arranged. Father was needed on Saturn to arrange for the Earthlings when they came, and on Earth nobody would credit my identity. I’d have to use an alias. Then again, there had to be a *reason* for taking several thousand people—who would multiply as time passed of course—from Earth to another world. To tell them the true story of Saturn would only have brought ridicule. The only alternative was to force them into it without them being aware of the persuasion. That was done by causing overcrowding which made a logical reason for being rid of thousands of people—all of them volunteers, remember. . . .”

“Then your scientific friends on Saturn were responsible for the cosmic ray stoppage?”

“Of course. They did it by complicated scientific processes of which I can only give the briefest outline. Where cosmic waves originate not even the Saturnians know, though they believe like us that they are possibly caused by the breakdown of matter in far distant parts of space. That is not of great concern: what really matters is that the greater proportion of cosmic waves cannot reach earth’s surface because of the ionization of the atmosphere’s upper levels. The greater the ionization the less waves can get through. That is well known. . . .”

Doone nodded slowly.

“Since ionization is simply the separation of positive and negative atoms composing the molecules of atmospheric gases and producing thereby negative and positive ions, and since



also ionization on a large scale can be produced electrically, it only remained for the Saturnian scientists to generate an electrical effect of the appropriate intensity to cause a far higher ionization of the stratosphere than is normal. This they did, using an electromagnetic beam of the required intensity.

“It crossed space at the speed of light, timed exactly to strike and remain fixed on earth. Naturally the beam widened out as it traveled, until by the time it arrived here it was easily able to encompass the approximate 8,000 miles of Earth’s diameter. The electromagnetism spread instantly through the entire upper level of the atmospheric envelope and deflected cosmic rays as completely as a mirror deflects light. No cosmic rays reached Earth, and as the scientists had calculated the stoppage created cellular changes and deathlessness, none of which affected me because I was already in that condition.

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“Keeping to their plan, the Saturnians waited until several thousands of Earth people had reached Saturn, then they cut off the blockade—this morning, as a matter of fact. Nobody has been harmed and my object has been accomplished.

“Of course my knowledge was handed to me by the scientists, and I used atomic force for space ships because it is definitely superior to father’s original method. In many ways the cosmic blockade did good—it stopped the civil war for one thing, which at one period threatened to ruin my plans. The rest you know.”

“Why didn’t you leave the moment your work was done?” Doone asked.

“For various reasons. I honestly expected the ships to be back before this. Once they come everything will be explained and proper Saturn-Earth negotiations can begin. As it is I’m left hanging in the air, so to speak. I’ve no proof. I’ve got to wait or . . . die.”

The girl sighed a little. Doone took her arm tightly.

“It’ll work out all right,” he murmured. “Tell me something, will you? Are you forced to be eternal? Do you like it?”

She shook her head. “Not really. If I ever clear up the mess I’ll use the antidote and come back to normal. It has had advantages up to now, particularly under torture. But I’d sooner be a normal woman anytime. Besides—”

She broke off and looked up sharply at the sound of distant voices, rising gradually into a swelling murmur that grew with the moments. The girl’s face tensed and her rounded chin set firmly. Doone gave her a quick glance as she turned to the nearest window and pressed the shutter switch. In grim silence they looked out together at a mob of people surging into the grounds around the laboratory. They seemed to be coming from every direction, armed with rifles and varied types of implements.

Doone’s face set like granite.

“Give me a gun!” he snapped. “I’ll hold them off somehow while you get away. You might be able to manage it—keep in hiding until something happens to clear things up.”

Eva sighed. “I haven’t a gun,” she muttered. “And anyway I don’t think it would do any good to escape. Besides, I don’t want anybody to be hurt if it can possibly be avoided. Everything has gone all right up to now. . . .”

She pressed the button and the shutter reclosed. They both stood in silence, listening to the whang of bullets against the shutters, the thundering of fists and implements on the door, the bawling of voices.

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After a moment or two Doone cautiously opened the shutter again and studied the proceedings. Men and women were around the laboratory door, working industriously with an oxyacetylene torch. He glanced at the interior side of the door; so far there was no sign of collapse. The metal was tremendously strong, far in excess of steel itself. He wondered anxiously why there were no police on the scene to quell the riot, then remembering Marden, the co-President, was back of it all his wonder ceased. Obviously the police had received orders not to interfere.

He made to turn from the window, only to start suddenly as the glass splintered under the impact of a long pole stabbed from outside. Instantly he depressed the shutter button, but the shield could not close against the pole. It was being wielded as fiercely as a lever: it slammed the shutter back in its slots, broke the mechanism, and Doone sprang backwards to avoid the shower of glass that came cascading inward.

Instantly he crossed to the girl and threw an arm protectingly around her shoulders, clenched his right fist for action.

In a moment two vengeful men's faces appeared in the opening. One of them shouted back to the crowd outside—then they began to scramble through, kicking the remaining glass away with their boots. Doone watched them through narrowed eyes as they dropped to the floor and commenced to advance.

One after another men and women scrambled through the gap, faces set and resolute. One or two of them snapped over the door lock switch and permitted a fresh flood of humanity to vomit inwards. Doone, watching them, realized immediately that they represented the lower classes of humanity—those who believed what they were told and who never troubled to reason for themselves. To them Marden's bitter radio indictment of the girl had made the most direct appeal.

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The foremost man halted at last, breathing hard, motioned to the others to stop.

"President Doone, eh?" he demanded, sneering. "Shielding this creature from another world? The one who told everybody what to do, was planning to fire us all into space if she had her way."

"You've got this all wrong!" Doone snapped. "She's an Earth woman, you fools! Not one of those people who went into space is hurt—"

"Yeah? Then why don't the ships come back and prove it?"

"They will—in time," Doone said desperately. "You've—"

"If this woman isn't a creature from another world dressed up like a dame, who in hell is she? Why didn't she submit to Marden's X-ray? What's her game?"

"She's—she's Eva Hurst . . ." Doone made the statement helplessly, and as he had expected there was a yell of derision.

"Lies only make it worse!" the man snapped. "Marden gave us the truth over the radio, and you're about as bad as this woman is. She's a mass murderer, and we intend to show her how foreigners from other planets get treated, 'specially when they take our friends and kill them. We're taking the law into our own hands, and nobody's going to stop us! Grab her, boys!"

"No—no, wait!" Doone gasped frantically, but he was hurled backward with a blow on the jaw before he could rush to the struggling girl's assistance.

He saw her lifted into the air, kicking and threshing wildly—then he too was seized and borne along a few yards behind her. Punched and pounded by the infuriated mob they were

dragged out into the grounds, round the laboratory, and finally to the massive oak trees bordering the grounds. There they were set down, their wrists fastened securely behind them.

“Well, what now?” Doone demanded, glaring.

“You’ll find out . . .” The leader of the party smiled twistedly. “I guess a length of rope round your necks will put you both well on the way to eternity, especially as nobody’s deathless anymore. This may be rough justice, but it’s the justice of ordinary people who know nothing about science or space traveling. All we know is that among our sons and daughters and friends were several volunteers who went into space—and we mean to exact revenge for their deaths. You too, Doone—you’re as bad as this she devil.”

“Aw, quit talkin’, Jeff, and get busy!” yelled somebody.

“Hangin’s too good for ’em!” one man bawled, waving a clenched fist. “Hang Doone if you like, but give the dame a slow death! Let her go through what the others did, out in space —”

“She wants lynching, that’s what!”

“Hang her by the heels!” yelled a sour faced woman.

Doone made a desperate, futile effort to free himself.

“Listen, folks—you’ve got to listen!” he cried hoarsely. “If you do this thing you’ll never forgive yourselves! Marden’s the one to blame for all this—”

“Let’s get started!” the leader interrupted briefly, took two stout ropes from one of the men and tossed them over the tree branch. Significantly he noosed the ends.

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The crowd surged forward to assist him as the nooses slid over two necks. Doone and Eva kicked and struggled madly as their limbs were tightly bound. At last the crowd stood back to admire its handiwork, then moved to seize the rope slacks and pull upon them—

But they never got that far. At that moment the sour faced woman suddenly gave a shout.

“Wait! Look up there—!”

The people turned, hesitated, stared aloft in amazement at an egg shaped, silvery vessel dropping slowly from the clouds in the direction of central New York.

The people scattered wildly out of the track of the vessel’s scorching underblasts as it began to settle down near the laboratory. Again it shifted, came to rest gently not ten yards away.

There was a moment’s pause then the airlock opened. A tall gray headed, handsome man came slowly into view—and immediately the crowd gave a tremendous roar.

“It’s Brandon Hurst!”

“The guy who went to the moon!”

“Father!” the girl screamed, and her voice cut over the roar of the crowd. “Father! Quick!”

Hurst looked across in her direction, made a quick signal inside the ship. In a moment, followed by seven other men armed with deadly looking weapons he had passed through the crowd to the girl’s side, savagely flung off the noose from her neck, drew her into his arms as she began to weep unrestrainedly.

“Oh, Dad, thank God you came—”

Eva broke off, gulped down her tears.

“Lucky I did, I guess,” Hurst said grimly, glancing at Doone as he too was released. Then he turned back to the astounded, still half suspicious people.

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“Have you idiots gone insane?” he demanded angrily. “Don’t you realize that this girl is my daughter? No, I guess not,” he went on quietly. “I’d forgotten the changed appearance. Anyway, you can take it from me that all those people who left earth are not only well and safe, but happier than they’ve ever been in their lives before! These men here with me are some of the volunteers who made the journey. Do they look too bad?”

The people were silenced, waited for Hurst to continue.

“The delay in coming back to Earth was caused by various difficulties coming through the asteroid belt,” he went on quietly. “It knocked days onto our schedule. I came as well because I had the idea my daughter might be in difficulties if things were not cleared up. Besides, there are matters of interplanetary negotiation which only I can handle . . .” He broke off and turned to Doone. “Where’s the President?” he asked briefly.

Doone smiled faintly, told him the whole story of Marden’s disbelief. At the end of it Hurst turned back to the people.

“Well, now you’ve heard the truth,” he remarked quietly. “You’ve seen how near you came to hanging a girl who has all but given her life in the service of space pioneering. Lucky it was that I saw this disturbance from the ship and came to investigate. What are you going to do about it?”

The crowd was silent for a moment, then the sour faced woman shouted:

“Where’s Marden?”

“Find Marden!”

“He’s the man we want—!”

They turned, surged away. Hurst looked after them with somber eyes.

“I rather fancy there is little doubt whom the next President will be when the full story is published,” he remarked. “A President of America and first ruler of the new Saturnian colony. Also, Doone, when the final details are complete you must come to Saturn and assure yourself of the enormous possibilities that await us there.”

“I’m assured of it already.” Doone smiled, glancing at the girl.

He was right too. They made the trip their honeymoon, and when they returned to Earth to complete further negotiations Janice Milford was literally dead, and even Eva Hurst was not eternal.

[The end of *WORLD Without DEATH* by Fearn, John Russell (as Polton Cross)]