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**THE
GIRL FROM
MARS**

BY

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AND

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A great, red transparent globe marked the place of each combatant; slender blinding tongues of flame played back and forth between them and little globes of blue fire exploded with terrific violence.

THE GIRL FROM MARS

By JACK WILLIAMSON *and* MILES J. BREUER

CHAPTER I

The End of a World

WENTY-FIVE years have passed since the falling of the egg from the Lost Planet, and five more since the explosion of Mars. It was during my latter college days that that catastrophe occurred. The French savant, Vanne, had just published his treatise relative to the existence of life on Mars. His daring proposals had raised a storm in the scientific world and energetic measures were being taken to establish interplanetary communication, when the red planet was destroyed.

The destruction, according to the subsequently advanced theories of M. Vanne, was due to atomic disintegration, which later shattered the planet. For there is little doubt that the Lost Planet was destroyed by intra-atomic energy. The previous manifestations of intelligence, as Vanne observed them, are unmistakable. The conclusion is inevitable. Mars was destroyed by atomic energy released by intelligent entities.

For the month before the explosion came there had been observed a luminous hollow with a diameter of a thousand miles and a violet sea hundreds of miles across. The end came without warning. There was a vivid flare of green light that suddenly appeared and faded slowly through a period of many hours. And when it was gone the fragments of the Lost Planet were started on the orbits they occupy today.

It was five years later that the meteors fell. My wife had been dead for many months. On that August even-

ing, after dark, I was standing with little Fred, my two year old son, by the west windows of the pleasant rambling mansion I inherited from my father. Beyond the wide, tree-dotted lawn a thunderstorm was rising in the night, its dense masses of black vapor continually riven by blinding flashes of lightning. Brief glimpses were given of the dark sheets of falling rain below the cloud, and of the sleeping campus of Idlewood College, in which I became head of the department of biology. In those minutes the world was dominated by the sublime, majestic power of the storm.

Suddenly a dazzlingly brilliant point of green light appeared above the cloud and swept across the heavens to the north. I had half turned to follow its course when another sprang into being and raced low over the horizon, vanishing in the direction of Camden. Wondering if we were to have a storm of falling stars, I looked anxiously out toward the south.

Abruptly an intense beam of green light poured in through the windows, casting on the opposite wall a sharp image of the panes, and of the branches of the elm outside. I looked out again to see a painfully bright point of green that had broken through the black curtains of the storm. It was motionless before the cloud, which hung in oddly lighted green streamers around it. Rapidly its brilliance increased until it was blinding. Suddenly I realized that it was a third meteor, and that it was plunging, with inconceivable rapidity, directly toward us.

The Messenger

I TURNED in horror and took Fred in my arms. I staggered blindly toward the center of the room. The light grew so bright I had to put a hand to my eyes. Then, simultaneously, it went out and we were

plunged into utter blackness; I heard a terrific detonation; the earth shook and trembled; and there was the bellowing shriek of parted air. The windows burst in, and an oven-hot tempest roared through the room. I was knocked down by the blast and the child began to cry, but neither of us was injured.

I groped my way to the door and went out, still carrying Fred in my arms. The falling star had struck in the yard. There, where a flower bed had been, was a great funnel-shaped crater. All the trees and shrubs about had been knocked down by the air-blast and one was burning, lighting the ruinous scene with its flickering glare. From the pit I heard the irregular hiss and sputter of steam, and a thin cloud of condensing vapor rose above it. I went over and looked into the hole. I saw the smooth side of a four-foot globe, covered with a grayish vitrified crust, and glowing dully red. But the red was fading quickly, as the heat was absorbed by the interior of the body, which still had the intense cold of space.

When I went back to the pit on the morning after, I found the meteorite in the pool of rainwater at the bottom, shattered like hot glass by the water. I picked up a fragment, and like glass, it was transparent and sharp-edged. When I had it analysed it proved to be composed principally of silicon; and an almost perfect insulator of heat.

I moved a larger piece and my eye caught the gleam of bright metal. Quickly I stooped and scraped about until I had uncovered the end of a polished green metal cylinder. My mind reeled under a flood of ideas. Was this the handiwork of intelligent beings? Was some other planet trying to communicate with earth? The idea seemed fantastic. Yet, was it impossible?

For a few moments I stood there dazed, trying vague-

ly to imagine what might be in the cylinder. At last I bent, knocked the shattered, glassy stuff off the thing, and picked it up. It was a heavy smooth tube of green metal, some fifteen inches in diameter and thirty long. I turned it wonderingly in my hands, resting it on the edge of the pit. I saw, on the upper end, a flat disc rather like the dial on a safe, with a single deep groove running across it. Looking more closely at the top of the cylinder, I saw on it two little metal points so placed that the ends of the groove could be brought opposite them by the rotation of the dial through about sixty degrees. I twisted at the dial and it turned quite easily. When the groove reached the points a sharp metallic click and then a high pitched hum came from the cylinder. Then the whole head sprang up abruptly, as though thrown by a spring, and fell with a startling clatter on the rocks.

I noticed with surprise that my hands were trembling from excitement. Carefully I steadied the tube and looked in the top. The walls were thin and lined with two inches of a soft substance resembling sponge rubber. Just below the slots in which the lock had engaged was a smooth little disc of black metal. I was picking it up when my eye was caught by a flash of color upon it. Before my astonished vision there materialized a picture of the solar system in miniature, with the sun and planets much enlarged. The colors were exact and the picture was curiously bright and clear.

And Mars, that weird red world as it had been before the explosion, swam toward the center of the vision, growing until I could see the vast scorched deserts, the narrow fertile regions, and the vast strange crater with the steaming violet sea as it had been near the end. Even as I was thinking of Vanne's theories, I was given a brief glimpse of an intricate machine, with terrified

human workmen running from it, growing incandescent and melting into a violet fluid. And then a diagram was shown that, even with my slight knowledge of physics, I recognized as representing the breaking up of an atomic structure according to the Bohr theory.

The Message

THEN the little picture showed how the world of Mars was overwhelmed by the vapor that rose from the violet stuff and flowed in acrid, poisonous seas, sweeping over the Martian cities one by one, with a terrible corrosive action on flesh and all organic matter. At last only a few survivors were left, on one of the low mountains of Mars, protected by a hastily constructed metallic dome.

In that dome, surgeons were shown, working skillfully over still forms, with marvelous apparatus. Presently I saw that the patients were females; that the operators were engaged in removing the mature egg from the female ovary, and sealing it in a cylinder of fluid, with tubes, pumps, filters, and oxygen containers attached. Other Martians put those cylinders, together with radium heaters, tubes of fluid, and other apparatus, in green metal shells, locked them, and cast them in the glass-like globes. At last, through huge guns, they were shot out into space. The Martians it seems, were doomed but they hoped to perpetuate their race on another world.

The plaque went on to show how to fertilize the egg, and to add the numbered bottles of chemicals to maintain the growth of the ovum. Everything was shown in detail. It was all simple and easy. Finally it showed how to remove the fully developed infant from the fluid and start its breathing.

I put the cover back and carried the cylinder into the

house. Emptying it, I found everything just as it had been shown on the plaque. There was even a nursing bottle and packages of prepared food. I broke the seal on the incubator cylinder, added the little capsule containing the sperm to fertilize the egg, and the first can of fluid; I fastened on the oxygen cylinders and the filters; set the little clock into motion; and replaced the whole in the insulated cylinder above the radium heater.

For seven and a half long months, I divided my care between my little son and that incubator. With infinite pains I watched the little being in the tube develop into a human babe. At last I lifted the little girl tenderly out, and bathed her quickly in the contents of the last can. She breathed! She cried, and clenched a tiny hand. . . .

I named her Pandorina. She became a rare elflike beauty; her skin very white; her hair a soft, red bronze.

She came to have a quiet gentle grace of movement. Her strange beauty increased as she grew older. The bronze hair darkened and the eyes were clear and beautiful. She was very human, and very dear to me. I did not dare to tell her that she was the daughter of another world, for fear she would feel estranged from me. But I did tell her that she was an orphan. She and Fred grew up together like sister and brother. But as they approached maturity I began to see that they were falling in love.

Pandorina's intelligence was remarkable. She and Fred always studied together, and, although my son was no mean scholar, she was always considerably in the lead. She studied music too, displaying an astonishing aptitude that must have been her inheritance from a higher civilization.

Scientists have sometimes claimed to have photo-

graphs and descriptions of a subtle luminous emanation of the human body, known as *the human aura*. I suspected that Pandorina had an *aura*, though I could never be sure. But, at night or in a dark room, when she was excited, I fancied that a faint luminosity flickered about her. And her senses appeared sometimes so remarkably keen that I thought the *aura* might be a sixth sense not developed in terrestrial man, perhaps a sensitivity to ethereal waves too high or too low in pitch to be perceived by our senses. I have always considered such things as foolish when I read them in the writings of others; over and over again I told myself it was nonsense; yet the thing kept forcing itself on my attention.

CHAPTER II

A Strange Meeting

FRED and Pandorina were classmates in school and college. They seemed very happy together and their mutual attachment grew always stronger. Neither of them had many intimate friends. Fred was tall and slender, blond, and cleanly made. There was modest, honest manhood in his keen, blue eyes. I knew that he loved Pandorina with all his being and that his love was well requited. The marriage had been arranged. It was to be two months after the girl's twentieth birthday, on a day in June.

One morning, just a week before the date set for the wedding, Pandorina and Fred were playing tennis on the lawn behind the house. I delighted in their joy. The sea breeze was just springing up from the Atlantic, ten miles away. The summer day was clear, save for the cloud of smoke that ever hangs above the great steel mills in that part of New Jersey just west of Idlewood. The air was still, though sometimes we heard

the distant detonation of a heavy gun, or the scream and explosion of a shell, from the proving ground not far from the college. For there are tried out the huge guns that are forged for our navy in Millville.

I had forgotten myself in the contemplation of the players, and their happy laughter, when one of the new mail planes roared low overhead. Fred and the girl stopped to watch it, and the pilot, curiously, leaned out and waved to them. In a few moments the plane dropped out of sight in the landing field beyond the town. Pandorina's white skin was a little flushed, and she seemed excited. She turned to me and said impulsively,

"What a queer man—made me feel strange—" and abruptly she hesitated and then went back to the game. It was all a little strange and I noticed that she looked off two or three times, in the direction of the landing field, as though the incident had left a strong impression.

And oddly enough, in half an hour, a man in aviator's togs and helmet came walking up from that direction. He came straight across the vacant lot next to us, seeming to be hunting for some small object on the ground. He came right on over my lawn, without looking up, and I went over to him. He was well over six feet tall, erect, and very strongly built. His skin seemed almost unnaturally white. I stopped before him and he raised his eyes. They were greenish black, and I had a feeling that they would be luminous in the dark, though of course I thought it fancy at the time. The fellow had about himself a vague and indefinite air of supernormal power and shadowy malignance. Really there was nothing definite, but at first sight I mistrusted him.

He smiled, with a flashing display of white teeth, and said,

"I beg your pardon. I lost a watch as I went over awhile ago. A wrist watch. I was looking at it and the strap must have come unfastened. The windstream whipped it away. Maybe not much chance to find it, but it was right valuable."

I thought the fellow was lying and I was about to tell him that he might go around my possessions, when Pandorina and Fred came up. She smiled and offered to help him look in the shrubbery and flower beds beyond the house if he thought it had fallen there. So we walked around the house and made a pretense of search. I thought that Pandorina and the stranger looked at each other more than necessary, but they said nothing save for a few comments on the weather, and in a few minutes he went on.

The Man From Mars

I HOPED I had seen the last of the man, but the next day I learned that a Mr. Harvey Mason, who was a pilot for the Atlantic Aero Express Company, and had his base in Philadelphia, was renting the King place, almost next door to us, and that he was moving in at once, planning to spend his off hours in Idlewood. I could only guess that it was the same man and that Pandorina had something to do with his action. I was not much surprised when the stranger came to call a day or so later, with one of my neighbors.

The company sat down and talked a while. Once I saw Mason and Pandorina staring at one another, quite lost to their surroundings. He became self-conscious and looked away, with a laugh, and Pandorina dropped her eyes. During the rest of the evening I was disturbed by the thought that she was developing an

infatuation for the fellow, and Fred must have noticed it too, though he gave no sign. Presently the three of them went to the piano and Pandorina played. They all seemed very gay, but I knew that Fred was worried, though he said nothing about it after the visitors had gone.

Fred had studied law. The next day he was down at his office, and I came home early and alone. I was a little surprised to find that Pandorina was not in the house. In half an hour, however, an automobile stopped at the front and she and Mason came up the walk. The man held her arm with a possessive air. I went to the door and opened it. Mason spoke to me, with something haughty and aggressive in his manner.

"I should like to speak to you alone for a moment, if you please, sir," he said stiffly.

I led him into my study, shut the door, and sat down by my desk. He remained standing, a striking and powerful figure with his mighty, muscular limbs, his strong and prominent features, and his eyes of penetrating brilliance. Then there was the difference I have mentioned, the air of alien power and the strange, malign spirit that lurked in the green-black eyes, setting him apart from ordinary men.

"Is Pandorina the child of earthly parents?" he asked harshly, his sharp eyes boring into mine.

"Why, what makes you ask that?" I countered, caught unexpectedly, but unwilling to admit anything.

"You have told her that she is not your child. In pallor of skin, color of hair, and luster of eye, she resembles me. But I am not a terrestrial man. I came to earth in a meteor. I am the son of the science of another world, and I know that two other similar meteors fell on the same evening. I was brought up by a farmer named Mason. He lived in the village of Fol-

som, over toward Camden. He did not, as you have done, lie to his foster-child about his origin. These are the reasons for my question; these, and the fact that Pandorina and I feel an irresistible attraction."

For a moment he paused, with those dark eyes still intent upon me, and then he cried,

"Ha, I am right! I read it in your face!"

I was beaten. "Go away!" I told him. "Get out of my house! Let me be the one to tell her. Please."

So, grinning unpleasantly, he went out and left me, but it was a long time before I had the heart to do anything but sit there and stare at the wall. At last I roused myself and went to look for Pandorina. I found her standing by the windows of her room, gazing pensively out at the hills in the north, empurpled by the setting sun. She started at the sound of my voice, and smiled to see me. I had her to come with me into the little laboratory where I had taken the green metal cylinder. The door had been locked for almost twenty years. There, on the dusty tables, was the cylinder. I showed it to her, and then told her about the night when it had fallen, and how I had found it. Then I opened it and let her see the contents. As the last bars of sunshine through the cobweb covered windows fell upon the little plaque the movies appeared again, and when at last the scene was black, and the sun had fallen behind the hills, I said,

"Pandorina, you came to earth in that tube. And there were three of the meteors. There are other Martians on earth! Mason is one of them!"

She was confused by the abruptness of the disclosures. For a moment she was silent, passing a hand over her white forehead.

"Now I know why I feel for him as I do. I think—I love him—more than I ever did Fred. But still,

don't think—oh, what shall I do?"

Abruptly tears started into her eyes and she clutched my shoulder and hung against me, her slight body racked by sobs. I tried to comfort her and presently she grew calmer and went out. I stood there in the room, looking idly at the cylinder and thinking of the part it had played in my life, until I was deep in the mazes of memory, and dusk had fallen.

At last Fred came into the room. Somehow he seemed almost old. Blank despair was in his clear blue eyes. His face was white and drawn and his slender figure was painfully erect. Pandorina had met him as he came home. What she told him I do not know. I put out my hand and he gripped it hard.

"Pandorina has told me," he said unevenly. "She loves him. I'm going away. I don't know what to do." He paused uncertainly, and looked away. "But I can't stay here. I'll go away. Perhaps—I'll forget. Good-by, father."

He choked, and a lump had risen in my throat so that I could not speak. I went with him out to the garage. He got out his car and as he drove away I stood and watched the light flashing on houses and trees, and the dwindling point of red, until it all was lost in the night. Two weeks later I had a half-incoherent note that told of his driving aimlessly down to Atlantic City, and then of his going to New York. There, it seems, he fell in with an old school friend who was living at New Brunswick, and went home with him.

Pandorina was hurt by Fred's going. To me she was more than usually demonstrative. But she spent much time with Mason. I think he took her up several times in his plane, and out over Delaware Bay.

CHAPTER III

The Third Martian

ONE day when the two had gone out together for a picnic, I heard familiar footsteps on the verandah and Fred walked into my study. He was thinner than when he had gone, and looked tired and worn, but in his deep blue eyes I read hope and determination. I sprang to my feet to greet him. Smiling a little, he said, as he grasped my hand,

"My arrival is a little sudden. And I brought a visitor. I wrote that I had gone with John to New Brunswick. Yesterday he and I started to the theatre to attend the matinee. On the street we met a man whom I took at first to be our friend Mason, although he seemed not quite so tall, and much better dressed. But John hailed him and it soon developed that the stranger was an old acquaintance of his, Irving Worrell by name. It seems that he is quite wealthy and is considered a brilliant young scientist, with many wonderful discoveries to his credit.

"As we were talking I was struck more and more at his resemblance to Mason and presently I remembered your telling me that the first meteor fell in the direction of New Brunswick. I spoke to him about it and he told me that the cylinder had been found by a banker named Worrell, on his country place. This man had hatched and raised the Martian.

"Worrell was intensely interested to learn of the two others of his race. He brought me over today in a remarkable conveyance of his own, a sort of rocket sailer. We covered the hundred miles in half an hour."

We went out, and Fred introduced me to the stranger. He was, like Mason, a strange figure, with dead-white skin, brilliant green-black eyes, and an intangible *aura* of mysterious power. While he was not

quite so powerfully built as the other man, he seemed to have an even more forceful character, emphasized by the penetrating brightness of his eyes, and the remarkable strength of his features.

He brought home to me more vividly than Mason had done, that the civilization of Mars must have been far above our own, with its people maturing much more quickly. The superiority of the planetary people speak highly for the advancement of the Lost Planet. Imagine a civilized baby brought up by primitive savages—it would have all the potential abilities to read and do algebra and play the piano, but, never having had a chance, it would not have learned to do these things. Although it could, due to a higher intelligence, outstrip the savages in their own accomplishments, its ability would be crude compared to real civilized accomplishments, because of its lack of civilized education. That is the impression those two men made upon my mind.

Presently Mason and Pandorina came in. They were very much surprised to meet the newcomers and I thought the girl was glad to see Fred. At any rate, while the others were talking, Fred and Pandorina sat down together, but the men were soon beside them. With his brilliant, cultured mind, Worrell easily dominated the conversation.

He told us something of his life and his scientific work. Beginning with a study of the cylinder in which he had fallen, with its chemicals and apparatus, the radium heater and the motion-picture plaque, he had done amazing things. Many of his discoveries had been given to the world. But as he was talking he took from his pocket a little handful of gleaming objects of metal and crystal. There were a half dozen of the little machines, very tiny and wonderfully finished.

"I have devoted some attention to the science of warfare," he said, tossing the little objects lightly upon his palm. "Here are a few of my inventions that were too dangerous to publish. Perhaps they look insignificant enough, but with them I could defeat and destroy a battleship. They utilize the powers of radium and the disrupted atom."

"Let us look at this one, for example."

He held up a little double disc, about the size of a dollar. One face looked like platinum, the other gleamed with an unfamiliar red. He took it in his fingers and slowly turned each face upon the other, as he stepped toward the center of the room.

"It creates a protonic wall that absorbs etheric vibration and stops the passage of ions," he said. "By a variation of adjustment, any desired wave length can be stopped or admitted. This one may have a clear field of vision, and, at the same time, be protected against heat or ultraviolet or cathode ray weapons, some of which I have developed to a high degree of efficiency."

Rivals

SUDDENLY my vision of Worrell dimmed. He seemed to be standing in a transparent red bubble ten feet in diameter, with its center at the thing in his hand. He manipulated the tiny instrument and the bubble grew darker until he looked a ghastly bloody red. And then, as we began to cower back in terrified amazement, the red thing floated up until it had melted far into the ceiling and Worrell's head almost touched it. As the thing floated down again, the red darkened until the thing seemed a solid sphere, densely, inconceivably, black. It was uncanny to hear the Martian's guttural laugh coming from it. Abruptly it vanished, and he came toward us, grinning.

I was speechless, but Mason stammered:

"Why—how did you—what made it go up?"

Worrell answered easily, "The shell may intercept any wave length. Gravitation is cut off as readily as any other."

He took a tiny metal statuette off the piano and set it on the corner of the table. As we watched with some apprehension, he took from his collection a piece of green crystal in the shape of a horseshoe, with a tiny silver needle mounted between the ends. As he held it so that the needle pointed at the little figure, a blinding tongue of fire stabbed out and the metal burst into vivid incandescence, with a dull report, and was gone.

"Cathode rays," Worrell said.

He took up his weapons and returned them to his pocket, and he and Mason went home to Mason's house across the street. They came back next morning and the three Martians went for an automobile ride. Fred went along. It was when they came back in the afternoon that I first noticed that the two men were growing jealous of one another, and that they looked with black disfavor on Fred's attentions to Pandorina.

Next morning they did not come in. After dinner Pandorina was playing the piano, with Fred sitting by her. I could tell her mood by her music and I knew she was very happy. Suddenly the door of the room was flung open and Mason strode in. At the sight of Fred with the girl he stopped short, an expression of terrible anger contorting his features. His body was disfigured by fiendish, inhuman rage. And I imagined, in the semi-gloom of the room, that a vague green *aura* was flickering about his body.

"Man, didn't I warn you? Didn't I tell you to go?" the heavy voice boomed out. I was sickened by the ruthlessness and malignance in the tone. Fred sprang

to his feet, clasping Pandorina's hand. He released it and stepped quickly toward Mason, clenching his fist.

The ultramundane man thrust a hand into his pocket and pulled out one of Worrell's little instruments. I did not see the shape of the thing, but as he clasped it in his hand, a vague green fire flowed out of it and flashed across to Fred. What that force was, I do not know—some form of electric energy, or of ions, perhaps. The green radiance condensed about my son. His brave advance was abruptly checked. An expression of agony came over his face. He tottered and began a scream that ended in a rattling sob. For a moment his body was outlined sharply in the curdling green incandescence. Mason relaxed his grip of the tiny device and calmly returned it to his pocket as my son, burned and distorted, fell heavily to the floor.

CHAPTER IV

The Duel

THEN I think I must have fainted from grief and horror. The next I knew I was lying on the sofa. Pandorina was standing by me, with her cool white hand on my brow. I sat up dazedly. I did not begin to remember what happened until I saw Fred, still lying where he had fallen. And then I saw Mason and Worrell. They were standing face to face in the middle of the room. Again I fancied the flicker of green light about them. They were talking heatedly, but in low tones, and I was so mentally befogged that I did not at first catch the drift of what they were saying. But presently I got an idea of the jealousy they felt, and of the fact that they were in a fair way to get into a fight.

Suddenly the aviator stepped back, with a sharp word that fell upon my dazed brain like a curse, and then swung forward at the other with

a heavy blow. Worrell's hand made a fleeting motion, and I caught in it the glitter of one of his tiny weapons. And, strangely, though he made no attempt to dodge, the aviator's blow did not fall home. Out of Worrell's hand flashed a beam of green fire. With a cry of pain, Mason staggered back as though he had received a heavy but invisible blow. Following his evident advantage, the scientist snatched from his coat pocket a little metal tube about the size of a fountain pen. As he pointed it at the aviator there was a sharp click and a little capsule flew out, seeming to ignite as it struck the air, for it burst into a ball of brilliant blue light, somewhat like a ball of lightning, that shot toward Mason's head. By the exertion of his powerful muscles to the utmost, the man was able to hurl himself out of the path of the strange missile. By a fortunate chance it struck an open window, flew out, and struck the old elm outside, reducing it to a blazing stump.

All with a single swift motion, Mason sprang aside, picked up a chair, and hurled it at the scientist with such terrific force, that I expected to see him brained on the spot. But Worrell was ready with his little ray-machine. A green light fell upon the chair and it swerved from its path, and went crashing into the glass front of a book case by the wall.

By that time I was sufficiently recovered to understand the danger I was in from the combat. I stepped toward the middle of the room, with my hand upraised. "Gentlemen, just a minute—" I began. They turned fiercely toward me. Mason lifted in his hand the deadly little weapon he had used on Fred. Doubtless he had forgotten it during the fight, but now he raised it deliberately. A pale light flashed out of it, and I felt an icy chill, a strange numbing pain, run over my arm and shoulder. But, crying out, with com-

passionate horror and pity on her tear-stained face, Pandorina sprang to my side and grasped my hand. And, although Mason was still muttering menacingly, the numbness left my arm. However, it was raw and painful for several days.

"Gentlemen," I went on, "I see your problem. Grant me respect for my dead son and I'll help you work out your question"—for a plan had sprung into my mind. Force was useless against them, but cunning might prevail.

The aviator snorted at the idea of my assisting them, but, possibly for that reason, Worrell agreed to the plan I explained. Assuming blindness, while I suppressed a fear that they would read my thoughts and find my secret, I led the way out to my car. Pandorina rode with me and the muttering planetary men climbed into the rear. In half an hour we drove up before a locked gate, with an open space beyond. Stopping the car back from the gate and well to one side, I explained:

"This is government property. The public is not permitted inside the fence, but I have secured the use of it for my botanical researches. Here you may be assured of plenty of room for your duel, and freedom from interruptions."

"Very well," said Worrell, "let us waste no time."

Noticing that my watch said 10:30, I got out, unlocked the heavy gate and swung it quickly around before they could read the sign upon it, and then drove in toward the center.

"Now suppose you separate a little way, and I will sound the horn as a signal to begin," I suggested.

Mason agreed with a savage monosyllable. Smiling, and haughtily polite, Worrell took from his pocket a few of his amazing weapons, also a little leather case, in which were more of them. Quickly he divided them

into equal shares, handing Mason's to him with brief words of instruction for their use. Mason was grim and belligerent but Worrell smiled superciliously. They went to their places and I gave the signal to begin. Then I drove frantically away to a distance of a half mile.

When I looked back they were already struggling. A great red transparent globe marked the place of each combatant. Slender, blinding bright tongues of white flame (electric arcs, perhaps) played back and forth between them, and the little globes of blue fire flew to and fro, exploding with terrific violence upon striking. Faint green lights flickered about them. Now and then the protonic armor of one or the other was darkened to afford greater protection, or momentarily dispensed with altogether to give greater freedom of attack.

And at one side was a slender, white-clad figure. It was Pandorina. In the heat of my grief and my plan for revenge, I had quite forgotten her. God knows that I meant her no harm! But then it was too late.

I could see few of the details of the contest until I remembered the binoculars under the car seat. I got them out and focused them on the scene of action. Indeed, that conflict of the Martians was a strange one. It was, to me, incomprehensible. They employed destructive agencies discovered ages ago, perhaps, on Mars, but inconceivable to man—powerful developments of radioactive energy, disintegrated atoms, electric arcs, cathode rays and streams of ions. And their means of defence and counter attack were as far advanced—protonic armor and screens of repulsion.

The Martians were perhaps a hundred feet apart. Mason was advancing steadily, while Worrell calmly held his ground. At times the red armor was so dim that I could see the men quite plainly. It was a strange

scene, bright with the vivid flashes of the ray weapons and the globes of flame, with the impalpable green luminosity, which may have been an incidental by-product of atomic disintegration, hanging over all. The earth was scorched and smoking from the effect of the intense white rays, and the air was full of rocks and dust from the continual explosions.

The Tale of a Sign

SUDDENLY Worrell stood still, and the red armor vanished from about him. A constant stream of the blue globules poured from his weapon. The balloon-like object that sheltered the aviator bounded from side to side as the occupant made wild efforts to escape the spheres, then vanished itself as Mason determined to let down his defenses in an effort to get in a vital blow. A great blaze of incandescence left his hand and poured over Worrell. It seemed to explode with withering flames and a roar that shook the earth. And, for the moment, the scientist disappeared.

At the same instant, as Mason stood with the blue globes exploding all about him, a faint mist of green flame was thrown over him—a flame like that with which Fred had been murdered. He grew rigid, with limbs stiffly outstretched, and slowly fell. But before he struck the earth the shielding sphere sprang strong and black about him.

All the while Pandorina stood close by. I could see the expressions of pity and fear and horror that moved across her face. Still I loved her and wished I had thought to save her.

Then Worrell, with the faint red shell about him, sprang out of the hollow into which he had been thrown. And strangely, he did not curve back to earth, but floated on and on, up over the motionless shell of the aviator, flashing his deadly rays and explosive blue globes down upon him. Abruptly a blinding light

beamed out of the aviator's armor and struck full upon the one overhead. The red shell was lifted and driven back by the impact of the ray. And it changed color. Splotches of changing orange and yellow came upon it. Mason was doing something to neutralize its effect. But Worrell replied with a frantic use of his weapons; successive puffs of greenish vapor impinged upon Mason's globe until it was almost hidden from sight.

All the time I had been keeping an eye out in the direction of Millville, twenty miles west, to the left of the fighters and the pitiful girl who watched them.

Now I heard the familiar but undescribable scream of the projectile from a great 16-inch naval gun, and I saw it as a dark speck, describing its trajectory. I saw the smoke in the distance and heard the detonation of the gun that had fired it. The shell struck and exploded with a force that shook the earth, throwing up a great fountain of dirt, rocks and fragments, that presently showered down into the great cloud of smoke that now hid the scene of the duel.

I waited patiently for the smoke to clear. It was half an hour before I could get close enough to see without getting choked by the acrid fumes. I found a vast crater, big enough to hold a house, with raw, torn earth about, and stifling odors still floating up. But no sign did I see of the Martians. There was nothing anywhere to show that they had ever existed.

When I went out I locked the gate, displaying again the sign that I had hidden by swinging it around against the fence.

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