

WAR  
OF THE  
WORLDS

AN ADAPTION

by

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BOOK ONE  
THE COMING OF THE VENUSIANS

## CHAPTER ONE

## THE EVE OF THE WAR

No one would have believed in the last years of the nineteenth century that this world was being watched keenly and closely by intelligences greater than man's and yet as mortal as his own; that as men busied themselves about their various concerns they were scrutinised and studied, perhaps almost as narrowly as a man with a microscope might scrutinise the transient creatures that swarm and multiply in a drop of water; an analogy quite fitting to the events that transpired at the pinnacle of man's complacent reign of the drop of water that he calls Earth. No one would have dreamed, while we were kings of our small planet, that there might be life on others. And yet, across the timeless worlds of space, beings incredibly superior to us regarded this world with envious eyes, and slowly and surely they drew their plans against us.

I scarcely need remind the reader that the planet Venus is Earth's sister not only in size and mass, but in proximity, as out of the eight planets that inhabit our solar system her orbit brings her the closest to our own, by which is meant around sixty million miles – a distance quite overwhelming for Earthly means, but for beings who have mastered the art of interplanetary travel it is but a hop, skip and a jump.

Furthermore she is our sunward neighbour. By interpolation it is estimated that her surface reaches 700° Fahrenheit, however the temperature gradient underneath her thick clouds cannot be determined; it could become hotter as one descends through the opaque gases, but it is more likely that one would reach cooler temperatures, that is, life-sustaining temperatures. It is speculated that one might have to bore underground in order to reach a

liveable climate, although one might eventually meet a molten core as unwelcoming as the scorching surface.

In any case there is life on this remote yet unsettlingly close neighbour-planet, and compared to the blue waters and green fields of our temperate world it is highly unlikely that Venus' boiling gases are more comfortable than Earth. Wealth creates opulence and opulence is equivalent to both weakness and complacency. We were so sure of our comfortable position of power on this lush world that we had no regard for the possibility that those less fortunate could be planning to relieve us of it; or, more accurately, relieve it of us.

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It was on August the 2nd that a violent burst of flame was observed spilling out of the gaseous atmosphere of Venus, and on the following day the English scientific community was ablaze with discussion as to the nature of the phenomenon.

It was hypothesised that it was the result of a tremendous volcano on the surface below the clouds, but it struck me as an odd explanation, since a volcano spews lava out over its sides, and not in a whirling vertical shot as was depicted in the facsimiles in both *The Times* and *The Daily Telegraph*, and in fact that is precisely what it reminded me of; a gunshot. I contacted the astronomer Ogilvy, whom I had interviewed some months earlier for my paper, and though he agreed with my observation and disagreed with the presumption that the cause of the mysterious event was a volcano, he would not concede that there was any possibility of it being anything other than a natural occurrence. He was convinced that there could be no living thing on that remote, forbidding planet.

"The chances against anything manlike on Venus are a million to one," he said.

I requested to see the flame of gas through the telescope at Ottershaw and although he insisted that there was nothing more to

see, I joined him on the evening of the 4th, which yielded a bitterly cold night though the skies were clear and there was a perfect view of the distant planet.

There was no way I could have known, as I peered into the cold eyepiece of the large instrument, that somewhere between the stool where I sat, in the round observatory in the small town in southern England on the planet Earth, and the glowing orange orb that was our neighbouring planet, that there were two missiles invisibly hurtling towards us. I was looking directly at them; they would have been minute specks in my vision, yet not I nor the hundreds of peacefully slumbering people in Ottershaw below the hill, nor the millions asleep in England, could have known that we were waiting helplessly for the inevitable strike of these projectiles.

Even as I peered attentively into the fascinating image there appeared a burst of colour; an orange glow on the circumference of the bright disc that was the planet Venus. It was mirrored by a dark blur over the surface and I realised this to be a shadow cast by this plume of gas, which must have been immense. Quickly calling Ogilvy, I yielded the eyepiece and he exclaimed in wonder.

It was indeed another of the flames bursting from the surface, and over the next ten nights there would be ten more. On the twelfth of August at midnight, precisely ten days after the first eruption, there was a mighty rumble which shook every pot and pan from its comfortable spot upon the shelves of my humble dwelling and woke every man woman and child in Maybury Hill.

Observers over the country had witnessed a distinct shooting star, and those in London claim to have seen something much nearer, some saying that it appeared to head towards the earth at forty-five degrees. All confirm that it was greenish in colour and was trailed by black and green mist that was distinct in the moonlit sky. Many in Berkshire, Surrey, and Middlesex saw the fall of it and maintain it made a hissing sound as it rocketed through the atmosphere.

I rose and lit a candle, and the window of every house in the street lit up with the same flickering yellow, and after fifteen minutes of murmured and confused chattering, most residents concluded that their time was better spent back in the warm covers, and the destiny of the world would have to wait until tomorrow morning.

\* \* \*

I awoke some time after dawn and spoke to the milkman, who upon my inquiry informed me that the tremble of the previous night had been largely forgotten, since his conversations with the town folk had been preoccupied with the more important occurrence of the engagement of the grocer's daughter. I thanked him and said good morning, and by the time I sat for breakfast the matter was out of my mind as well.

Ogilvy however, was deeply excited since he had seen the shooting star and was persuaded that a meteorite lay somewhere on the common between Horsell, Ottershaw, and Woking. He had risen early with the idea of finding it, and that he did, since its position was flagged by a thin column of blue smoke rising starkly against the sunrise. Following it he discovered a pit in the middle of Horsell Common, surrounded by mounds of earth strewn half a mile around it and visible a mile away, concealing the depression in the centre, which was more than a hundred yards across and probably twenty deep.

However it was the item in the centre of the pit that was of interest, particularly due to its clearly unnatural shape. It was a cylinder wedged at an angle into the ground; its flat end pointing diagonally into the heavens, and was encrusted with a layer of a caked, rough material. The end was thirty yards across, but the cylinder tapered outwards and increased in diameter towards the earth in which it was buried. There was no way to fathom the complete size of the object, as only this end was visible; like an iceberg.

The projectile radiated heat and Ogilvy was forced to observe it from the sloped side of the pit. While he watched, he detected faint sounds of stirring within, and he feared there was a man within, trying to escape. He rushed to the cylinder but was stopped by the intense heat before he could burn himself on its surface.

Stunned and overcome with excitement Ogilvy stumbled out of the pit and ran wildly towards Horsell. He was unsuccessful in convincing a waggoner of the situation, who thought him to be a madman due to his wild appearance –his hat had fallen off in the pit– and stumbled over the Horsell Bridge, the potman who was unlocking the doors of the public house yielding the same incredulity at his ranting. However he encountered Henderson, the London journalist who had interviewed him regarding the eruptions on Venus, in his garden, and made himself understood.

While Ogilvy was supplied with a brandy, Henderson left for the train station in order to communicate the report to London, and having encountered the milkman on the way, the news began to spread through Horsell one house at a time.

By midday I had learnt about the meteorite from the grocer, and after having passed on my congratulations to his daughter I made my way to Horsell Common. When I arrived there was a small crowd of maybe a score of people lining the pit; being a Friday morning they were mostly boys and unemployed men. Ogilvy returned and related his story of that morning to me while we inspected the cylinder.

There were indeed the same faint stirrings as he had heard earlier, but still the same heat prevented us from assisting whomever was inside. By mid afternoon I was considering returning to write a report, but there was a sudden grating sound; the coarse, chilling squeal of metal, and the material encrusted on the cylinder began to flake off in places, revealing a shining silver surface below. I gasped, and the murmurs of the crowd were hushed.

At first no movement was discernable, but after a few more loud grates there was a particularly intense squeal and my attention

was caught by a shudder of the cylinder's end. It was rotating, unscrewing. The next turn of the disc was clearly visible and some of the boys ran off in panic. I must admit that even I stirred in nervous apprehension.

When, after several minutes, the crowd's agitated suspense began to die away and become overcome with curiosity, Ogilvy and I walked to the side of the cylinder, and though the heat still kept us a dozen yards away, we made out a silver slit encompassing the cylinder's circumference about two feet from the flat end, very slowly enlarging with each short rotation of the disc. It was the thread of this giant screw; the cap that was fixed onto the cylinder buried to an unknown depth in the skin of the earth.

After an hour, two feet of shining screw projected when, suddenly, the lid fell off.

Ogilvy and I ran back to the front where we could peer into the cylinder, but the sun was setting directly behind its large rounded silhouette and its interior appeared simply as a black circular cavern. The only things visible were two faint spots of light, which hovered to and fro and disappeared briefly every few minutes. I had the odd notion that they looked like large eyes, but naturally I didn't mention this imaginative and fanciful thought to Ogilvy.

Slowly, appetite began to drive some of the spectators away, but upon the arrival of Henderson with a white flag, Ogilvy and he descended the pit. The heat must have been bearable by that stage, since they appeared to approach without hindrance. The giant disc lay on the bare soil at the base of the monstrous black cavern, with its interior side upwards, and the two men had to climb onto it to approach. I saw Ogilvy remark in astonishment and touch the shiny surface of the metal upon which he treaded. It must have been quite cool.

For several suspenseful minutes the pair stood before the angled circular opening, Ogilvy shouting 'halloa' while Henderson waved his flag. After some time the white fabric became motionless and the two could be seen conferring with each other.

Cautiously, Henderson then approached the lowest rim of the cavernous cylinder with Ogilvy following.

I watched as the pair ascended the two-foot-thick hull of metal and paused on its rim. They turned towards us, hesitating, before facing the blackness and stepping inwards. First their legs disappeared in darkness, then they were enveloped completely in shadow as they entered the cylinder. The two spots of light hovered in the depth of the darkness.

How long we waited around the edge of the rim I cannot tell, since those moments were drawn out by the terrible suspense. We all expected the two men to emerge heroically shaking the hands of the men from Venus, or maybe to report that the poor creatures inside had perished on their voyage to us, however after these few suspenseful moments there was a single, blood-curdling scream.

The crowd was fixed to the spot in shock and indecision. At that instant, the last glimmer of sun disappeared below the horizon and the sky became a black, moonless night dotted with faint evening stars. The crowd was still, and I heard someone calling for a lantern. Suddenly there was another scream to my left. I stumbled backwards in shock. I was faintly aware of something large moving, because the air whooshed with turbulence and there was a heavy thudding that rumbled the ground. For a millisecond the stars were blacked out above me then there was another scream to my right, followed by more thudding and terrible cries for help.

Faintly silhouetted by the sparkling night sky I saw an indiscernible bulk, its size impossible to gauge, retracting back into the looming black outline of the cylinder. It was at that moment that I ran in panic.

\* \* \*

## CHAPTER TWO

## THE EMERGENCE OF THE VENUSIAN

My wife was immensely troubled by the time I returned home, weary and unkempt, with my coat unbuttoned. I related the day's events to her by mentioning only facts and no suppositions as to what could have been within that strange, foreign cylinder – simply because I had none.

I sat down to a cold dinner and ate silently. Even now I remember this so clearly; it was to be my last civilised meal for some time. Everything seemed so serene and tranquil. Outside could be heard the laughter of lovers in the alley, and the London train rumbling past, softened into melody by the distance. I wrote an account for my paper, and sank into a restless, troubled sleep.

During the night a group of people on the Chertsey road, Woking, saw a green flash as a star fell from the heavens into the woods to the northwest. This was the second cylinder.

The next morning I awoke unusually late, which I attributed to my exhaustion at running two miles in panic the previous evening, though oddly I could barely remember anything between seeing that horrible moving mass in the sky with the heavy thumps on the ground and arriving on my doorstep. It was ten o'clock by the time I was dressed and made my way down to the railway station to buy the paper.

There was barely a mention of the landing of the meteor on Horsell Common; the only article was a brief paragraph entitled 'Men from Venus' and provided no new information regarding the cylinder than I already had witnessed.

Making my way to the common I encountered a group of soldiers on the Horsell bridge. I discovered that a company had arrived from Horsell and had formed a cordon on the edge of the

common, and a second company was marching through Chobham to deploy on the north side.

Just as I stood there a young man in soldier's clothing rushed past in the direction of the station, and when the men accosted him for tidings he exclaimed in panic-stricken breaths, with a disturbing look of terror in his eyes;

"It's a monster! ...huge!" he stammered, his eyes widening and beginning to stare into space, "those eyes... those huge eyes! Got to warn London!"

As the youth darted off the soldiers hesitated in disbelief before bursting into laughter. Having already seen the cylinder myself, I was deeply troubled and I left them to their hilarity. 'Those eyes' the young man had said, sparking my memory. Good lord! My fanciful impression of those two floating points of light had been true!

My imagination ran wild with concepts of what terrible kind of enormous monster could have been lurking in those shadows. I found it hard to believe that I and so many others had crowded around the vast opening, unknowingly peering in at some huge dreadful beast. I visualised a giant lizard with blinking yellow eyes and a hardened tail that swooped out of the cylinder and struck down people in the crowd, creating that thudding and the horrid screams. Perhaps it was a gargantuan with horns, one eye, with maybe hooped feet, perhaps the teeth of a shark, the body of a lion.

I returned home deeply unsettled and told my wife and maid to pack their things, before running to the Spotted Dog, the landlord of which was in possession of a horse and dog cart. When I arrived there was a gentleman requesting its loan and the landlord asked for no less than a pound.

"I'll give you two," I said over the gentleman's shoulder, "and I'll bring it back by midnight."

I resolved to take my wife to her cousin's house at Leatherhead, and when we arrived in the late afternoon I felt reassured that they were safe. It was only my promise to the landlord that persuaded my wife that I should return to Maybury,

but I was also driven by curiosity to observe what sort of monster that young man could possibly have been describing. As yet I was unsure of how I was going to *safely* observe it.

The sky darkened halfway through my journey and a thunderstorm brewed when I was a few miles out of Maybury Hill. A heavy rain began to pound down and lightning lit up the cold landscape at abnormally short intervals, replied by thunderclaps that shook every bone. As I rounded a crest within two miles of my home I saw the college in Maybury Hill silhouetted by the red flickering of flame. Then, suddenly, while I descended into the valley which rose up to the hill, my attention was caught by a bulky shape glowing yellowy red, indicating it was on the other side of the flames that lit up the college. All I could make out was a curved arch, much larger than the college buildings.

Suddenly the shape was blurred by movement. The arch began rising and I stood up awkwardly in the cart as the black shape of a tree obstructed my view. The instant I regained my view there was a sheet of immense carpet lightning that lit up the countryside as if it were day and seared the resulting image into my mind forever.

I fell back into the driver's seat, stunned and in pure disbelief. The image was impossible yet I couldn't blink it away. Rising above the dwarfed outline of the college, lit by reddish flame from below and by silver blue lightning from above, was the most unmistakable form of all – a human. I can still see it now. I can still see the face... *her* face. It was a woman. She was of immense proportions; from behind one side of the college one of her ankles rose up into the air, and her other ankle from behind its outhouse thirty yards away. These towers of legs sloped up away into the sky higher than any tree and met at the lower folds of a garment that looked like a lady's shrunken nightgown –that is, shrunken relative to the lady, for this one was forty yards high– and clung in transparent wetness to the glistening skin of the monstrous woman. Her legs and arms were bare, though not at that

moment, and never throughout the ordeal, did I once consider her modesty.

Her poise was singular. It left an instant impression upon me, and ever since this one instant in time, the duration of which was only a single lightning-strike, I have somehow longed to behold this posture once more and discover its mysterious secret; that is, why it struck me with such awe. She stood in a most unladylike manner but in no way insulting; rather it was almost exhilarating – she stood in a way no nineteenth-century lady would ever dare. Her feet were placed slightly apart and her knees were bent to a fractional angle as she was in the middle of a giant rising motion (the shape I had seen silhouetting the college had been her arched back as she had stooped for something below her). One arm was slightly behind her hip while the other hung in a swinging upwards movement, grasping an unidentifiable object in her clasped hand. Her head was thrust to her side in the direction in which this arm was moving and her face, only the profile of which was visible from my vantage point, was lit up in the instant of laughter – yes, *laughter*. Her smile was wide enough to reveal rows of glistening teeth almost all the way back to her molars, and while they were perfectly normal teeth relative to the giant woman, I was struck by their intimidating size and menacing jaggedness. Her poise suggested a million impressions at once, which I have little chance to accurately describe. She looked aggressive, active and powerful... fearless, assertive, confident, exultant. It was in a strange way a thrilling sight.

However the next lightning bolt presented a new sight which sent a chill down my spine and shook me from my awed trance. It lit up the second half of the motion she was undertaking, and I saw her face still pointing in the same direction but her torso was now twisted, her first arm invisible and her second arm –in which she had clasped something– was flung out directly until it was almost horizontal and her fingers were now wide open. Her head was tilted back and her mouth wider with the ecstasy of heightened laughter. Standing out brightly against the black sky were the

objects she had flung from her fingers, and they now hung in the air in this instant in time captured by the lightning bolt. Once more I didn't fail to recognise the most easily identifiable figure of all – the human body. There were four figures; only tiny shapes in the sky from my distance, in impossible positions; their limbs stretched out by the centrifugal forces of their spinning through the air, tumbling helplessly, doomed.

I was in shock. In the darkness the clap of thunder from the first lightning bolt echoed over the landscape and it was followed by a chilling sound – the delayed sound of the laughter that I had seen on the giant's face. It was a shrieking, cackling laughter; not that of an old twisted wretch but that of a youthful girl who can't hold in her excitement. It was ear-piercing and was worsened by its echoing over the countryside, reverberating off the hills and filling every valley and shaking every tree. I lost the reins as I blocked my ears but her unrestrained voice penetrated painfully and was audible as if she were standing before me, shrieking into my face. Not even the following clap of thunder drowned out the sound of her laughter.

When I forced my hands back to the reins and looked up into the sky at this ghastly female apparition, I saw her giant bulk standing straight and relatively motionless. Then the blink of a lightning bolt lit up her figure and I saw with a pang of terror that she stared straight at me. I looked directly into those eyes that I had seen in the shadows of the cylinder and they seemed to pierce me through to the bone. Her face was stiller; her expression contracted into a cool and calculated smile. I could not fathom how she saw me, or whether or not she was even looking at me; to her just a speck of movement on a drenched dreary landscape, but I was struck with her omnipotence, and with the image of her malicious cruelty to those tiny bodies hurtling through the air fresh in my mind, I yanked on the reins in panic.

The poor horse stumbled to the side and we struck something indiscernible which sent the creature tumbling and the cart splintering. I was thrown through the air and landed heavily

amongst the scrub beside a ditch. I stood and looked in the direction of the monstrous woman and saw her ankle rising, lit by a red flickering light, before lowering into darkness and I knew she had stepped over the blazing college; just a miniature obstruction to her, in my direction. Her wet legs glowed in the dancing light of the flames beneath her, but suddenly she began dimming and becoming invisible, though this was due to my vision blackening as my head became faint. I stumbled and dropped to my knees in weakness, falling on my back helplessly while my vision swam with blackness.

I remember a violent shake underneath me, which was the tremor of her foot meeting the earth, and thunderclaps alternating with loud rumbles, some of which were accompanied by the cracking of trees and the awful splintering of wood; houses long-standing in Maybury Hill being demolished in a second under the foot of the giant female. I was shaken by perhaps half a dozen of these earthquake-like footsteps before the sky above me, which I began to perceive through rain-soaked eyes, was filled with a monstrous black form that whooshed overhead with tremendous momentum, buffeting the dwarfed landscape and stopping my heart entirely. I couldn't breathe. Her immense figure halted and from the shape of the colossal silhouette above me I knew my helpless body lay between her feet. I perceived a change in the dark form and realised her head was craned forward. She was staring at the ground below her. The question of whether she had been truly looking at me or not I can never answer, because the lightning desisted for a few lucky seconds, blessing me with the cover of darkness, before the black shape looming above me moved on with earth-shaking steps. I was saved.

\* \* \*

In hindsight my best option at this point, lying dazed, shocked and faint in a ditch under the pelting rain and incessant claps of lightning, would have been to turn back to Leatherhead

and weather the hardships to safety. However my first desperate need was driven by my battered state and was to get back to my own house.

I stumbled through the trees up the hill and as I broke out onto the road I saw a dark figure crumpled beside a picket fence, strewn into the most impossible position with limbs flung underneath and around him. I did not even check for a pulse and hurried past in shock, shuddering at the unlimited devastating power of the creature –the Venusian woman– that I had witnessed.

For an unknown amount of time I remained propped against my front door after creeping in wearily, before the chilling cold shook me from my daze. As I was preparing myself some badly-needed food I heard a thudding on the door and opened it to see a man in a sodden uniform fall to the floor. I helped him up and gave him a dose of brandy. He was a soldier.

“What happened?” I pressed.

“Wiped us out...” he stammered, “she wiped us out!”

“She?” I said out loud, not because I didn’t know what he was talking about but because I had not had not yet considered her as a woman, a *female*, and not just as a monster. Shaking my head slowly, I took a sip of brandy myself and returned my attention to the man, whose head sunk against his chest. He lifted his chin and I pressed the liquor again to his lips. “Please go on.”

“We had surrounded the pit – we had no idea what it was... then a platoon made their way over the mounds of earth and disappeared,” he uttered, thankful to be able to share his dreadful story, “we heard their screams and then one man flew, *flew* overhead, tumbling through the air... she probably just flicked him!”

I grimaced at the thought. The weary soldier paused and his eyes drifted and I asked him about his unit to keep him talking and aware.

“I’m an artilleryman; a driver... just a driver. I was driving a limber when she appeared from the pit. She rose like a... like a... I

don't know what – she rose into the air, a hundred yards high! And looked down on us as if we were ants. The men panicked.”

“Was she fired upon?”

“There was firing. She didn't even notice it – she wiped us out! Lifted her foot here, stomped there. Men disappeared under her very feet! She would pick up some poor fellow and toss him into a dozen others. She grabbed men by the handful and tossed them into the air like leaves!”

The poor man began to sob and I decided to let him doze off as it seemed his state would not improve with the brandy. Although sleep seemed to be precariously unsafe I too was weary after my ordeal and no sooner had I covered the soldier in a blanket did I slump onto my bed and fall into a deep slumber.

I vividly remember horrid dreams of that impossibly huge woman; the lighting-lit image of her fearsome body towering over the dark horizon repeatedly flashing through the jumbled images in my nightmare. The mind has difficulties coping with such a shocking experience. Suddenly it was no longer the giant Venusian woman tossing those men from her hand but my wife, a hundred yards tall. She picked up our own house, with the soldier and I tumbling around inside it, in her hands. Then our young maid appeared on the horizon, stumbling clumsily over the town of Woking. The grocer's newly-engaged young daughter arrived in her wedding dress, which draped over every house within a hundred yards of her immense feet, and plunged her gloved hand into the market stalls to grasp her father in her fist. Her face was filled with menacing benevolence as she lifted the poor man high into the air before her, staring down at him with a serene smile. Every girl and woman I knew began to appear in my vivid and awful dream; all a hundred yards tall and one-by-one flattening poor Maybury Hill under their feet.

I awoke with a feeling of dread and had to calm myself before creeping down to the front room. The soldier stirred gently and I let him be as I crawled to the window to look in the direction of Horsell Common.

\* \* \*

It was with nervousness that I hesitated at the windowsill and brave courage with which I finally resolved to look over it. I felt almost like a curious schoolboy desperately attempting to sneak a peek at the neighbours' beautiful daughter, although if I were caught peeking now I shouldn't receive a rap on the knuckles but could be crushed out of existence. The recollection of the manner in which she had seemed to stare at me on the previous evening, when my insignificant figure should have been a tiny, indistinguishable, unnoticeable patch of inconsistent colour in the landscape before her feet, was awfully unnerving because it made me wonder if she had some extraordinary power of vision and might be able to see my little head poking over a windowsill in Maybury Hill, two miles from her cylinder in Horsell Common.

Therefore it was with caution that I raised my head, and it was with a strange sense of disappointment that I saw nothing. That is; I saw no immense female figure stomping over the countryside. I saw plenty of devastation, and my eyes grew wide as they fell on the burnt-out ruins of the college and dozens of simply flattened houses on the lower slopes of Maybury Hill. They were obliterated; some left standing with gaping holes through their rooves and walls, others flattened to a tack, and others had simply disappeared, the only evidence of their existence being the scattered remains of building materials and the unfortunate occupants' worldly possessions strewn in wide radii up to two hundred yards away.

Trees were flattened and many on their side. I noticed with dread several figures lying lifeless here and there, but it wasn't the scene of a bloody battle – instead it was a ghost town. I myself had fought in exotic lands for Her Majesty and witnessed all the atrocities of war, yet the stillness of the devastated scene, which had only the day before been the quietest and most unremarkable village in England, chilled my bones.

I was just beginning to cast my thoughts to the possible locations of the Venusian giant when my attention was caught by a great motion and I jumped, startled, and ducked instinctively behind the windowsill. The sweeping movement that I witnessed may have been mistaken for the giant turning blade of a windmill were it witnessed in Holland perhaps, but here it was the lower half of the giant woman's leg rising upwards above the trees in the two miles between us. She must have been lying on her back and had lifted her leg, flexing her knee luxuriously, and from my vantage point only her leg past the latter was visible. I made out a dark shape, her footwear, swiftly making an arc through the sky but it was gone before I could make any note of it.

For the next half hour I was stuck, spellbound, to the window. My knees were stinging and my arms beginning to go numb, and I was considering that she might not appear again, when a sudden hush befell the world. Even the birds became still, and the eeriness was overwhelming. My eyes were fixed on the trees towards Horsell Common, and I shivered with anticipation. Suddenly I beheld an awesome sight.

From behind the very tips of the trees ascended a curved surface –her forehead– with flowing hair trailing behind it. She seemed to be either looking directly into the sky or closing her eyes, as she began to prop herself up on her elbows from her lying position. Perhaps she had been sleeping. I watched her head fully rise above the tall trees. Her bare shoulders were partly visible. Then one shoulder disappeared as she took her weight off it to lift her arm. It rose again as she must have planted her palm on the ground. Her other shoulder had executed the same procedure, lifting her chest above the treetops as she attained this sitting position, before the shockwave of her hand first striking the ground of the common hit my house, having propagated through the earth for two whole miles. The walls shivered and so did I. Somewhere behind me the soldier stirred.

After the second shockwave hit I regained my composure and observed as she stood upright. It was a huge, graceful and

impossibly slow movement. She turned to one side, in my direction, and pushed with one arm, keeping her eyes on the ground below. Her body began to rise and then contort as she drew her leg underneath her. Her hair swung not lightly as a young lady's hair will blow in the wind, but in long, slow lashing motions, reminiscent of a ship's riggings swinging to and fro. I marvelled at her body ascending over the countryside, rising up like a tower. I had never seen anything so large move so quickly, and never *upwards* in any case. That is, the closest simile I can provide is of a giant of the forest tumbling at the lumberjack's axe – in reverse. If the reader will attempt to visualise the most enormous tree that ever existed rising impossibly upwards into the sky, it may provide at least a general impression of the sight I beheld.

Before I knew it she stood upright; a beacon of beauty, breathtaking in her enormous power. With the morning sun behind me I had a clear view of this woman, with whom I had already so abruptly become acquainted, and was able to take in infinitely more detail than by the flashing light of the thunderstorm. If she were an Earthling she would not have been overly remarkable – she was most definitely pretty, but she would not have looked unusual if one passed her in the street. She looked like an Earth girl in her mid twenties, had wavy brown hair and a constant wide smile that I later observed was wont to erupt into the piercing cackle that had echoed out over the land on the previous evening, with only the merest provocation. I experienced this only moments later when something in the common at her feet was amusing enough to yield a squeal, which sounded like a laugh that had been stifled by a hiccup, and which caused my house to shudder. The soldier jumped in his sleep.

More striking was her attire; or lack thereof. The trees between Maybury Hill and the common concealed her ankles so I couldn't observe her footwear at that stage, but the foliage concealed nothing else and nor did her clothing. The garment that I had likened to a nightgown on the previous evening was now dry

and hung loosely from her shoulders by two thin (comparatively, that is) cables, which were attached to the main expanse of fabric just to either side of and half-way up her breasts, leaving her flesh only partly covered by the semi-transparent material. There was a strip of what must have been an elastic band of material circling her body directly below her breasts, dividing the garment into two distinct parts; the upper quarter of material that struggled to support her chest, clinging tightly to her flesh, and the lower three-quarters which spread down and outwards like a canopy, unconstrained, ending only yards below her crotch, leaving almost the entirety of her legs bare. Since it was comprised of only one sheet of material, there was formed a cavern of billowing white fabric below her chest, her giant body filling the centre. An observer below could have looked directly up into her body all the way up to where this garment was bound tightly underneath her breasts, but her face would most likely have been concealed by the vast parasol of whiteness. Even from my position looking more or less horizontally at her, I could make out a dark patch beneath the white fabric that almost certainly corresponded to some dark undergarment, and which I verified later to be a pair of jet-black underwear which were comprised of an elastic fabric that clung strangely closely to every curve.

I became mesmerised and was almost convinced that I was gazing at a normal young lady, when a huge flock of common geese glided in front of her chest and roused me from my daze just in time to see another immense movement – a second Venusian!

I watched with dread as the second woman rose, realising that of course the ten nights of explosions from Venus' surface would correspond to ten cylinders hurtling through the empty void of space to our helpless planet. In this instant, like a premonition, the future of the human race flashed through my mind, but I could not hold onto a single image and before I knew it my attention was torn back to the two figures now towering over the horizon, left only with a feeling of dread from the images I had seen in my mind's eye.

The second monstrous woman was clothed in the same way as the first. She was taller and slimmer and her appearance immediately disproved the theory that the other giant female's constant smile and cackling were typical of Venusians, since her face carried a serious expression that simply scowled when her acquaintance's hilarity annoyed her. I began to wonder whether these and possibly more faces were going to become disastrously familiar to me and the entire human race.

\* \* \*

Once I had made an acute study of their appearance, I turned my attention to the Venusians' actions. It was not particularly clear what the two invaders were undertaking at that time. They seemed to dawdle; stooping now and then to fiddle with something where I assumed the cylinder ought to be. I realised that it was likely that they were waiting for the subsequent cylinders and more backup. The artilleryman's account of the battle against the huge female had given the impression that there were heavy human losses at least partly due to the surprise and chaos that ensued at the first sight of their colossal opponent. I wondered then, whether more prepared troops would have greater success against the Venusians. I couldn't imagine that their flimsy, revealing apparel could provide them any protection against cold hard artillery fire.

Later that morning the artilleryman awoke and we observed the giant females together like two boy scouts undertaking a secret mission. We chatted quietly and made a plan. The soldier resolved that he should make for London and thence rejoin his battery – number 12 of the Horse Artillery. My plan was to return to Leatherhead, but it was clear that my path was not going to be direct since the common and its new occupants lay directly in between me and my goal. I reasoned that if I were to take a long detour, maintaining a 'safe' distance from Horsell Common, it would take me two days to reach Leatherhead, whereas it should only take one otherwise. Therefore if the two Venusians happened

to depart within a day I could instead leave tomorrow and save a day of travelling. This argument, combined with my weariness, proved overwhelming, and the poor soldier needed little convincing since he too was in dire need of rest.

Together we observed the Venusians for another hour before they lowered themselves back below the treetops, and we remarked that they seemed to be largely inactive and even at that early stage it appeared that they spent a lot of time lying down. We had no explanation other than that space journey would most likely be indeed rigorous and that they needed rest.

After an uneventful afternoon we retired and slept soundly; oddly well despite the unbelievable situation into which we had been plunged. That night however, there was more terrible rumbling that woke me from my slumber and I knew the Venusians were moving, and the next day would provide us with more dreadful excitement.

\* \* \*

## CHAPTER THREE

## THE DESTRUCTION OF BYFLEET

The morning was marked by the appearance of the third Venusian. She really was a beauty; utterly astounding. With feet apart, her figure dominated the skyline above Horsell Common while she surveyed the countryside like a lord watches over his lands. Her posture was held with such confidence that it seemed she considered she owned it all.

Her appearance was captivating – if she were an Earth girl she would have been the envy of the most beautiful princesses and the breaker of a thousand bachelors' hearts; her locks outlined a bright, beaming face with a disarming smile and lovable eyes. Her body was curvaceous and giant even by Venusian standards; she was voluptuous and the garment she wore –identical to the others– struggled to hold her immense chest and resulted in a tantalising, womanly cleavage of great proportions between her breasts, which I estimated to be each approximately the size of my house. The wide canopy of the dress could not hide her wide rounded hips and her gentle, smooth legs disappeared curvaceously into the trees surrounding them below.

This new young lady took obvious pleasure in investigating her surroundings, and the artilleryman and I watched in awe as she uprooted giant trees and then flung them away nonchalantly after inspecting them for such a pointlessly brief period that it could only be surmised that she was tearing them from their century-old roots for the sake of it. She wandered several steps this way and that (each carrying her more than fifty yards of course, and shaking the floor beneath us, two miles away) and we couldn't help noticing that the Venusians were staying oddly close to the first cylinder, despite the fact that they were essentially omnipotent in

our tiny, helpless world. Despite her restricted range she managed to find various objects that interested her for several seconds each; a cart appeared in her hand after she stooped gracefully and it became airborne after she had peered at it briefly. She stooped again and this time retrieved a small pointed object at which the artilleryman started.

“That’s a cannon... one of ours! From a limber!” He realised it might have even been the very limber that he had driven from which she had torn it. The heavy steel weapon ended up soaring in our direction and we gulped as it struck a house down the road, demolishing its upper floor instantly. She had flung it two miles without thought or effort. Suddenly her attention was caught and she took a large step which we felt through the floor even more roughly than her other steps. She stooped quickly and rose again with something indiscernible in her hand. The artilleryman squinted to try and make it out but I knew what it was – what it could only be. Suddenly I was reminded of a small telescope I had borrowed from Ogilvy, and with a morbid need to watch the giant girl toying with this unfortunate object I darted upstairs, grabbed the cylindrical device and put my eye to the tube, peering bravely – perhaps foolishly – out of the upstairs window.

As I adjusted the eyepiece the blurry patches became focussed and I took in the Venusian’s immense torso, and followed it out past her shoulder to her arm. Between her fingers dangled exactly what I expected to see; a human figure. I tensed and watched the unfortunate soul writhing as he ascended; I had to raise the tube, shaking with my trembling, to follow the motion of her hand as it rose to her face, which filled almost the entire viewpiece. She peered at him closely, curiously. I realised that perhaps she hadn’t yet have seen one of the tiny beings she had travelled millions of miles to conquer and crush.

While I watched she dangled him momentarily below her face, then turned sharply and responded to something one of the other Venusians had said to her. This was the first time I witnessed one of the invaders speaking, and it verified that they were indeed

similar enough to humans in the respect that they communicated with spoken language. A few seconds later, her words finally reached the house after having travelled the two miles considerably slower than the sight of her uttering them, and even though her voice was barely audible over the great distance, my spine tingled with its melodic smoothness that seemed to wash through the house without appearing to originate from a distinct direction.

I saw as she turned her head back to the man she held pinched between her fingers and it seemed he had been the subject of the other Venusian's comment. Suddenly the girl, without concern or hesitation, wrapped her fingers around his figure and I froze in horror as the beautiful creature squeezed her fist tightly, biting her lip with a curious smile. I dropped the telescope, appalled at what I had witnessed, and stumbled back down the stairs. The artilleryman asked me what she had had in her hand and I told him I hadn't seen it. Fortunately he was turned away and didn't see my pale white face.

\* \* \*

That night we resolved to move, judging it safer to move under the cover of darkness. We predicted that the women would once again make a journey to find the next cylinder to arrive that night, and we judged that we had only a fractional risk that we would lie directly in the path between them and their target, wherever that would be. I concluded to accompany the artilleryman under the cover of woods, northward as far as the Street Cobham and then make a detour via Epsom to Leatherhead.

We packed our pockets with packets of biscuits and slices of meat, and filled a flask full of whisky, before setting off as the last rays of sun disappeared somewhere behind the common. None of the three giant invaders was visible and it could have been any other evening had it not been for the destruction surrounding us in the skeleton of Maybury Hill.

The trek towards London was uneventful. My eyes were turned to the sky whenever I could spare them from navigating the terrain and at midnight there shone the green glow of the fourth falling star. It sailed far to the east and the rumble of its impact was barely felt. We were safe – at least for the night.

However we made slow progress and when we arrived at Byfleet in the early hours of the morning we came across some soldiers who were eager to receive news from Horsell and we were just as eager to rest our bones in the town, which we learned had become the outpost preparing to defend London from the advance of the women. After the slaughter at Horsell, it appeared that it had been decided not to attack the giant girls in the common but to fortify the outlying towns with concealed artillery; turning our disadvantage in size to an advantage in natural camouflage. It was not considered that anything; not even a hundred-yard-tall young woman, would withstand a barrage of shells, and so it was with condescending confidence that the residents of Byfleet and other nearby towns waited in their homes on this night, enjoying the excitement of what was sure to be a spectacular victory anytime within the next few days.

We told the soldiers all that we could and woke the landlord of the first inn we came across. Had we known what was in store for the town of Byfleet the following day, we would have fled the doomed city, weary or not. However, without the benefit of hindsight we dined on some well-deserved cold beef and quickly settled into the comfortable beds, enjoying a long and deep slumber.

I awoke late the next morning and hurried down the stairs. Upon entering the dining room I recognised a familiar face.

“Patterson!”

He turned at my call. Patterson owned the bakery in Maybury Hill. His face was deathly white and his eyes distant, and he took a moment to recognise me, but a familiar face was soothing and his expression relaxed.

“You escaped!” he stammered. I explained how I had returned to and subsequently escaped Maybury Hill. It seemed he had escaped while the Venusian girl had begun terrorising the town, and not looked back. He was distressed, and clearly in shock. He had no idea as to the whereabouts of his wife and daughter.

Soon the artilleryman entered the dining room and over our breakfast we agreed that we needed to make haste from this town, since we most certainly did not share the townsfolk’s enthusiasm for the victory of which they were convinced. We discovered that there was a train bound for London and readily bought tickets. I would only travel as far as Epsom, as per my original plan, and from there I could find safe passage to Leatherhead and to my wife.

By midday we were seated impatiently. We spoke with the conductor and urged the driver to leave, and were frustrated at his obstinacy in preferring to stick to the timetable. The train; our ticket to safety, remained idle at the station. We glanced regularly out the window and regularly at our watches. Finally there was a whistle and some puffs of steam, and the clanking of couplings could be heard towards the front of the train.

It was at that precise moment that the train’s whistle was echoed by an eruption of voices from somewhere inside our carriage and we turned towards the window, knowing exactly what to expect to see.

\* \* \*

Patterson the baker cried out in alarm but was drowned out by the stunned shrieks of the other passengers, who hadn’t yet beheld the giant Venusians. The artilleryman and I were silent and my anger rose at not having departed earlier, but it was soon overcome by my fear. There was a sudden common chorus as every passenger who was collected enough to think straight called out to start the train and flee the town that lay at the girls’ feet.

They strode in single file; beautiful and terrible. The third immense girl was in front and her striking beauty seemed to radiate out over the countryside; I even perceived that the tumult in the carriage began to hush as she caught the gazes of every awestruck man and woman. Her eyes were cast down at whatever unfortunate part of the countryside was currently passing under her feet and the earth rumbled accordingly. Behind her could be seen the first Venusian to arrive, into whose eyes I had stared in the cylinder, and her gaze swept the land in all directions, the hapless world of humans going unnoticed beneath her toes. Further behind, the third woman was becoming visible over the trees and I recognised the thinner, scowling Venusian. As we had predicted, there was a fourth giant figure, though she was too far to clearly perceive.

My daze was interrupted by the violent hammering of artillery fire and my sight was drawn to six plumes of smoke rising swiftly from a row of trees just visible from the carriage window. The eruptions followed immediately and were completely ineffectual – the guns were probably aimed at where the first giant Venusian had been, but since the guns were placed to her side, her immense steps would have taken her clean out of harm's way, with the six black puffs appearing in the air behind her – the fuses too were improperly adjusted. The gunners could not handle such quickly-moving masses, even despite their size.

She did not allow the men to correct their errors. Her billowing garment swung wildly as she planted her foot heavily, creating an eruption of dust and debris, in her turn towards the six plumes of smoke, then as she accelerated and bore down upon them the fabric seemed to cling to every contour of her body as it was pummelled by the wind created by her momentous speed. The guns couldn't have been more than half a mile from our position and my fear rose as I gazed upwards at the giant figure; the closest I had been since my encounter on the first night, as she took her last hundred-yard steps, her eyes cast down upon the miserable creatures before her feet who were about to meet their fate at her

whim. The giant did not even halt her pace; she simply followed through her final step with an almighty swiping kick.

Whatever must have been before her momentous toes was vapourised. It was converted into an explosion that seemed to be a cocktail mixture of foliage, timber and dust. The heavy cast iron barrels that had fired their deadly projectiles at the unforgiving girl would later be discovered, twisted and wrecked, six miles northeast of Byfleet. Of the unlucky artillerymen manning them not a trace remained.

The girl turned and raised her other foot and at that instant four reports thundered over the countryside and four new plumes of smoke appeared; this time even more useless than the first as they sailed by her ankles. I was awestruck and watched the action in a daze. I wasn't fully aware of the Venusian holding her foot high above the poor wretches and their cannons; instead I was mesmerised by the gunpowder smoke wafting upwards around her thighs, when suddenly the black form of her shoe fell from the sky as she stamped down on the closest artillery.

We watched the violence and the explosion of debris into the air without realising its meaning, until the shockwave hit us. I can't imagine that even a derailment at high speed could ever be as tumultuous as the ferocious crashing of the locomotive and its carriages as the heavy steel beast was thrust into the air by the elastic vibration of the Earth propagating outwards from beneath the young lady's toes.

The train was ruined. Half of the windows instantly shattered and there was a splintering of wood. Even if the bogeys were intact, the stark tilt of the floor beneath us indicated we had been thrown off the tracks. Even while we were attempting to stand there was a second thunderous clap as the girl crushed another cannon under her sole, and the train once more became airborne. All three of us struck out of the smashed window on the opposite side of the advancing women and I had turned to try and assist other passengers in escaping, when I was stopped in my tracks by the appearance of a figure over the silhouette of the carriage's roof.

Her height seemed to rise in bounds but it was the illusion created by her approach, as I craned my neck further upwards to behold her. It was the very first Venusian once more. It is perhaps fitting at this point to convey the word that later in my ordeal I became convinced was her name.

*Meri.*

I felt rooted to the ground and am certain that it was at this point that, perhaps due to the tremor of another crushing stomp on the remaining cannons, that I fell onto my back and gazed upwards at the giantess *Meri* in utter helplessness and completely at her mercy. She stood on the other side of the wrecked train and although I'm sure her gaze was darting over the long object that was infinitely far more interesting than I, at the time I was utterly convinced that her complete attention was fixed on me and I felt I was facing my fate. My body must have been within her step, and from my lowly perspective I gazed up her long legs into the alluring curves of her body under the wide billowing skirt, seeing but not perceiving the limitless black undergarment clinging tightly over her giant yet shapely hips. I waited in suspense for her foot to appear over the roof of the train and in this split second visualised it casting me into shadow as it ended my existence, but my horrid fears were thankfully not realised. Instead I lay dumbly and saw her figure once more growing larger in my vision; this time because she was bending over. Adrenaline rushed through my veins. Finally my terror subsided to a panic which allowed my limbs to move and I began scrambling; kicking back and away from the monstrous young woman. I was cast into shadow precisely as in my horrible vision a moment earlier, but now in reality I was in the shadow of her hand, and while my heart and lungs stopped in agonising suspense my legs luckily continued to push me from the wreck, and I was buffeted by a turbulent gust of wind as a huge object rushed by, which I can still see perfectly in my memory; the wide white band of the tip of her fingernail hurtling downwards in an arc towards the helpless carriage, followed by the shiny cream-coloured oval that was the rest of the

fingernail. Her fingers wrapped completely around the doomed vehicle and I will never forget the sight of the locomotive; the symbol of man's modern world, sleek, powerful, heavy and indestructible, ascending into the air, dangling helplessly from the coupling that attached it to the carriage that she had grasped. *Meri* raised herself to full height and lifted her arm high in the air. The train looked like a string of dangling sausages. She eyed it with mere interest despite the awful sight of people tumbling from the carriage windows. The figure of a man landing on the tracks; halfway between me and the Venusian female's giant feet which I now clearly beheld for the first time, roused me out of my stupor and I stood and bolted.

When I saw my companions scrambling into the bushes beside the Byfleet river I followed them and after falling into a heap beside them we crouched to the ground and watched in horror. I don't know what I had expected to see – perhaps nothing, and that's why every deed of the omnipotent strangers to our world was a surprise for me. The following sight was no exception. *Meri's* other hand rose and she wrapped her fist around the lowest carriage that swung before her waist, lifting it until the entire train formed a sagging curve between her hands at either end. Without deliberation the girl lifted the endmost carriage to her mouth, which widened upon its approach, just as our eyes widened at the terrible sight. With a slowness that created nerve-shattering suspense we watched the end of the unfortunate carriage ascend into the shadow of her mouth – I remember seeing her giant, deadly teeth glistening with wetness – and promptly her jaw closed with a force I cannot begin to fathom. The steel plates of the roof crumpled like dry leaves; the wooden beams of the sides split like matchsticks and the bogeys became useless lumps of twisted metal as *Meri's* teeth crushed them all. Any doubts I had as to her intention of consuming the machine that was clearly inedible – however large she may be – were dispelled, as she hastily reopened her mouth and sent the remains of the carriage end plummeting to earth.

In my adrenaline-enhanced state the entire scene was completely lucid. Her hair and the loose skirt billowed slowly and mesmerisingly as she raised the now open tube of a carriage to her eye, taking obvious pleasure in watching the captive humans tumble about the interior of the hollow vessel in her grasp. The grin I had already observed widened on her face, and suddenly her cackling shriek sounded out with piercing volume throughout the town. She was toying with it for amusement – she angled it upwards, tilting it towards her just to watch the helpless beings inside tumble about; just as a child might tip a glass of water to watch it spill. The moment the carriage had passed the horizontal, there appeared several specks tumbling from the open end that pointed straight towards the giant girl’s face. They appeared to be nothing more than luggage –perhaps benches loosened in the destruction– but they were followed immediately by the first ill-fated passengers.

“That’s us!” hissed the artilleryman in an attempt to articulate the realisation that the flailing, tumbling figures *should* have been us, had we not escaped. The poor people struck her body; prolonging their suffering as they recoiled off her soft flesh before resuming their deadly plummet to the ground at her feet. More figures spilled from the carriage before her face, and we watched them strike her chest. One man managed to catch onto the very uppermost seam of the garment I have described, where it wrapped over her bosom, and he remained there, dangling and kicking helplessly, pinned to the front of her breast until she noticed him. Her eyes looked down her nose as her other hand released the carriage and rose to her chest, where she plucked the man’s figure effortlessly from her body and lifted him to her eyes.

We then heard *Meri*’s voice. She uttered some words; completely unknown to us, in a voice that was filled with excitement, danced with melody and although she spoke with almost sounded nasal tones, they were not in the least unpleasant, except for the volume, which was unbearable. We simultaneously clapped our hands to our ears just in time to dampen the sound of

her shriek of delight at her own words; indicating that they might have been some kind of jest. Not only did she torture the pathetic men at her feet, but she found hilarity in it. Man's love of hunting and killing for sport those creatures considered lesser to him, had finally returned to haunt him. No witness of the horrors that occurred at both the hands and amusement of the Venusians would ever again condone the notion that men should find pleasure in destroying other creatures of the Earth. They were toying with people for the sheer pleasure of it, as a mischievous child might destroy an ant's nest for the sake of watching the miserable creatures suffer.

It was at that moment that we heard the volley of the second set of guns. We never saw them, but we were startled by the appearance of the explosions in the air above us. Five of the six shells were poorly timed and exploded in the air high above our heads, resulting in audible splashes of flak in the water behind us, but the sixth had a longer fuse and erupted directly before the Venusian's body. She was more shocked than injured, and at this instant I realised one of the purposes of their garments, as the shards of deadly metal that burst in all directions in front of her tore through the dangling train carriages but seemed to bounce off the fabric of her billowing frock. I was reminded of the impenetrable felt armour of medieval warriors and realised that this elastic material would provide better protection from Earth's weapons than heavy, brittle steel. Instantly *Meri* let the train fall from her grasp and started without delay in our direction, as the guns were directly behind us. She was so swift that the plummeting locomotive struck her accelerating thigh and bounced off harmlessly before striking the ground to her side with a deafening thud and a terrible crash of splintering wood and twisting steel.

However our attention was not on the train at that stage, but on the impossibly huge female figure whose foot was raised above us at that very instant. It was a moment in which fate was decided, and while I in hastiness attempted to move forward, thinking her fatal bulk was going to land behind us, the artilleryman shoved me,

with infinite charity, to the side and I watched as the pointed toe of her strange footwear crashed down on the earth precisely where I would have leapt. In slow motion I watched the shrubbery and a horse trough crumple under the sole of her shoe, before they disappeared out of existence. As her foot collided with the earth I had an inkling of its size – I was not taller than her toe. It did not halt upon striking but sank heavily into the ground, displacing tonnes of soil and turning the rich green of the grass into torn and messy patches of upturned earth. The shock of air alone sent us three sprawling, which was a fortunate effect since it spared us from the departing swing of her next step. I realised that, by a miracle, I had survived.

\* \* \*

## CHAPTER FOUR

THE APPEARANCE OF THE FOURTH  
VENUSIAN

I am ignorant of the fate of the second set of guns at Byfleet. I was stunned and numb, and lay trembling while the earth shook as a result of the demise of the artillery and its operators. I remember turning about slowly and regarding the sight of *Meri* towering in the heavens through the trees behind us. More clearly visible was the other giant girl; the second one who didn't partake in *Meri's* cheeriness at the destruction she reaped; that is, this second Venusian also reaped destruction and also seemed to gain satisfaction from it, but did not shriek or cackle like her companion. Furthermore she seemed almost too haughty to bother stooping to wield her unlimited power on mere men, but instead dispensed of them with short stamps of her feet of a particularly singularly vicious nature.

Again, it seems the appropriate time to mention the name I discovered of this Venusian – *Emi*. She towered over the town with each foot on either side of the river, alternating the side on which she caused destruction, and thus allowing us a clear view of her ankles and feet, directly down the road that ran along the Byfleet river beside us. The Venusians' footwear puzzled me because it seemed at a first glance extremely impractical. Her shoe appeared similar to that of a lady's summer shoe, that is, a pointed –though not sharp– toe, with a sole that rose in the middle of the foot to form an arch that ended with a solid heel protruding at the bottom. However the heels on these shoes were particularly thin and sharp in appearance (thin relative to the shoe – in actual fact they were more than two yards in diameter), and furthermore they were

without laces. They appeared to be able to be slipped on and off like slippers, though their composition was of the hardest material in order to rip through concrete and steel when they wished to demolish Earthmen's houses with a kick. However I couldn't imagine that this shape could be of practical benefit, even when their advantage in size and power over us was so overwhelming.

*Emi* employed her shoes with efficiency and without prejudice. Half of her actions seemed directed at a specific victim and the other half seemed random acts of destruction aimed only at establishing her unlimited power over us miniature beings. I watched as she glanced at a two-storey house to her side, raised her foot and razed it to the ground with a stomp that shook us violently. The impacts of her deliberate crushing stomps had a very distinct effect, which could always be observed; that is, when the foot of the giant girl rushed to the ground it always caused an initial sideways explosion of its target, for example, a house would burst out of its walls and splinter in all directions for hundreds of yards. Anything directly below a Venusian's foot inevitably disappeared, so the roof would be turned to dust in the gaping hole left in the ground. Then an aftershock would send a second wave of debris vertically into the air a split second after the initial explosion. It was a most singular sight, and if her target was anywhere near a dusty road it made a spectacular pattern of cloud that swirled about her ankle and wafted up her leg; first the flattened disc-like explosion of her target and then the wafting vertical columns of dust shooting up and slowly settling back to earth. This effect we observed several times in these minutes. *Emi* saw a man darting across the road directly before her, and directly in our view. He was not fit and struggled in his overcoat, clinging desperately to his hat as he shuffled in panic away from the girl. I looked at her face. Her eyes were cast downwards upon her wretched victim and her features appeared expressionless except for a twist of her mouth, a wisp of a smile, that betrayed the callousness with which she lifted the toe of her foot over the poor man. The only redeeming feature of his demise was that it was

sudden. We cringed with disgust and horror as the pitiless, slim female leaned forward and put her weight onto the foot, under the toes of which the man's body disappeared. She then ground her foot from side to side and extinguished the man as if her hatred of him required her to remove all evidence of his existence from the earth, and her lips peeled back as she made the effort, exposing a satisfied smile.

It was after she repeated this process several times on a few houses and several helpless humans that I finally turned away in disgust, but my attention was immediately caught by the expression on Patterson's face. I was surprised because not only did his expression appear one of serenity and tranquillity, causing me to think he had gone numb or insane, but he was not even looking at the colossal female that had attracted our attention. I followed his glazed eyes and beheld another in a plethora of unforgettable sights.

It was the fourth Venusian and I was suddenly taken aback.

This time I was shocked not because of her height, but because of an instant feeling of repulsion that stemmed from my paternal instincts. This giant creature was *young*. If she were an Earthling I would have guessed her to be passing her mid teens. She was vibrant and beautiful, precisely as a father would hope his daughter to be. I could visualise her merrily chatting with her friends about which young men she fancied, and pleading with her father to let her marry him. She should have been charming the boys who came into her father's shop pretending to be interested in something, while they wanted the chance to gaze upon her smiling face and perhaps even speak to her. I saw in her face half a dozen of the beautiful young girls whose beaming smiles filled the daydreams of my youth. However this beautiful creature was doing none of those happy youthful things. My feeling of repulsion heightened when after a few moments of watching I grasped the nature of her undertaking.

She was stooping low; scouring the ground with her gaze, and quickly bending at short intervals. Her long, slender arm shot

down to the ground and rose again promptly each time, and the sight of the object in her other hand sickened me. She held under her arm the recognisable form of a basket, comprised not of heavy cane but of a mesh so fine, probably of steel, that it appeared as a semi-transparent, shining cylindrical bag. Within was a multitude of writhing dots of colour and black, and when she reached down before her and from behind the sea of houses through which she waded lifted a hand that had the unmistakable shapes of struggling limbs protruding from between her fingers, their identity became irrefutable. I was aware of the artilleryman gasping madly behind me. He had experienced the horrors of war but could not look upon this ghastly sight and maintain his composure.

Her sweet face somehow seemed familiar yet I could not tear my gaze from the awful sight of this dazzling young woman casting her bright eyes over the scene of destruction at her feet and stooping to collect numbers of fleeing men and women in her hand, but the fact that she was bearing down directly upon us shook me from my daze, which otherwise might have caused me to become one of the hundreds of helpless figures trapped in the basket that bumped against her hip as she delicately trod over the town. I turned to Patterson and grabbed his shoulder, but the strange expression on his face provided me with yet another surprised.

“Come on, man!” I uttered at him, but then a pang of realisation hit me. I suddenly knew why the towering giant seemed familiar. The youthful Venusian had remarkably similar looks to a girl I knew from Maybury Hill – a girl who worked in a shop; her father’s shop, precisely as I just mentioned that a pretty girl of her age should. She worked in the bakery. This terrible huge girl looked precisely like Patterson’s daughter!

My realisation came too late. As if dazed, he bolted towards her. I shouted and ran after him but he was deranged and darted directly into the open. I saw no escape if I left the cover of the shrubs and so I turned back towards the river, from which position I spun and watched with dreadful anticipation. I saw his figure,

looking miniature compared to her immense body looming up into the heavens behind him and bearing down upon the exposed man. Suddenly her foot finally came into view as she stepped over a house and I was so absorbed by the scene that I barely noticed the tremble of the ground. Watching her face, I bit my lip waiting for the moment when she would see him. Her cheek was turned to us, she couldn't have been more than a hundred yards from him, and he stood almost stationary with his neck craned upwards at her. I couldn't make out whether he was signalling with his arms or not. Suddenly, when her head swung back to her front, her eyes fell on his body and she halted. The basket of hapless humans swung by her side and her short, giant frock billowed with the stilled momentum. She peered at him oddly, then a frown appeared on her brow. She was still mid-step and her rear foot began to rise, but without concentration her toes clumsily knocked the roof of the building between her legs clean off, resulting in a shower of debris raining down on a couple of stragglers stumbling stupidly around her foot. She seemed completely gripped by the sight of the Maybury Hill baker and my excitement heightened since it seemed so unreal. There was no way she could have any relation to his real daughter. Then again, her behaviour became so vexing that I began to doubt this – had I really seen the cylinders erupting from Venus?

She dropped one knee onto the road beside him and he was cast into her shadow. Her arm slid down to the ground and she took him in a sweeping motion that ended with his body tumbling into her cupped hand, which she raised to her face, where she held him under her nose. Her expression was strange; perhaps of bewilderment. She was clearly deliberating. I was tense with nervousness, shocked by the staggering notion that there could be some extraordinary relationship between the baker and this impossible, beautiful creature who appeared to be identical to his daughter. *It can't be possible...* I told myself. Suddenly her hand closed around poor Patterson and I thought it was his end. Her hand shot to the basket and quashed all my doubts. However she hesitated and brought him back to her face and opened up her

fingers. I couldn't deny her strange behaviour. She stared down at him, perched in her open palm; I could see his head over the rim of her hand. Then there appeared to be a reprieve for the poor, helpless fellow as she caged him gently in her fingers and began to lower her hand to the ground as if to spare him. I rejoiced at the first sight of compassion, but then my joy was dashed and I stumbled backwards in horror as she changed her mind once more, and in one terrible, momentous movement, her arm swung upwards and her delicate pink lips parted to reveal for a split second an infinite black cavern behind her glistening white teeth, into which the pitiful baker was thrust, her hand covering up her mouth as she did so. Upon its removal her lips began to meet as she closed her mouth and I made out the black shapes of the poor man's kicking trouser legs, before the dimples of her cheeks momentarily deepened as she made a sucking motion and the legs vanished into her mouth. There was a cry of agony from behind me as the artilleryman witnessed this terrible deed and I felt a wrench in my stomach.

Stunned and horrified, I stumbled backwards, out of control in my panic to escape such an awful doom, and watched through whirling eyes as the girl resume her task, when I tumbled into the river.

\* \* \*

## CHAPTER FIVE

## THE CURATE, AND THE SILVER SMOKE

My uncontrolled plunge into the water probably saved my life, since the rampaging women concentrated on the immediate threats on the land and ignored the river. Of particular danger was of course the youngest, fourth Venusian whose goal was to collect people, for which reason even harmless, fleeing civilians could fall victim to her immense fingers. However these points were certainly not on my mind as I paddled, dazed and rapidly fatiguing with the quickly-flowing current; instead it was with the images of those awful last moments of the poor baker's life that filled my traumatised mind.

If the terrible act had have been committed by any other of the giant Venusian females, I believe its impact would have been lesser than when it was the radiant young creature who stuffed the poor man into her mouth. The fact that she held a striking likeness to his daughter gave the sight a surreal irony with which I freely admit I could not cope. Therefore it was with slow, stunned movements that I dragged myself up the first bank that I could grasp, and expired from consciousness in the mud.

It was late afternoon when I came to, and my primary needs were for nourishment and some warm clothes. I had no idea whether to expect the dwellings to be occupied or deserted, but upon my arrival at a few cottages I discovered the latter to be true, and procured for myself there the meagre supplies I required. Upon returning to the river I saw an abandoned boat, very small and remote, drifting down-stream; and I went after it, gained it, and so escaped out of the destruction at Weybridge. There were no oars in the boat, but I contrived to paddle, as well as my weary hands would allow, down the river towards Halliford and Walton, going

very tediously and continually looking behind me, as you may well understand. I followed the river because I considered that the water would once again give me my best chance of escape should these giants return.

It was upon the bank at Middlesex that I finally struck and exited the boat wearily. I lay amid the long grass and began to doze, and probably for this reason I do not remember the arrival of the curate. I became aware of his figure sitting some yards away with his back to me, slumped with his head in his hands. He seemed to shake his head and mutter to himself, but even before I had made the slightest sound he whirled and opened his mouth to speak.

“What does it mean?” he said. “What do these things mean?”

I stared at him and made no answer.

“Why are these things permitted? What sins have we done? The morning service was over, I was walking through the roads to clear my brain for the afternoon, and then—” his face went deathly pale as his eyes glazed over, “those... those things! Those women! All our work undone!”

“What work?”

“All the Sunday schools! The services! We only rebuilt the chapel three years ago. I saw her... she knocked it down with her foot and it shattered like a vase!”

I could not procure any useful information from the curate. His ranting grew less coherent as I listened to him, and gradually I ceased my soothing condolences until my attention was drawn by a flickering in the sky. He saw my gaze.

“What’s that flashing in the heavens?” he asked abruptly. I told him it was the heliograph signalling; that it was the sign of human help and effort in the sky.

His muttering became a distant distraction and I considered a course of action. While I naturally desired the demise of these giant females, I wished to avoid places of human resistance since it would be difficult to avoid the wanton destruction once the Venusians commenced their attack. The hills surrounding

Richmond and Kensington appealed strongly to me since they would provide the cover of trees and I could gain a view of London and the giants who would attack it.

\* \* \*

The next morning saw the curate and I perched upon the hill with the most promising outlook over the surrounding countryside, and it was from there that I gained my one and only glimpse of the silver smoke. I had expected to be able to sit and observe the defeat of the Venusians as they would be one-by-one felled by the batteries that I was certain reinforced London in more numbers than even the huge women could overcome. However I had not reckoned with the employment of a weapon that the females had not yet put to use on the wretched defences of Earthmen.

I presume that the Venusians commenced their advancement without the employment of the silver smoke until they found the resistance strong enough to warrant it, and I gather that it was the near miss of the artillery in Byfleet that did precisely this.

It was eleven o'clock when I caught sight of the first girl. They must have retired to the first cylinder at Horsell Common for the evening and they now proceeded in the same order as on the previous day with approximately a mile and a half distance between them. I saw the first turn briefly to her comrades, resulting in an explosion of debris from her foot as she unwittingly crushed a house, and uttered something, which was passed along the line to the third giant. The voices of the first two reached our ears after a delay of at least twenty seconds, at a volume that had the unnerving effect of making it sound like these females were purring the words gently beside us.

I noted that the first of the Venusians, whose beauty I have mentioned but not yet the name that I later discovered; *Cali*, had paused with her feet in the streets of a town that could have been Byfleet and if not, had to be close by. It was a fair assumption that this may have been the extent of their progress on the previous

day. Shortly the third Venusian, *Emi*, began striding over the countryside to the front of the line, while the second, *Meri*, remained still and scanned the lands at her feet and to the sides. She was passive, but there was the hint of a smile on her face which would soon give way to her grin, followed by the cackle I have already described. *Emi* passed her and continued towards London, at which point I noticed the sash that was slung over her shoulder, supporting a small pouch, from which she presently drew a strange device that she held to her face, and I was immediately reminded of a telescope, although this object was proportionally shorter and fatter; perhaps the size of a trolley car.

After a few moments the woman with the eyepiece uttered something to the other and pointed out an area of country that I had to look far to my side to observe, but I couldn't make out anything of interest at such a distance. Then, *Cali* withdrew from a satchel that I hadn't previously been able to see as it hung from her opposite hip, some round object that I couldn't identify from my position. This, I later discovered, was a ball constructed of a material with the consistency of glass but which was opaque and reflective, just like steel. It was like a spherical mirror. The giant girl then hurled this with an uncoordinated-looking throw that was distinctly feminine; that is, not the direct, accurate throw of a cricketer, but the clumsy toss of an unpractised female. Regardless of her throwing style, the ball –more than three yards across– sailed for miles over the English countryside and struck somewhere in Surrey. No cricketer could boast a throw that spanned three suburbs.

I witnessed an explosion; not fiery like that of an artillery shell, but whitish and silent. A plume of smoke erupted into the air and glistened with a strange silver luminescence. As quickly as it rose, the mushroom-shaped cloud began to fall, and it spread over the countryside as thick honey spreads over bread, though with dancing and swirling waves that were hypnotic to watch. It seemed thick yet viscous at the same time, and gusts of wind could be seen

picking up its light contours, while gravity stretched its dense form over the countryside.

The gas was a paralysing agent. Although I was never under its influence, I have heard that its smell was sickly sweet and overpoweringly suffocating. Its victims were still awake and conscious but had no control of their own limbs, which fell limp at their sides. Gunners were draped over their cannon. Soldiers, already helpless enough against the soles of the giant girls' shoes, now lay inanimate with their eyes turned to the skies, waiting for their fate; perhaps ending up in the fingers of the young lady with the basket for collecting the miniature humans.

And so it was for the next half hour; the women stood with the conquered town of Byfleet at their feet while one identified human defences with her looking-device and another hurled balls of sweet paralysing gas at the powerless men until the first was satisfied that there was not one artillery cannon within twenty miles that had an able operator. It was during this interim that I began to watch the other two Venusians and gained a valuable but shocking insight.

They were occupied with the defeat and capture of some number of people in a town closer to our position. They were in a fortunate position for my observation and I could see *Meri's* feet in a square at the end of a road that ran directly towards us, thus leaving the view uninhibited. The other young lady stood before her companion with her legs deliberately wide apart; there had to be a hundred yards between her feet, presumably so that she could bend over to collect unfortunate humans more easily. I focussed on the shoe of *Meri*, the elder of the two. My attention was briefly drawn once or twice by a fleeting speck of darkness in front of her foot, which I realised to be a hansom or carriage darting over the road, and I silently prayed for its occupants. I have already mentioned the queerness of the design of the Venusian's footwear, and my mind returned to this topic as I looked at the shoe with its flat toe and its raised arch and long, thin heel that was at least higher than a one-storey cottage. While I watched, the giant female

lifted the very foot upon which I was concentrated, and I saw some specks of figures scattering below it, who I think had abandoned their concealment inside one of the buildings. Powerless, I watched as she lowered her foot into the group of people, and it was at this moment as the second girl stooped to collect the survivors, that I realised the horrible purpose of the seemingly clumsy and impractical shoe. The Venusians wanted to do damage, but not *too much damage*. They wanted to be able to destroy houses under their toes and make a full display of the terrible destruction that they wrought upon us, yet as I saw the toes of her shoe crush several unfortunate souls but the arch of the heel spare several others, I realised that complete destruction was not their only goal. The younger girl reached down and collected several men in her hands who would otherwise have been smeared into the dust under *Meri's* foot. These females wanted to conquer us, not to wipe us out. For whatever reason, they wanted to *keep* us.

I shuddered at my realisation and watched the other two hurling their silver balls. I could not know it at the time, but the knowledge that the gas contained within was aimed only to paralyse and not to kill (which I'm sure a civilisation capable of space travel would have been able to achieve if they wished) would have only verified my thoughts.

However there was no way that I could have known the purpose of the gas that the projectiles dispensed over south-west London, and I watched the unfolding scene intently. For some time the tallest, thinnest Venusian, *Emi*, peered through her looking device until she appeared satisfied that the hurling of the silver balls had been sufficiently effective, and with a word all three of the elder females began their advance no longer in single file but in a fan-shaped formation that gradually spread out, leaving three trails of destruction marked by floating dust and scattered debris, until they reached the swirling edges of the lakes of mist the tossed canisters had created. I watched the closest giant figure –*Emi*– who couldn't have been more than a league away since their advance had begun from our left and she was now no further away, but on

our right. She knelt down, planting her knees into the sparse trees on the outskirts of Surrey, and bent forward. I was stupefied as to her intentions until I saw the silver mist dancing as if alive. It receded from her immense, kneeling figure and I realised she was wafting it away with her own breath. I have already described the conflicting appearance of the gas; viscous yet thick, and this property was no more apparent than when she blew upon it, that is, instead of the smoke billowing into the air like the smoke from a cigarette, it slithered away from her, clinging to the ground and flowing backwards through and around each of the miniature trees and houses in its path. Patches remained in the nooks and crannies of ponds and ditches, undecided whether it would cling to the obstruction or yield to the giant girl's overpowering breath and slither away with the rest of the fluid. I saw objects being scattered by the winds that rushed from between her lips; carts, animals, human figures. I saw the roof lift off a building tile-by-tile, and the thatched roof of a cottage simply exploded into an invisible cloud of straw. On the horizon, the other two women knelt over the conquered towns in a similar fashion and presumably undertook the same practice.

I was puzzled by the apparent purposeless of their actions; first they covered the countryside with this strange silver fog, then spent their own breath washing it away. Of course, as I later learnt, it was perfectly logical since the effects of the gas lasted only a matter of hours, and they wished to disarm the human defences in order that the maiden loitering above the trees behind them could proceed with her business of collecting the helpless humans strewn within the clouds of gas. To this aim the warriors were removing the veil of silver gas and exposing the artillery one-by-one, then daintily destroying them like toys. I watched as *Emi* discovered a cannon on its limber, grabbed the formidable weapon between her fingers without effort and brought it to her nose. She studied the long object, holding it between her thumb and forefinger at either end, then her digits seemed to tense. For a second the heavy weapon held out, then buckled between her fingertips and became

a useless L-shape of cast iron that floated through the air before crashing into a field by the girl's knee. The next cannon was not even blessed with her attention before it was crushed into flattened steel in her hand as she grasped it and closed her fingers tight around it. Very quickly she tired of the effort and stood upright, casting her shadow once more over the unfortunate landscape, lifted her foot, and systematically sent the remaining artillery and whatever men lay helpless below her sole, staring up into the body of this infinitely powerful being, into oblivion.

I tore my gaze away from the merciless creature to the other two beautiful but deadly beings, and watched as the closer began fanning away the gas with the front of her skirt, kneeling above the doomed defences of our helpless planet and undertaking this flapping action with the energy and light-heartedness of a child, when in chilling reality there were real men lying between her knees, about to meet their horrible fate at her gentle, feminine hands.

Whirling away from the ominous sight I had to calm myself and console the deranged, uncomprehending curate, and it was some time before I turned my attention back to our conquerors, who had obviously concluded their first tidying up of man's defences and were bunched together after achieving these several miles of progress, as the voluptuous giant began hurling more silver balls.

And thus, on the fifth day, the clouds of swirling gas covered the countryside in great blotches, like the ink of a pen dripping on a map of London, and the likelihood of a human victory decreased with each one.

\* \* \*

## CHAPTER SIX

## THE “THUNDER CHILD”

It is at this point in my narrative that my adventure was at a turning point and is therefore an appropriate time to leave my journey across the south of London and join that of my brother, which in actual fact took place several days later.

My brother was in London at the time of the landings and up until the spreading of the silver gas, which marked the beginning of the end as the women of Venus created a free and defenceless passageway to their goal in central London. While his escape from the onslaught of the Venusians was fraught with danger, there were dangers of a human kind as he encountered desperate scoundrels and stampeding fleeing masses, and I will confine the description of these couple of days to a minimum.

News of the landing of the Venusians in Horsell Common was treated at best as trivial by the newspapers. The destruction of the first military units, of which my former companion was an artilleryman, was too unbelievable to be considered anything but ‘unsubstantiated’, in the words of one *Times* article. It was only upon the fourth day, and the obliteration of Byfleet’s inhabitants and railway, that any notice was taken of the happenings in the otherwise drearily peaceful south-west, and even then the general mobilisation of the military put to rest any fears the public had of these unheard-of ‘Venusians’. There would have been more commotion if it were announced England were going to war with France; that is, a battle on England’s own shores was not even a possibility in the minds of the inhabitants of London. In fact even the special bulletin on the fifth day concerning the advance of the giant women with the aid of the inescapable silver smoke, only

managed to create great volumes of gossip. Nothing could penetrate the greatest metropolis of the world, thought the six million Londoners. However it was on that evening that the feminine silhouettes were seen looming over Wimbledon and some of the closer western suburbs, and the word of the silver gas (which was thought to be deadly) spread more quickly than the insidious substance itself.

It took a remarkably short amount of time for stubborn confidence to transform into hopeless panic. There was a general and uncontrolled evacuation of London, sparked by police but managed by no-one. My brother managed to be in the front row of a crowd that ransacked a bicycle store and rode swiftly northward until the buildings gave way to houses and the houses to cottages, and finally his machine gave way to mechanical stresses when his front wheel crumpled upon striking a pothole in the early hours of the morning. He proceeded on foot to the next village, where he encountered one of undoubtedly many examples of mankind's apathetic brutality, as two men were mounting a pony-chaise against resistance from its current occupants, who from their screaming for help were identifiable as ladies. My brother immediately grasped the situation, shouted, and hurried towards the struggle. One of the men desisted and turned towards him, and my brother, realising from his antagonist's face that a fight was unavoidable, and being an expert boxer, went into him forthwith and sent him down against the wheel of the chaise. A pistol hastily produced from one of the lady's purses and apparently procured from the drawer of her husband, who was absent when the panic began, assisted my brother in warding the would-be attackers away, and the ladies consented to travelling with him – an agreement beneficial for all parties.

Had the Venusians aimed only at destruction, they might have annihilated the entire population of London on the sixth day, as it spread itself slowly through the home counties. Not only along the road through Barnet, but also through Edgware and Waltham Abbey, and along the roads eastward to Southend and

Shoeburyness, and south of the Thames to Deal and Broadstairs, poured the same frantic rout. Every northward and eastward road running out of the tangled maze of streets was stippled black with the streaming fugitives, each dot a human agony of terror and physical distress. Never before in the history of the world had such a mass of human beings moved and suffered together; and this was no disciplined march; it was a stampede –a stampede gigantic and terrible– without order and without a goal, six million people unarmed and unprovisioned, driving headlong. It was the beginning of the rout of civilisation, of the massacre of mankind.

Until about midday the Pool of London was an astonishing scene. Steamboats and shipping of all sorts lay there, tempted by the enormous sums of money offered by fugitives, and it is said that many who swam out to these vessels were thrust off with boathooks and drowned. About one o'clock in the afternoon the thinning remnant of a cloud of the silver smoke appeared between the arches of Blackfriars Bridge. At that the Pool became a scene of mad confusion, fighting, and collision, and for some time a multitude of boats and barges jammed in the northern arch of the Tower Bridge, and the sailors and lightermen had to fight savagely against the people who swarmed upon them from the riverfront. People were actually clambering down the piers of the bridge from above. An hour later, a Venusian appeared beyond the Clock Tower and waded down the river, turning over boats before her and swamping others in the vortexes swirling about her legs, while the waters of the Thames rained down from her sopping and almost transparent dress onto the bridges over which she gingerly stepped.

However, my brother and his companions were out of this danger as they had made good time in the pony chaise, and after resting part of the night in a field of unripe wheat outside Chelmsford, reached the Essex coast at midday on the seventh day. After the sailors could no longer come up the Thames, they had come on to the coast, to Harwich and Walton and Clacton, and afterwards to Foulness and Shoebury, to evacuate off the people;

though not for humanity's sake but for the sake of their purses. The boats lay in a huge sickle-shaped curve that vanished into mist at last towards the Naze. Close inshore was a multitude of fishing smacks – English, Scotch, French, Dutch, and Swedish; steam launches from the Thames, yachts, electric boats; and beyond were ships of large burden, a multitude of filthy colliers, trim merchantmen, cattle ships, passenger boats, petroleum tanks, ocean tramps, an old white transport even, neat white and grey liners from Southampton and Hamburg; and along the blue coast across the Blackwater my brother could make out dimly a dense swarm of boats chaffering with the people on the beach, a swarm which also extended up the Blackwater almost to Maldon.

About a couple of miles out lay an ironclad, very low in the water, almost, to my brother's perception, like a water-logged ship. This was the ram *Thunder Child*. It was the only warship in sight, but far away to the right over the smooth surface of the sea –for that day there was a dead calm– lay a serpent of black smoke to mark the next ironclads of the Channel Fleet, which hovered in an extended line, steam up and ready for action, across the Thames estuary during the course of the Venusian conquest, vigilant and yet powerless to prevent it.

My brother escorted the ladies down to the beach, where they succeeded in grabbing the attention of some men from a steamer from the Thames, bound for Ostend, and managed to bargain a passage for thirty-six pounds for three. When they boarded the steamer there was food available and under hungry fatigue they relinquished their remaining funds for the exorbitantly priced nourishment. Despite the already overcrowded decks, the steamer lingered off the beach while the crew ferried more passengers to increase their profits. It was while the boat was turning to leave the shore, steam pouring out of her masts, that there could be heard a shout from one of the upper decks; a feeble yell stifled by shock. All heads turned to behold a giant figure that trampled over the land, bearing down on the fleeing fleet of ships.

This was not one of the Venusians that I had encountered in the south-west of London, but one of those that had arrived in the north in the following nights. My brother described her as youthful, though whether she was the youngest of the second group of invaders –that is, the equivalent of the dangerous maiden who bore the similarity to the baker’s daughter– I cannot ascertain, since all of the Venusians could have been described as ‘youthful’. He is unable to provide much further description of use as he was in an understandably stunned state and beheld with glazed eyes the approach of the colossal young female.

Without hesitation she made for the shallow waters upon reaching the beach, where some of the crowd disappeared beneath her shoe and the rest sprawled about helplessly as one giant feminine foot slammed into the sand and the other swooped dangerously low above them. Her step created a wave that swept up the beach and swamped the miniature humans for a hundred yards to either side. Even while she sank into the waves, she grew larger in the eyes of the helpless souls aboard the fleeing boats, peering up at her in terror as she approached them. Her thigh created a bow-wave more momentous than even the largest man o’ war, and tipped over the small boats that passed underneath her immense, curvaceous figure, though these trifles were of no interest to her – her gaze was set on the large steamers such as the one in which my brother and his companions now seemed doomed.

With each step she waded into deeper water, and the instant her thin frock touched the salty water it became a heavy curtain that swiped over the surface and overturned the small boats that found themselves between her momentous legs. Passengers’ gasps echoed the loud splintering of wood as a barge was unfortunate enough to be caught between her thighs during the shearing motion of her legs midway through a powerful stride, and the wretched craft found itself smashed to splinters over her skin. The girl payed no attention and with her next step leaned forward and planted her hand on the stern of a steamer. Instantly the passengers fled the deck where her fingers landed, like rats driven before the pied

piper, even as the planks began shattering under her grip as she pulled the vessel towards her, the usual regular splashing of water from its paddles replaced by a churning, turbulent mass of froth as the pitiful engines struggled against her might.

The girl effortlessly pulled the steamer to her body. She was at a depth where the water almost came to the top of her thighs, and the top-most decks of the vessel were level with her navel. It appeared she hesitated; deliberating, but at the sight of multitudes of people hurtling themselves from the opposite decks she shoved the ship towards the shore. The giant girl, seemingly not more than a gentle and meek maiden, strode alongside the ship, clad in her now sopping dress that clearly showed the jet-black undergarments beneath, with her hand guiding the vessel by its curved bow. When it struck sand with a reverberating thud, she continued onto the beach and lifted one leg over the debilitated craft. Bending over it, she clasped the hull with both hands while water rained down onto its deck from her stooping body, and with an almighty pull she yanked the disabled ship beneath her arched legs and up the beach, resulting in the destruction of the hull where her fingernails smashed through the strong planks.

While my brother was not aware at this time of the reason for which the omnipotent Venusian female would undertake such an arduous task when she could sink the vessel with the touch of her hand, it was clear to me upon learning of these events, that she wished to save the humanity aboard the floating hulk. Once again a stark similarity can be drawn between the Venusians and Earthmen, because, like the sailors whose purses were filled with the savings of the refugees, she was not saving the humans for the sake of humanity but for her own sake, but in her case it was not for the purpose of filling her purse but for filling her stomach.

With a couple of strides she had reached the next large vessel, after which it appeared that the steamer bearing my brother was to be her next victim. However she waded through the specks of people who had deserted the first boat and as she looked down and observed them paddling desperately for the shore, while many

disappeared in the swirling waters around her legs, it became obvious that she realised she didn't have to beach an entire ship to prevent its human passengers from escaping. Therefore, with one hand she leaned and snatched the hull of a fishing boat near her thigh, and lifted it into the air before her, placing her free hand to steady it as dozens of crowded passengers plummeted from its decks under her wild uneven grasp. From my brother's viewpoint the figures of helpless men were outlined by the smooth features of her face as she peered down with a terrifying smile at the people whose existence was merely at her whim, while every second a dark flailing speck of a figure could be seen tumbling from her hands and striking her chest, where they either clung desperately or plunged to the distant water. My brother tried protectively to hide the gazes of his horrified female companions but was too drawn by the terrible sight that he ceased his attempts and fell still with his neck craned up at the girl with the boat in her hands.

Some of the passengers were aware of the second figure now looming over the horizon some miles from the beach, but most were fixed on the half-submerged girl, who in turn was unaware of the sleek form that approached from the open water. My brother too was unaware of the approach of the *Thunder Child*, since his eyes were fixed on those of the Venusian, which seemed to glaze over with some terrible purpose. Suddenly, to the horror of every observer, the girl lifted the boat higher and pulled it through the air to her face, and with some dreadful spontaneous impulse bared her two rows of immense, glistening teeth and gnashed downwards at the defenceless and vulnerable miniature humans. While the ladies behind him fainted with utter horror, my brother watched through eyes swimming with darkness, the blood rushing from his face, as the supreme young woman lifted her head with an indiscernible collection of flailing limbs protruding from her lips, from which a man fell, thrashing through the air, to meet a fate decisively kinder than those whose bodies disappeared with a swipe of the girl's tongue. It occurred with such a shocking swiftness that the passengers –those who had not lost consciousness from the

unbearable stress of horror— didn't even notice the black puffs of smoke that rose diagonally from the ironclad that charged under full power towards this monstrous young female.

The giant demon had swung her arms wide as if revelling in her own omnipotence, smiling towards the heavens; towards her own planet, with the boat in just one hand, when the courageous ironclad struck.

There echoed the most terrible, piercing, bone-shattering shriek over the land and the sea, followed by the tremendous crash of the fishing boat smacking the water as the girl released it and clutched at her thigh where the steamer had rammed her. The watching crowds cheered with elation. From between her fingers could be seen gushing blood like a pierced whale and she staggered backwards, effecting an awkward limp in her attempt to reach the shore without moving her injured leg. Immediately the second Venusian descended from the hills where she had been perched, and crushed dozens of men underfoot in her haste to reach the scene of the battle. My brother gazed upon this tremendous figure for the first time. She was voluptuous and her curvaceous hips swayed momentarily with each of her gigantic strides. Her features were smooth but were contorted with an expression that struck terror into the observers in the insignificant boats scattered around the coast. It seemed she was not concerned for her injured comrade but for the offending, insulting craft, which had changed its course and now hurtled at full-steam towards her body.

The scene that followed was not a battle but a slaughter. The heavy and powerful ironclad charged towards the new Venusian girl who stood in water only midway up her thighs, and who paused as it approached within a hundred yards of her. Too late to make a change to its course, the warship sliced through the water directly at her legs, and it was her effortless side-step that caused it to career harmlessly for the gap directly between them. As its bow thundered between her thighs, its bow-wave dashing waves against her skin, she casually but deliberately lowered her hand towards it, and at the approach of the first raised deck she grasped the vessel,

her fingers digging into its iron plating, and all its terrible momentum went into tugging her arm slightly, tearing its own shielding in her vice-like grip. The *Thunder Child* was halted halfway between the giant girl's legs, with its fore-castle draped in the wet folds of her dress and its bow poking out blindly behind her and beneath her backside. The large vessel was as long as she was tall, yet it was utterly helpless in her hands. Even before its crew had the chance to raise its guns, the girl had reached down behind her to the fore cannons and easily tore them with a squeal of steel from the decks, and made a similar pile of scrap out of the aft guns.

She released her grip of the craft – it was powerless anyway. Black puffs of smoke rose from its twin stacks and drifted about her figure, leaving patches of soot on the garment that struggled to hold her chest in, particularly when she stooped to the ship between her legs. It seemed as if the girl wished to prolong her victory by demeaning the conquered. She waded forward a small step, deep enough for her crotch to descend onto the bridge of the ship, which swayed to and fro in the swells caused by her giant movements. However its motion was suddenly halted with a terrible whine of bending steel and my brother with his perspective of the entire event, saw that the girl had clamped her legs around the boat's sides, and with a squeeze of her hull-width thighs she crumpled its iron plating without even deigning to lay her hands on it. A second scream of twisting metal echoed over the ocean as she tightened the vice between her thighs, slowly torturing the doomed ship. Steam and smoke began pouring out from thin cracks in its hull around her legs and as sailors began appearing on its decks, frantic yet not yet under order to abandon their noble vessel, she stooped once again and her chest swayed downwards as her arms lowered towards the water. Her hands pierced the water on either side of the *Thunder Child's* stern, sending crashing waves of foam against its hull, then her arms were seen to press against the railing of the upper decks as she clamped her grip around its keel.

My brother saw her vast thigh muscles tense as she pulled upwards, and with the hull pinned between her legs, lifting with such force at the stern, there once again sounded the wretched squeal of metal as the hull was crushed between her hands and ripped open like a can between her legs. The poor, brave ironclad formed an impossible angle as its bow remained parallel to the surface while its stern lifted into the air; the whole ship bent like a nail – its decks buckled and its hull stretched and torn. The cruel girl tugged once more and the *Thunder Child's* steel hull let out its dying scream as the once-sleek hull was pulled into an even more acute angle. The observers were silent and aghast.

Satisfied, the omnipotent, pitiless girl dropped the limp body of the vessel and widened her legs enough to let the bent and broken form of the valiant *Thunder Child* pass between her knees and sink beneath the waves. She immediately cast her eyes to the fleeing vessels; directly meeting the collective gazes of my brother and his fellow passengers, who shuddered under her very eyes, but who were thankfully out of her range; the *Thunder Child* having purchased their escape with its heroic death.

\* \* \*

In its dying throes the *Thunder Child* coughed a black, choking smoke from its stacks that rendered the body of the woman who destroyed it in an ugly blackness, that reflected her deed and made her all the more fearsome. However she repulsed in disgust at the sight of the befouled fabric, and while hundreds of men emerged on the surface below her, having escaped the fate of the sinking vessel, she tore her garment upwards and lifted it cleanly from her body; a significant action since it showed that the Venusians were not warriors of strength and fortitude, but women with the pettiness to be concerned at the cleanliness of their smocks; albeit indestructible women who were so gigantic in size and had such an awful advantage over our entire world, that they could afford to be inefficient warriors and petty clothes-washers.

She immediately thrust the removed garment into the water between her legs in a thoughtless act of malice that dragged the survivors into the depths amongst the folds of her dress. This was of course invisible to the observers of this ritual, who naturally could not behold the sight of her body with any kind of sensuality but with repulsion, for which reason their descriptions of her are cold and impartial.

She was clad in the same black undergarment as the other Venusians, but its deep blackness was seen to glisten in the sun with its wetness, indicating it was indeed nothing more than highly elastic fabric. Her skin was unusual in that it was of a perfectly even tone; not a line of different colour from her belly to her arms or her legs betrayed that she were ever exposed to the directional light of our sun. Her breasts were bare with the removal of the garment, and those who beheld them estimated them each to be the size of a two-storey building such as an inn or hotel. Otherwise she exhibited the identical but grossly disproportionate features as Earth-women. None of the witnesses who noted these points were wise to the fact that at that very moment she was unwittingly – though carelessly – drowning dozens of sailors in the folds of her garment that she thrust in the water between her legs.

When this cruel Venusian girl withdrew her dress it was dotted with stranded sailors clinging to its folds in desperation, whom she disregarded upon slipping the garment over her head and pulling it tightly over her body with the men still trapped within it. Witnesses claim that human figures were visible, pinned to her skin underneath the wet and almost transparent fabric that clung to her every curve. She adjusted it once to bear her weighty chest and those men who were not crushed between her flesh and the fabric, were never seen again.

\* \* \*

BOOK TWO

EARTH UNDER THE VENUSIANS

## CHAPTER SEVEN

## UNDER FOOT

My adventure was at a turning point on the hills at Richmond when the Venusians overtook me on their advance into London. From there, the burdensome curate and I made our way to Halliford where we concealed ourselves in an empty house for two days in fear of the silver smoke.

My mind was occupied by anxiety for my wife. I figured her at Leatherhead, terrified, in danger, mourning me already as a dead man. I paced the rooms and cried aloud when I thought of how I was cut off from her, of all that might happen to her in my absence. My only consolation was to believe that the Venusians were moving London-ward and away from her. The presence of the curate furthered my frustrations and I grew weary of his selfish despair and his constant ejaculations, and locked myself in an upstairs room until his muffled whining became more intolerable than his conversation.

On the morning of our third day at Halliford I concluded that the risk of capture at the hands of the towering young beauty with the mesh-basket was not great enough to prolong my torturous dwelling and I departed, attempting to convince the curate of his safety within the walls. Unfortunately for me, he was of such delicate mettle that he was less frightened of the Venusians than of solitude – despite my unsubtly inhospitable demeanour.

In Sunbury, and at intervals along the road, were dead bodies lying in contorted attitudes, horses as well as men, overturned carts and luggage, and for the first time I observed a Venusian footprint in detail. Initially I didn't even recognise that the depression in the ground wasn't man-made; that is, I glanced past it, assuming it to be unfinished foundations. Only when the illogicality of a house

being built in the middle of the road struck me, did I turn and look. The larger of the two depressions that comprised it was sixty feet long and in the form of an isosceles triangle – this was the toe of her shoe. Thirty feet behind the flat end was a round depression that could have been mistaken for a sunken well. It was about three feet deep, even on the hardened surface of the road. Curious and quite astounded, I followed the direction in which the footprint pointed, the curate trailing as faithfully as my shadow, and found another, and another. It was in the fourth footprint that I saw a dark red patch of unidentifiable horror and turned away in revulsion. The curate understood its nature too late and I heard his agonising cry stifled as he became violently sick.

We went through Bushey Park, with its deer going to and fro under the chestnuts, and some men and women hurrying in the distance towards Hampton, and so we came to Twickenham. These were the first people we saw. By this time we were hungry; especially the curate, who had evacuated his stomach beside the fatal footprint, and his complaints drove us into a house where we discovered only scraps of dried bread. It was dark by the time we then crossed to a place where the road turns towards Mortlake. Here there stood a white house within a walled garden, and in the pantry of this domicile we found a store of food – two loaves of bread in a pan, an uncooked steak, and the half of a ham. I give this catalogue so precisely because, as it happened, we were destined to subsist upon this store for the next fortnight. Bottled beer stood under a shelf, and there were two bags of haricot beans and some limp lettuces. This pantry opened into a kind of wash-up kitchen, and in this was firewood; there was also a cupboard, in which we found nearly a dozen of burgundy, tinned soups and salmon, and two tins of biscuits.

I was dozing in the kitchen when it struck. There was an enormous crash and a whopping explosion which obliterated the walls behind us and tossed me like a leaf in the wind, and I instantly lost consciousness. This was the eighth cylinder.

\* \* \*

The first sight I beheld upon my sore eyes was that of the figure of the curate cowering against the only two upright walls of our dark prison. His attention was caught by my groan of pain.

“Hush!” he whispered. I attempted to right myself but he hissed at me, “there’s broken crockery all over the floor. We can’t move, for I fancy they are outside.”

I was at this stage much disoriented and not quite sure what had happened nor even who ‘they’ were, but a heavy thud and a subsequent rumble of the house jogged my memory; waking me from a pleasant dream of ignorance back into harsh reality. With a whisper I asked the curate what had happened.

“It’s another shooting star – it fell right beside us!”

He was indeed correct; this was another projectile from Venus. However, while I naturally assumed that the ‘they’, who had caused the thud we had heard, was a new giant Venusian girl exiting her cylinder-shaped transport, the following morning brought to light the fallacy of this assumption when we discovered that it was the immense women with whom we were already familiar, who were occupying the newly-generated crater, and that the cylinder had brought cargo of a different nature.

\* \* \*

Before I proceed to describe the following two weeks of entrapment in the house in Kew, I must point out to the reader why I am the author of this work. Out of the survivors of the Venusian invasion, I was in the closest proximity of the giants for the longest duration, and am thus the single most experienced witness. That is, it is not by extreme chance that the eighth cylinder struck my current dwelling, rather it is because of this fact that I am writing this account. However I must repudiate by mentioning that although I will provide my own theories as to their operation and

their home planet, it must be remembered that I am just a witness and my suggestions are by no means undeniable facts.

I will now proceed to describe these two weeks as an unknown captive of the giant young females.

During the night we had undertaken the stressful task of blindly gathering pieces of crockery –one at a time, in order that the fragments did not rattle together– and depositing them in a corner where we would not stumble and give away our existence. This was tiresome work but was sustained by the dreadful thought of perishing forever between the exquisite lips of a beautiful, fearsome young lady. When the kitchen was dimly lit by the wakening sky we crept along the cleared floorboards to the destroyed wall, where we discovered that our dwelling was almost completely covered in the ruins of the neighbouring house. There was a gap between some fallen planks through which daylight began to shine and I crept to this and peered at the outside world.

The street via which we had entered the house had vastly changed since the previous day, in that it no longer existed. In its place were mounds of earth thrown up by the impact of the cylinder, the point of which protruded from the crater –invisible from our position– about two hundred yards away. Protruding high into the air beside the cylinder was the splendid round form of a female backside, which would have been irresistibly enticing but for the fact that it was more than a hundred feet wide and would have meant certain death to be in any form of proximity to it. When the huge hips began curling as the girl withdrew her body from the cylinder, I assumed this was the newly arrived Venusian emerging backwards from her transport, until the giant face appeared in the dawn sun. It was *Meri*.

I was momentarily startled, and during the milliseconds that it took for the rest of her figure to withdraw from the cylinder I wondered if this were her twin, or perhaps if the Venusian warriors were clones of one another, but when her hands emerged holding an obvious piece of machinery about the size of a large inn, the

apparent truth dawned very quickly upon me, that is, that the cylinder contained not another female warrior but equipment.

While I watched, the cylinder was unpacked by *Meri* and the contents were laid about the mounds of earth, and some objects I only saw briefly as they were placed in the crater –into which I had no view– but all were instantly identifiable as machinery. On the following day were they put into operation, and after long periods of curious study, interrupted only by the curate's nagging persistence to have his turn at the slit in the wood, I concluded that their purpose was the construction of devices that were too cumbersome to transport from Venus. The operation most clearly visible from my vantage point was the production of aluminium. I saw a type of automated excavating machine that emitted plumes of green smoke while it burrowed at the earth around the crater. The clay it exhumed was deposited into a container larger than a house, which was periodically collected by one of the giant women; most often the youngest girl, startling me every time her immense foot slammed down into the earth directly before our prison as she stepped over the house from somewhere behind us, shaking the already dilapidated structure quite dreadfully. She would empty the container into another partially-concealed machine, from which rose banks of white steam mingled with the green smoke that seemed common to all their apparatus, suggesting it was a by-product of whatever fantastic form of power generation they employed. This machine churned out shining rods of aluminium, which were automatically stacked for cooling, with heat shimmering in the air above them, until the girl stooped to collect them.

Much of the other machinery was on the other side of the crater and all I could gather at the time was that they undertook various operations on the thirty-yard rods of metal that the towering young woman fed into them one-by-one, to transform them from blanks of aluminium into useful components that were to comprise the machines the Venusians were making. After her round of delivering and conveying was complete, the giant girl

would collect the finished components and tread thunderously back over our dwelling to where I assume her companions were busy assembling the parts into working devices for some demoniac purpose.

At this point I will depart from the focus on the machines, which were only a fractional point of interest during my imprisonment, and delve into the aspects of the larger, greater, feminine beings that preoccupied my attention.

\* \* \*

## CHAPTER EIGHT

## OBSERVATIONS OF THE VENUSIANS' HABITS

I have mentioned three of the Venusians by name; *Meri*, *Emi* and *Cali*. The fourth –the youngest, whom Patterson fatally mistook for his daughter– was called *Beli*. This knowledge is possible because I was attentive enough to identify parts of their extraterrestrial language.

Although the females' voices were mighty enough to saturate even into the cellar where the curate and I cowered when not peering out the crack between the debris, it was only when their giant bodies were in sight that I was able to interpret the meaning of some of their words, for example, when it was clear that one was addressing or calling the attention of another. Their language was sweet and beautiful despite its often deafening volume. It is difficult to imagine an extremely loud noise without recollecting dull and deep sounds such as thunder or the report of a cannon, yet these sounds were simultaneously piercingly loud, as soft as a purr and as sweet as music. Strangely, the words themselves were uncannily earth-like. A layman in languages might have mistaken their speech for a European tongue, as it exhibited the vowels of French and the musical rhythm of Italian. I was particularly taken aback by the feminine '-ie' endings of their names, which is a trait shared by many Earth languages, in which most –if not all– women's names end in vowels, and a large proportion in '-ie'.

Like humans, much conversation was undertaken at mealtimes. The Venusians' dining habits is an account that horrifies me, even now, to put to paper, but to which I must now pay its due attention, for the sake of completion of this story and for enabling the reader to fathom the sheer gruesomeness that I and many other humans witnessed.

The reader should either already be familiar with or have guessed the staple item of the Venusian women's diet; the most abundantly available flesh on the planet Earth and that which the youth *Beli* so effortlessly captured in the thousands and stored in the mesh basket she carried at her waist. I am referring, of course, to humans. Although at first the sight of the young women placing men into their mouths sickened me; firstly out of horror and secondly due to the fact that I was utterly helpless to prevent it, I gradually became immune to the dreadful plight of my fellow men and learned (or perhaps more accurately, forced myself) to block the vision from my mind while I undertook the duty that I considered of greater consequence to posterity –whatever scraps thereof might endure– and that was the study of the beings who had taken over our world.

The other major ingredient of the Venusians' diet was greenery, with which they experimented keenly. I saw all of the giant women tasting birch trees, oaks, pines and elms. Shrubs were like parsley to them. Each variety provided them sometimes with delight and sometimes with obvious disdain. They would take whole trees in their mouths and clamp the uprooted trunks between their huge, destructive teeth, and in yanking the unfortunate plant with their fingers they would tear off the entire foliage as if they were sucking meat off a bone, then chew on the ancient boughs briefly before the forest giant passed down their throat.

Men, however, were treated differently by each of the Venusians, and I can even now quite clearly visualise the horrible manner in which the fellows of my race met their doom between the women's lips. Although I must warn the queasy reader of the nature of these descriptions, it must be remembered that humans do not have the right to complain about the injustice of the giant girls feeding on inferior creatures such as men, since every day we heedlessly deal the same fate to practically every type of creature on the Earth.

*Emi* was clearly the most meticulous (in a picky, fussy sense) of the four Venusians whom I observed. She went to the trouble of

relieving the men upon whom she dined of contaminants such as coats and other heavy clothing. She disrobed them by pinching them between her thumb and forefinger and tearing away offending items of clothing with a fingernail of her free hand. Each of the immense women sat in the same place at mealtimes, and *Emi* sat barely a hundred yards from our house, facing the crater, always with her legs clamped together and knees arched a hundred-and-fifty feet over the remains of a few buildings. Her thigh rose up across my field of view and I could see the side of her face by ducking and looking upwards through the gap in the debris. She was close enough that I witnessed horrible, inadvertent injuries occurring as a result of her forceful stripping-method, that would sicken even an aged soldier and after which the victim's sudden termination between her back teeth would have been a blessed end to the poor man's misery. I'm certain she was the only girl to end her victims' lives in her mouth, that is, by chewing on their doomed bodies – the other three Venusians appeared to swallow earthmen whole.

The young *Beli* undertook the least ceremony in her meals; perhaps since she would have wasted her whole day if she had performed the same fussy ritual as *Emi*, because she was clearly the hungriest of the giant females. I found it ironic in an awful, chilling way that her name resembled the word 'belly'; I counted that the girl consumed sixty men a day. The fact that she had the greatest appetite might have been a result of her youth, (which in itself was an anomaly that I found quite confusing and ambiguous; that is, why the Venusians would choose to include youths in the very first wave of pioneering invaders). *Beli* would take a whole handful of panic-stricken people from the mesh basket and sit cross-legged directly on the opposite side of the crater, where her lap, darkened by the skirt stretched between her legs, was visible between some cottages before her, that were barely as high as her widely-spread knees. With her meal cupped in her hand, which she relaxed in her lap, she would reach down and clasp a man, whose figure was barely discernable, and with little pomp would deposit

him between her delicate, glistening lips. Despite the half-mile distance, her giant features were clearly visible, and I never saw a shadow dance over her smooth cheeks to betray any movement of her jaw; therefore I am certain that there was always a living, breathing, writhing man trapped on her tongue at this moment in the ritual. The sight of the repetitive tilt of her head as she passed a human being down her throat is burned into my memory – in particular the beautiful wisp of a smile that sometimes blessed the countryside.

No less beautiful was the captivating *Cali*. The whole world of man would have submitted at her feet, just to be bestowed with a glance from her giant, deep brown eyes that twinkled with her radiant smile, which persisted even while she undertook so dull a chore as partaking in a meal. I can imagine that her overpowering beauty might have been a slight reprise for a male being helplessly elevated towards that enchanting smile, her eyes growing larger in his vision until he passed under her gleaming front teeth into the blackness that was going to make him become truly one within her. *Cali* took obvious pleasure in devouring the miniature beings she had conquered; not out of malice, but it appeared that she was fascinated with every single one of them. Sometimes she would hold a man between her thumb and forefinger and peer down at him as if his black waistcoat were any different to those of the previous ten men, prolonging his agonising suspense (or his blissful acceptance of fate, as it may have been). Several times she even retained one individual between her fingers, giving the appearance of being preoccupied with some particular characteristic, while piling less fortunate men between her teeth. It was during one of these momentary lapses in her concentration that a flash of movement caught my eye and I watched a man tumble from her loose grip and plummet down her body until he struck her chest, and was guided by the contours of her body into her bosom, where he disappeared into her garment. Intrigued and hopeful for the salvation of the man, I watched attentively. *Cali* was usually seated diagonally opposite our humble vantage point and was most

often –as in this case– resting with both legs tucked to one side, her upper leg slid back to expose the inner thigh of the lower leg to the sky. This formed a triangular cavern out of her skirt, which draped over her thighs, at the rear of which loomed the blackness of the undergarment clinging to her womanly form. It was against this dark background that I distinguished a moving speck; the man –the oversight– fleeing from his landing spot, most likely in the tip of her lap, down her upturned inner thigh, towards the opening of the triangular tunnel. The desperate man burst into the light and I almost cried out in triumph as I watched him darting, seemingly unnoticed, along her leg towards a house below her knee, onto the roof of which I presume he intended to leap. His pace was hastened by panic and adrenaline, and my excitement heightened as he reached her knee, where he changed course, down the rounded profile of her leg, and sprung with the energy of a hunted deer. He hung in mid air for what seemed like an eternity of suspense, until, with a startling motion that seemed to dash not only his but all of mankind’s hopes, the giant shape of a female hand swept from out of nowhere and collected his airborne body in an arc that followed through directly to the owner’s open mouth. It was *Meri*, and with a stifled cackle of triumph she held her mouth wide for an instant as if to prove her achievement to her comrades, before she snapped her lips together and swallowed the man with an exaggerated gulp.

\* \* \*

## CHAPTER NINE

## THE VENUSIAN MERI

I must dedicate more words to *Meri*. I hesitate to reveal the following account, but this journal would be incomplete without this aspect of my adventure, because it suggests strange facets about the nature of the Venusians. However I appeal to the reader to empathise with my situation and forgive me for the unhinged state of my mind during these difficult days.

It may be useful to remind the reader that *Meri* was the first arrival from Venus. On the very first day when the cylinder opened, I was amongst those who peered into the blackness; unknowingly directly into her gleaming eyes. On my first encounter on that stormy night, I had a narrow escape thanks to a reprieve between lightning strikes at the moment when she paused, with me lying exposed and unprotected between her feet. Furthermore, at Byfleet it was only the artilleryman's quick wits that saved me from a fate beneath her toes. I'm certain that at the time I felt there was something more than coincidental about these lucky escapes, and the events of the two weeks in captivity beside the crater enhanced my fanciful notions. The occurrence that precipitated my fascination –so to say– with the giant *Meri*, took place just as she recaptured and swallowed the escaped man, as described in the previous chapter. This occurrence was that, as unlikely as it may sound, she looked at me.

As soon as her Adam's apple had bobbed up and down to signify the man being pulled down her throat, she paused, as if bewildered. I was crouching on the floor looking upwards through the crack at her face as she kneeled over a street of houses two hundred yards away. Then, inexplicably, her head slowly turned in my direction, and while her face remained pointed at the horizon,

her eyes rotated downwards, and she became motionless as soon as her gaze rested precisely on me.

It was quite impossible for her to have seen me. The crack through which I peered was no wider than three of my fingers, and to her the exposed part of my face would have been an indiscernible patch of cream colour amongst scattered wood and thatch-coloured debris, and I estimated that my entire body would have been no bigger than the littlest segment of her little finger; thus to her only a hair's width of me would have been visible.

And yet she stared.

At first I was comfortable with my apparent security and felt it simply coincidental. Then I became nervous as her gaze persisted, piercing me until I finally broke into panic, and it was only a moment's hesitation that caused me to neglect my chance to flee, since my body then froze in shock. Our eyes seemed to lock and the debris seemed to disappear; I felt naked and exposed, completely at her mercy.

At that moment there was an echoing boom of feminine voice as the giant *Emi* beckoned *Meri's* attention for some assumedly unrelated purpose. At her second call the latter slowly tore her gaze from mine and the invisible bond was broken. Whether or not she resumed her probing stare I will never know, since I had shakily scrambled back into the cellar in panic. Just the piercing gaze alone of the extra-terrestrial girl was enough to frighten me to the core. Later, upon reflection, I speculated whether *Emi's* beckoning was indeed coincidental, for reasons soon to be elaborated.

The curate enjoyed full privilege of the viewing-gap the next day, as I was too shaken by my apparent brush with fate to dare to resume my observation. Twice I heard the curate groan in anguish, obviously denoting the mealtimes of the giant females looming outside, and on the third set of his dangerous ejaculations I ascended the stairs and pulled him away in order to prevent any further vocal endangering of our tentative existence. His protests

were muffled by my arm around his neck and I left him whimpering in the cellar.

Plucking my courage I crept to the gap and peered out into the dazzling sunshine to assess if his loud exclamations of horror had been justified. I admit I had to suppress an exclamation of my own when my eyes adjusted to the light and grasped the odd sight. Perhaps two hundred yards away was one of the female figures crouched in an awkward position. It was *Meri*. Her legs were doubled under her and she rested her chest on her knees her so that she was almost curled into a ball in this kneeling position. In leaning forward her face descended to the height of some scattered cottages and she had to support herself by planting both hands onto the ground on either side, crushing a tree as she did so. My gaze was directed to the object of her attention, which I soon identified to be a man clad in grey, tattered trousers and a torn white shirt. The poor soul faced towards the giant girl and looked up with a craned neck into her descending face, on which I could see a broad, frightening smile. His expression, however, was indiscernible. It was dizzying to attempt to visualise this poor man's view, and spine-chilling to attempt to fathom what he must have felt in his predicament. He knew –it was clear– that he was going to meet his doom at the whim of the impossibly giant female, as he stared into her beautiful face. I felt a deep sense of despair wash over me as I took in the entire picture; the vast feminine body seeming to dominate the entire world, yet concentrated on this one solitary figure that was not even as tall as her nose, down which she peered at him through half-closed eyes. It was unfair. It was like the English navy pointing their cannons at a boy in a dinghy, or Napoleon's army crowding around to point their bayonets at a toddler. I felt like crying out and pleading for her to quickly crush him or stomp him or even smear him under her finger; anything to end this demeaning prolonging of his –and it seemed of all mankind's– demise. Suddenly I watched as a dark cavern opened up in the heavens above the man and I saw him stumble in the gust of her warm breath that rushed down over him,

before he regained his feet to meet his fate like a man. With parted lips *Meri* let her head descend towards the man. He remained motionless as her lips formed a twenty-yard circle on the ground around his helpless figure, the soft pink flesh striking some scattered debris and crushing some shrubs as they closed in on him.

When I saw *Meri* lift her face, her lips were puckered and from the tip protruded a set of writhing legs. Her cheeks formed giant dimples as she widened her jaw, creating an overpowering vacuum, and with this effortless suck the man exploded down her throat. As soon as his legs had disappeared her lips widened into a smile which yielded to the echoing, deafening cackle, and I was chilled by the notion that she was playing; toying with him – with *us*.

\* \* \*

While I was stirred by the scene and emotionally exhausted, I felt drawn, almost obliged, to remain and observe the giants. I was grateful therefore, when the otherwise relentless *Meri* paused unexpectedly and leaned back as if tired, effecting the destruction of a two-storey structure with a careless swipe of her hand. She held a hand to her chest as if she were out of breath, and I noted this uncharacteristic lapse.

Upon the former shifting away, I gained a view of the beaming face of *Cali* looming over a couple of houses on the far side of the crater. She was lying idly on her stomach, propped on her elbows and facing precisely in my direction, and I wondered how much of the former town was pressed underneath her outstretched body. It was remarkable that the houses before her remained standing and I marvelled at the fact that their profile was scarcely large enough to shield her breasts, which loomed behind them, draping to the ground; the dark line of her cleavage rising up like the enormous trunk of a tree with no canopy, to almost double the height of the rooves below it. She too was idly toying with

some poor Earthmen, as I could tell by her flippant gaze at the ground beneath her face and the periodical playful jab of her finger into this area, but their fleeing figures were too difficult to discern, as was the purpose of her game, which at that moment was interrupted by a rumble.

From high above, outside my field of view, there rang out words spoken in a tone that to Earthmen and Venusians alike could not be mistaken for anything but displeasure. The sudden appearance of the young *Beli* towering over the opposite horizon with a train carriage clasped in her hand told me the voice could only belong to *Emi*. Whether she had uttered a complaint, an insult or a command was unclear, but it evoked a frown on the faces of all three of the giant listeners.

There was a second utterance, and as I attempted to wriggle into a position to look upwards through the gap, I quickly came to the realisation that our fragile refuge was directly between the agitated woman's feet. I looked up the insides of her legs into the billowing folds of the white frock, which swayed to and fro to alternately reveal and re-conceal the infinite blackness of the curvaceous undergarment and the shadowy curves of her abdomen. As I looked up at her belly from so far below, a chill went through my spine at the thought of the hundreds of my fellow humans whose tombs were within that attractive, rounded feminine feature.

However I had no further time for contemplation, since the reactions of the listeners appeared to be undesirable to the speaker, and I suddenly found myself peering up into the underside of *Emi*'s shoe. In this moment of terror I found myself observing in slow motion the various remnants of human civilisation flattened into sole of this woman's footwear; a splintered cartwheel, a pair of twisted cannons, and even an inn sign I fancied I recognised. Omnipresent in this documentation of destruction were horrible stains of red, reduced to insignificance by the immense proportions of the body that silhouetted the shoe, filling the entire sky.

Her foot came down with decisive, ruthless suddenness. The neighbouring house exploded into fragments and dust, and the

thunderous thump very nearly relieved our abode of the precious roof, and resulted in a trembling of the ground that could be understandably mistaken for an earthquake.

I am unaware of a third utterance, since my ears were ringing with the shock. When I rubbed the dust from my eyes I instinctively wriggled back to the gap and looked up at *Emi's* figure. She was completely disinterested in the destruction she had caused simply to emphasise whatever point she had been making. Suddenly the foot rose once more, and I realised it was all over.

I cannot explain why, but in this instant, instead of contemplating my fate or even commencing a prayer, I writhed and shot my gaze towards *Meri*, the closest of the other Venusians. I became aware of the darkness enveloping the grounds around the house but I dared not look up into the bottom of *Emi's* toes, which seemed were to become my executioner. I am convinced that I caught *Meri* momentarily glancing at our house, and then she barked a response, its grave tone uncharacteristic of her otherwise consistent joviality.

\* \* \*

I long to discover the meaning of the word that *Meri* uttered to save my life, whether knowingly or not.

All I can conclude from these strange occurrences, and the same conclusion to which I came when the heel of *Emi's* shoe returned slowly and undestructively to the ground only yards in front of my concealed figure, is that there was some kind of connection between *Meri* and me. Perhaps it was real, or perhaps it is more likely that this was the explanation to which my fatigued – perhaps hallucinating – mind came, under the stress of my unimaginable situation.

## CHAPTER TEN

STIPULATIONS ON THE NATURE OF VENUS'  
INHABITANTS

I have mentioned that it became my purpose to study the invaders of our Earth. This was not without aim nor result, and if I may I will presently indulge in some of my deliberations, and allow the reader to draw his own conclusions.

The events described in the previous chapters occurred very early in the period of my imprisonment in the half-destroyed house, and since the following days were relatively uneventful, with the obvious exception of the repeated horrific consumption of fellow humans by the indifferent young women, I spent much of the cold dark nights contemplating the observations that I had made during the days.

The first and most obvious question was why the Venusian invaders were all female. I was certain that males must exist on Venus, since the females were biologically identical to humans. That is, nothing in nature is without a reason, and therefore one can infer that if they have the same biological features as human females, these features must perform the same functions. For example, a woman is not endowed with bosoms simply to entertain males; they are employed in the nourishing of infants. Therefore, since Venusian women clearly have bosoms, then they too must be for nourishing infants. Thus it follows that there must be Venusian males. Where then, were the males?

The only undeniable fact regarding this question is that they were not invading Earth with the females. Since there must be a reason for their absence, and since the weapon that the Venusian women wielded against us most proficiently was their

overpowering size, then it may be reasonably inferred that the men of Venus are not in possession of this said weapon; that is, that they are smaller than the females. A reason for this can only be speculated. For example, it was mentioned that the surface of Venus is uninhabitably hot, yet the depths of its rocks may be cooler. If the Venusians live at varying depths underground, then over thousands of years of evolution, the size of their bodies might be moulded to the corresponding magnitude of gravity that they endure (that is, a being living precisely in the centre of the planet would experience none, since it is cancelled out in all directions, while a being dwelling close to the surface would experience almost the same strength of gravity as we Earthlings). However this would entail the deliberate separation of the sexes, the men near to the surface and the women near to the core, which I am unable to adequately explain. Further hypothesis would be purely conjecture.

I must admit that I am fascinated by the notion of a society in which one half of the race may be at least considerably larger than the other, and for the sake of passing time by considering this entertaining idea during my lonely, bleak hours, particularly at night, I assumed that the genders were not separated but in fact lived together. The relatively minor differences in the size of Earthmen leads to enough complications, such as the need for different sizes of clothing, hats and shoes, yet what if the population varied to the extent that the smallest beings were no bigger than, say, the finger-length of the largest? Clothing would become difficult but not impossible, but what of such ordinary devices such as doors, cupboards, windows and beds? Venusian doors might have a quaint little *Gentlemen's Entrance* tucked down beside the large *Ladies' Entrance*, but what if there were sizes in-between? How could a set of crockery expect to be able to cater for all sizes of guests, when a boy might be small enough to accidentally tumble into a girl's soup? Would a man's bed be with his wife, plunged somewhere under the covers, or on her bedside table? Furthermore, it would be fatally dangerous to employ beasts

of burden, since they might tread on the smaller beings – but then again, horses might not even be needed since a lady could carry a man with her in her pocket, but the problem remains that the smaller sex is still just as likely to be tread upon, and though a victim may find it somewhat more agreeable to find himself under the giant foot of a lady than a horse, it would be no less fatal. The thought of a lady coming in from the cold and grumbling as she peeled unfortunate men from the underside of her shoes made me cackle in a sad, desperate way; the first trace of humour –albeit twisted and black– that I had experienced for more than a week.

While blocking the curate from my mind I lay in the dark and giggled to myself in a manner that I am loathe to say was almost deranged, while I entertained these comical thoughts, continuing my fanciful conception of Venusian society.

In particular I cackled at the suggestion that the larger gender might regularly misplace their tiny counterparts. *Elisabeth dear, have you seen Harold? Could you have left him in the pocket of your frock?* I almost laughed. *Alice, come here. What have you done with your father? Oh dear... I might have packed him away with my other toys.* This made me wonder how procreation could possibly function, wounding my fantasy somewhat. I then realised that there would have to exist such a vast social divide as to render any form of society comparable to ours completely impractical, if not impossible. That is, females would wield so much infinite power over males that society would not function. On Earth, males are on average physically stronger than women but there exists enough mutual respect to maintain our way of life. How would a society function, in which one half of the beings necessary for reproduction were merely playthings for the other half? My mind cast to the praying mantis insect, the females of which devour the males after fertilisation. Perhaps on Venus, after whatever grotesque, ill-proportioned procreation ritual was performed, the woman would lift her partner to her mouth and with a sympathetic smile lower him between her lips and swallow him, just as I observed them devouring the inhabitants of Earth. Furthermore,

there could exist no fair form of justice, since a woman could not be held accountable for destruction she might accidentally or even deliberately reap on a man, since the inequality would be far too vast to be made fair through the use of law. For example, a squabble between siblings on Earth is no matter of consequence whatsoever, but how could such an insignificant event be handled if the result were that the sister crushed her brother in her hand simply out of frustration? How could this hypothetical society survive if every woman were severely punished for every man she inadvertently extinguished? The only solution would be to reduce the severity of the punishment to the extent that it was barely an inconvenience, which in turn would reduce the worth of men's lives and essentially women would be able to do with them what they wished.

After this sobering contemplation I was again sullen. Covering my eyes in the darkness, I reverted back to my more humorous, light-hearted fantasy. *Oh dear, I've been searching for James all afternoon and he's been stuck here in my petticoat pocket the whole time!*

\* \* \*

On the following night I resumed my contemplation, with the assumption that for the above reasons a mixed society of genders of grossly different proportions was unlikely. Therefore I considered that the sexes were indeed separated, and while I was pondering what possible reason could cause the two genders of a species to be deliberately or accidentally isolated, I struck upon a notion that might not be altogether far from the truth.

If we assume that the eventual effect of evolution under differing gravitational conditions was known to the Venusians some aeons in the past, it may be possible that the men were *deliberately* (whether also willingly or not is another question) allocated to inhabit the upper layers where gravity would cause them to achieve only fractional statures compared to the women, in

order that the effect of their inevitable warring, which may be common to Venusian males as it is to Earth males, would have a reduced impact on the civilisation and perhaps also on the planet. Perhaps it was due to ancient vast conflicts that the surface of Venus became scarred and forced the survivors underground, at which point the separation of the sexes was initiated.

Satisfied with this somewhat sounder theory I again began to entertain myself with fantasies of this surreal yet possible world. I imagined vast underground caverns lit with phosphorous and shores washed by strange lakes, such as the Lidenbrock Sea conceived by the great M. Verne. Men piled into canoes, boats or ships, and bore down on the citadels of rivals. Then a female from the cavern beneath would intervene; perhaps a mediator of peace, or perhaps not. Perhaps they didn't care which wars the insignificant males fought. Perhaps it was simply an inquisitive girl who had ascended to explore the male world she had read about. She would wade into the midst and lift a ship from the waters, the men within looking out helplessly as their cannons pointed uselessly at the all-powerful female figure. She could sink ships with a brush of her hand. At this time I was not aware of the disaster on the coast and the fate of the *Thunder Child*, and thus I was merely amused by my imaginings. The girl would turn her attention to the fortress and step over its walls, scattering soldiers and raining water down over the confused armies. She could decide the fate of the entire war simply at her whim... or maybe her mother would call her back for dinner and she'd have to destroy the armies of men next time.

\* \* \*

## CHAPTER ELEVEN

## THE DEATH OF THE CURATE

The next event of note occurred approximately a week into the period of inhabitancy of the house. The curate was viewing the giant Venusians at the time, since he had begun to create a fatally dangerous raucous in order to have his turn at the gap in the debris. I sat on the floor of the kitchen in a small spot of sunlight that broke through the roof, trying to shake off the chill with its feeble warmth.

I was first aware of a gasp from the curate, and before I had time to enquire as to this outburst there was a deafening crash and a thunderous thump, followed by a shaking of the earth that was familiar to us by this time, but larger in magnitude than anything short of the most vicious stomp. I instantly thought, as I cowered on the trembling floor, that *Emi* had once more exerted her power by destroying the neighbouring building under her foot, and my instant reaction was to scramble for the cellar, but the inaction of the curate told me there was no danger quite so imminent.

“What is it?” I whispered.

“She fell over.”

“Who?”

“The young one,” he said shakily yet with an atypical level of calmness.

“Fell over?”

“Yes, just toppled, like a tree,” he replied in annoyance.

“Did she trip on something? A house maybe?”

“No, she just fainted!” exclaimed the curate with the frustration of someone explaining something that they feel should be common knowledge. I pushed past him and seized the viewing-hole.

The sight was quite singular. Her curvaceous, spectacular body stretched wide to either side behind the crater. She lay amongst the ruins of the town; some intact cottages lay between our vantage point and her unconscious figure, but through the rising cloud of dust and fragments settling after her explosive collision with the unfortunate village, I could make out a row of houses that were dissected by her falling arm and a structure crushed under her chest. Her hips had struck another house and I noted numerous unidentifiable wrecks under her thighs and calves. Her hip rose like a magnificent mountain above the entire catastrophic landscape. Thunderous thuds comprised the fanfare announcing the arrival of another giant female and I looked up to see the slender form of *Meri* striding over the trees to her assistance, and not particularly carefully at that, since I saw three or four entire trees uprooted and sent airborne by her momentous, swinging steps.

The elder tended to the unconscious girl for a minute or so before she regained consciousness, at which point she rolled to a sitting position, yet another explosion of dust puffing out from underneath her backside, marking the obliteration of some unlucky structure. *Meri* seemed to scold her as if it were her fault because, for example, she hadn't been eating properly. This instant assessment of mine proved to be exactly correct, as *Meri* procured for her a half dozen of the trees which I knew to be the most distasteful to them (oak and elm), which I'm certain indicated to them that they must be the healthiest, and plunged her hand into a basket of humans, withdrawing a closed fist full of men who protruded, dangling from between her fingers. Several fell to their deaths from the enormous height of her waist as she stepped to the younger girl, depositing her fist-full of humanity into the latter's lap. *Meri* then straightened and for the first time exhibited an expression deviating from confidence. I had trouble deciding whether it was frustration or despair on that beautiful face to which I had become accustomed, though in any case I assumed at the time that the cause was simply the younger girl's misfortune.

\* \* \*

Our rations were at that time worryingly low. On the following day I was observing *Beli*'s somewhat sluggish comings and goings, when I noticed something; or more accurately, the lack of something. The curate was not pestering me at my side, and as soon as I was conscious of this my heart sank and I dashed into the cellar.

“Good lord, stop you fool!” I barked at the dim sight of the idiotic man wolfing down some bread, a bottle of burgundy in his hand. I grabbed at it and there was a short tussle, during which the bottle fell to the floor and broke. I desisted, telling him of the need for discipline. I divided the food in the pantry, into rations to last us ten days. I would not let him eat any more that day. In the afternoon he made a feeble effort to get at the food. I had been dozing, but in an instant I was awake. All day and all night we sat face to face, I weary but resolute, and he weeping and complaining of his immediate hunger. It was, I know, a night and a day, but to me it seemed –it seems now– an interminable length of time.

And so our widened incompatibility ended at last in open conflict. For two vast days we struggled in undertones and wrestling contests. There were times when I beat and kicked him madly, times when I cajoled and persuaded him, and once I tried to bribe him with the last bottle of burgundy, for there was a rain-water pump from which I could get water. But neither force nor kindness availed; he was indeed beyond reason. He would neither desist from his attacks on the food nor from his noisy babbling to himself. The rudimentary precautions to keep our imprisonment endurable he would not observe. Slowly I began to realise the complete overthrow of his intelligence, to perceive that my sole companion was a man insane.

From certain vague memories I am inclined to think my own mind began to wander at times. I had strange and hideous dreams of the Venusians; particularly of *Meri*, whenever I slept. It sounds

paradoxical, but I am inclined to think that the weakness and insanity of the curate warned me, braced me, and kept me a sane man.

On the following day he began to talk aloud instead of whispering, and nothing I could do would moderate his speech. Then he would suddenly revert to the matter of the food I withheld from him, praying, begging, weeping, at last threatening. He began to raise his voice – I prayed him not to. He perceived a hold on me; he threatened he would shout and bring the Venusians upon us. For a time that scared me; but I must confess that I had the strangest, most ridiculous longing for *Meri* to descend upon us and save me. But that day, at any rate, he did not attract the women's attention. He talked with his voice rising slowly, through the greater part of the following days; threats, entreaties, mingled with a torrent of half-sane and always frothy repentance for his vacant sham of God's service, such as made me pity him. Then he slept awhile, and began again with renewed strength, so loudly that I was forced to make him desist.

“Be still!” I implored.

He rose to his knees, for he had been sitting in the darkness near the copper.

“I have been still too long,” he said, in a tone that I was certain would leak into the outside air, “and now I must bear my witness. Woe unto this unfaithful city! Woe! Woe! Woe! Woe! Woe! To the inhabitants of the earth by reason of the other voices of the trumpet—”

“Shut up!” I said, rising to my feet, and in a terror lest the Venusians should hear us. “For God's sake—”

“No,” shouted the curate, at the top of his voice, standing likewise and extending his arms. “Speak! The word of the Lord is upon me!”

In three strides he was at the door leading into the kitchen. I put out my hand and felt the meat chopper hanging to the wall. In a flash I was after him. I was fierce with fear. Before he was halfway across the kitchen I had overtaken him. With one last touch of

humanity I turned the blade back and struck him with the butt. He went headlong forward and lay stretched on the ground. I stumbled over him and stood panting. He lay still.

My blood ran cold with fear. *Have I killed him? Did the Venusians hear him?* A thousand panicked worries ran through my mind and I dashed to the gap to conclude the agonising suspense of not knowing whether the girls had heard him. The instant I pressed my eye to the hole between the planks I was privy to the awful sight of the inside of a giant, feminine hand, with a vast body looming in the heavens behind it as it reached directly for me. I fell back in terror and struck the opposite wall just as the debris caved in precisely where I had been crouching and a huge rounded mass pressed halfway into the room, with a blade-like fingernail half a foot thick piercing rubble and walls alike. This was the anonymous female's giant thumb, and as the fingernail was on the underside I perceived that her fingers must have been pressed onto the roof of the house high above, in order that the girl could simply pry the walls off the building. As she applied force her thumb tore upwards through the house, lifting the ceiling above me into an impossible slope before the materials gave way and split, raining chalky fragments upon me as half the ceiling lifting away in her hand and the rest clunked back into a dilapidated yet still supported position, to my fortune, since this fragment was the only thing that blocked the view of my tiny body from the omnipotent girl looking down upon the tiny humans she was hunting.

As her hand disappeared into the air the remains of the room were flooded with brilliant sunlight, starkly illuminating the helpless figure of the curate and despite my hatred for him I felt deathly sick at the prospect he was about to endure. Upon seeing my own feet bathed in light I scrambled into a standing position, pressing myself against the wall, as far into the shadowy corner as possible, and with terrible fear I glanced out to determine whether I had been seen. With the concealing walls and debris gone I looked upon the knees of the giant female, planted into the ground twenty yards apart and no more than fifty yards away. Her thighs rose into

the heavens and the rest of her body loomed high above and was concealed from my view, except for her feet, which were visible far away in the background behind her knees. Off to my right I saw half a house rain down from the sky, and then there was a great movement of the shadows sweeping across the ground outside, and I looked up to see momentous wobbles of her tower-like thighs. Then the tones of colour on her legs began changing as they changed angle; lowering to the earth as she moved to a lower kneeling position. The seam of her skirt descended into view like a ship's sail being opened and slowly began to form the roof of a cavern between her legs. The view of the countryside through her thighs disappeared as the back of her skirt passed down the far side like a great curtain. The movement was slow and momentous, and in my precipitous position it was excruciating. In the cavern, where the inside of her thighs were walls and her skirt was the ceiling, the blackness of her crotch finally came into view and formed enticing feminine curves where it met the top of her sleek, rounded thighs at the end of the tunnel, and both despite and due to my imminent fate I gazed with marvel at the beautiful form until the bright shapes of her thumb and forefinger descended in chilling proximity into view.

My heart froze as I watched the fingernail of the finger, which was as wide as the trunk of a great oak, mash the floorboards as it grazed along the floor to the curate's immobile body, where it scooped him, tipping him, off the ground so that his tiny limbs could be grasped between the large tips of her digits. Her thumb clamped inwards as his figure was effortlessly tossed up and I gasped with horror when I saw his eyes flick open. He was unaware for a moment and I could almost sense the thoughts washing back into his insane mind. I knew that he was about to resume his fanatical preaching when his lower leg was pinned between her immense thumb and forefinger and when these powerful female fingers lifted gently into the air he was torn upwards and not words were uttered from his mouth but a chilling scream.

He disappeared into the air.

I was not even able to see the fate of the man, instead only large receding shadows playing over the ground, and I writhed in agonising pity and guilt. Her other arm was visible, resting on her knee, and I knew that the hand containing the curate was high above her mouth. Suddenly there was a sight to intensify my agony. I caught a glimpse of a flicker of moment and recognised his figure striking the billowing fabric stretched between her thighs. She had dropped him due to the loose grip she had achieved on just his one leg, and there was a brief change in the shape of the fabric roof of the cavern at the back of which her black underwear loomed, before the curate's figure, rolling down the incline between her legs, tumbled over the edge of her skirt. His figure landed between her thighs somewhere, concealed from my view by the remains of a garden fence, and there was another momentous action as her hand slid down between her legs to retrieve him. The girl must have bent to search for his body and I recognised the wavy locks of young *Beli* descending briefly into view.

I shut my eyes in agony during the fate of my unfortunate companion but in the blackness behind my eyelids I saw the vision of Patterson the baker tumbling into this girl's lips.

Thrusting my eyes away from this vision I realised instantly that this reprieve was my brief opportunity to escape her attention, and I fled into the scullery, glancing back to see her arm lowering back down to her knees after having delivered its human cargo to her mouth.

I backed into the furthest, darkest corner of the cellar but knew that she wouldn't be satisfied with the capture of just one man who couldn't alone have made the commotion that had attracted her fatal attention. This fear was proved correct when there was a vicious smashing of timber above. Suddenly light burst into the room and earth spilled to the floor as the opposite wall collapsed. I had chosen the most obvious hiding spot. I cringed with fright as a finger smashed through the ceiling, bringing the debris of the house down with it, before retracting through the

destruction it had made. In the vast open gap I saw the girl's face peering down without yet perceiving me, with a look of indifferent cruelty. Her face was angled upwards so that she looked down her nose directly at me and those fearful, glistening pink lips formed the thinnest trace of an idle, bored smile.

It was during the instant that her eyes scanned the bared cellar for my trembling figure, and while her fingers descended to destroy the last fragments of the house that comprised my last and only protection, that a voice echoed out over the land.

*"Beli!"*

As the girl turned to look over her shoulder, a face came into view far behind in the heavens. *Meri*.

My saviour.

I saw her lips move but my head was swimming and I didn't hear the words. Suddenly the giant figure of the younger girl was gone and I looked up at *Meri* from the torso upwards – she was distant enough that her lower body was concealed by the debris scattered around the ground above the cellar. Her hands were on her hips and she stared directly at me. Her body enlarged as she took a step towards me, until her form filled the entire gaping hole in the ceiling, from her head to her calves, her legs spread slightly apart in a dominating manner. I stared up at her figure from this acute angle, from my position between and barely fifty yards in front of her feet, with clashing feelings of relief, dread, humility and in a shocking manner, love. She stared precisely at me, but as with every encounter with this strange, giant, beautiful woman, I will never know whether she was looking at *me*. It was just as possible, and furthermore more likely, that she was scanning the cellar for a human snack. However, in my distressed state I was on the verge of falling on my knees at her mercy, when her head turned and her vast body was gone.

\* \* \*

## CHAPTER TWELVE

## THE STILLNESS

For three days I lay still in the back of the cellar, convinced that at any moment the young maiden *Beli* was to return to complete her investigation of the ruined house and discover me, helpless and doomed. I cowered behind a pile of coal, my face to the wall. I felt the intermittent thudding of their footsteps through the ground and saw the occasional dimming of the cellar as somewhere above me a giant female figure passed before the sun, but I was left alone.

On the third day however, I was struck by the stillness. From the moment I stirred from my restless, haunted sleep I was acutely aware of the lack of any noise other than my own nervous breathing. By midday I concluded to dare a peek from the wreck of the cellar.

The machines were there but no Venusians. It was exceedingly strange for me to look upon the scene without the concealment provided by the debris, to which I had become accustomed over my two weeks of imprisonment, and I crawled back into the hole in trembling nervousness. After an hour I returned to the surface, driven by the summation of what little courage I had left. I crept out of the house like a rat leaving its hiding place – a creature scarcely larger, an inferior animal, a thing that for any passing whim of our masters might be hunted and killed. Surely, if we have learned nothing else, this war has taught us pity – pity for those witless souls that suffer our dominion.

No giant girl towered over the horizon in any direction and I stood perfectly still. They were gone. I was suddenly without purpose; while they had dwelled by the crater I had at least been

occupied in observing them. Now that I was free there was a sudden emptiness.

After I remained motionless and somewhat stunned for at least a quarter of an hour, I slowly awoke from the daze and my thoughts returned once again to my wife in Leatherhead. I hadn't thought about her for at least a week. That world had seemed forgotten while trapped in the dark.

I stumbled blindly in the direction I presumed to be Londonwards, tripping over the strewn earth of the crater before I emerged on the other side and was taken aback at an utterly unexpected sight.

Rubble would have been perfectly normal; shattered houses, strewn debris perhaps. I wouldn't have been surprised to have seen flames flickering. But *snow* was unexpected. I rubbed my eyes and approached with suspicious caution to discover that the white matter that covered the countryside was not snow at all.

The White Weed is a most singular substance. It has the appearance of cobwebs and possesses similar adhesive qualities, though is as elastic as indiarubber and is insufferably difficult to cut. However it shies from fire as if it were a conscious and fearful being, and while it doesn't burn as such, it singses with a spine-chilling crackle as if it were screaming. Its scent is overpoweringly, chokingly sweet – strangely almost as if one were in intimate proximity with a woman. It was as if it were there to provide a subconscious reminder of the presence of the Venusian women, by convincing the brain that it were plunged into their sweet, deadly nearness. However its main purpose was clear. The White Weed was perfectly suited to snaring hapless, unfortunate human beings for later collection by the giant females that dominated the sky.

These qualities became apparent to me upon my first cautious experimentation with the foreign flora, and the insurmountable force exerted by the adhesive substance on the stick with which I had probed it convinced me immediately that I was not going to win my freedom by attempting to traverse the matted material.

Whether or not England still existed beyond the white fields of waist-high weed was completely unknown to me at this stage, yet I made my way around the rim of the crater in search of an exit.

The opening in the barrier was a wide path clearly created by a Venusian, with the White Weed trampled into the ground. There were odd streaks along the ground; twenty yards wide and a hundred long, as if the giant girl had been dragging her feet. It provided me with a comfortable escape from the crater and the worst that I suffered was a few of the sticky threads attaching themselves to my shabby trousers.

After only half a mile I encountered another object of great interest. It was a skirt; an immense skirt of the Venusians, and it had been discarded and was strewn, suspended, over half a dozen neighbouring houses (which were noticeably less damaged than those nearer the well-trodden area around the crater), and through the semi-transparent fabric the cottages appeared dim and ghostlike. I was puzzled as to the reason why the garment had been dispensed with and the thought struck me that the giant owner might be bathing nearby and my impulse was to flee, though the White Weed hemmed me in on both sides. Furthermore there was no river nearby large enough for the women to exploit. These doubts permitted a skerrick of curiosity to rise in me and I proceeded.

The feminine garment was suspended between the houses like a great circus tent and I entered the arena with a sense of wonder. The billowing fabric above gave a sense of being inside the garment and combined with the sweet feminine scent of the White Weed I suddenly found that I was visualising floating underneath *Meri's* skirt, somehow tied to her body. The image became lucid and I looked down her giant, swinging legs to see villages and towns pass underneath her strides, buildings exploding forwards at the touch of her momentous foot. I looked upwards and through the folds of the transparent fabric saw the underside of her bosom, protruding out above me like the overhang of a colossal balcony. The hallucination caused my head to swim and I

stumbled, falling to the ground, only the striking pain rousing me from my vision. I credit the hallucination to a poisonous effect of the White Weed's overpowering scent.

Hastening from the strange, dim world underneath the vast skirt, I quickly discovered a road, the barren surface of which provided a welcome hindrance to the White Weed and allowed me to proceed towards London, aiming to search for humanity on my way to Leatherhead, where there was the remote but pressing chance that I might find my wife healthy and safe.

Thankfully I discovered that the density of the White Weed lessened with increasing distance from the crater. I concluded that it might have been seeded at the Venusian encampment where I was imprisoned (it would provide excellent protection from nocturnal attacks) and have propagated outwards. On the road from Putney Hill to Wimbledon, from underneath the increasingly sparse matting of whiteness, which began to look like sporadic patches of melting snow revealing the muddy earth beneath, I began to take in the vestiges of the panicked London-wards rush upon the Venusian onslaught. There was a little two-wheeled cart inscribed with the name of Thomas Lobb, Greengrocer, New Malden, with a smashed wheel and an abandoned tin trunk; there was a straw hat trampled into the mud, and at the top of West Hill a lot of blood-stained glass about the overturned water trough. In a particularly large patch of uncovered earth beside the road I discovered a vast footprint preserved immaculately in the now-hardened mud. I was startled at the depth; the footprint was at least five yards deep. In the centre of the triangular toe-end of the shoe was a man's body, and I wondered which of the women to whom I had grown so accustomed had been the culprit. The mud must have been quite soft as he had not been crushed, but smothered to death. This was the first human I had seen since the death of the curate and I was moved by the overpowering loneliness. Descending the gentle slope which had been created by the rising arch in her shoe, I hacked at the clay before the unfortunate man and planted a small cross of two sticks bound roughly with strings of bark. I beheld my

meagre tribute for ten minutes and my despair grew at the lack of response – I wanted to at least hear a bird chirp in recognition of my deed but I was alone in the utter stillness.

## CHAPTER THIRTEEN

## THE MAN ON PUTNEY HILL

Following a cold night of starvation while occupying the empty ruin of a barn, I resumed my weary journey and paused on the edge of Wimbledon Common with a strange sensation of being watched. And presently, turning suddenly, I beheld something crouching amid a clump of bushes. I stood regarding this. I made a step towards it, and it rose up and became a man armed with a cutlass. I approached him slowly, filled with elation at the conclusion of the desolate loneliness, despite his obvious hostility. He stood silent and motionless, regarding me.

As I drew nearer I perceived he was dressed in clothes as dusty and filthy as my own; he looked, indeed, as though he had been dragged through a culvert. His black hair fell over his eyes, and his face was dark and dirty and sunken, so that at first I did not recognise him. There was a red cut across the lower part of his face.

“Stop!” he cried, when I was within ten yards of him, and I stopped. His voice was hoarse. “Where do you come from?”

“I come from Mortlake,” I said, “I was buried near the pit the Venusians made about their cylinder. I have worked my way out and escaped.”

“There is no food about here,” he said, “this is my country. All this hill down to the river, and back to Clapham, and up to the edge of the common. There is only food for one. Which way are you going?”

I answered slowly.

“I don't know,” I said, “I have been buried in the ruins of a house thirteen or fourteen days. I don't know what has happened.”

He looked at me doubtfully, then started, and looked with a changed expression. He shot out a pointing finger.

“It is you,” said he; “the man from Woking. And you weren't killed at Weybridge?”

I recognised him at the same moment.

“You are the artilleryman who came into my garden!”

“Good luck!” he said. “We are lucky ones! Fancy you!”

He put out a hand, and I took it.

“I thought you were surely crushed by that vicious woman,” I said, recalling the last moments of our companionship.

“I crawled up a drain,” he said. “But they didn't kill everyone. And after they went away I got off towards Walton across the fields. But... it's not sixteen days altogether – and your hair is grey.”

“Have you seen any Venusians?” I enquired. “Since I escaped the horizon has been empty.”

“I saw them on their way towards London,” he replied gravely, “though they were—”

He paused, searching for words.

“Strange. Alone – one by one they went. They didn't even stomp and kill.”

I went on into a little bower, and sat down.

“It is all over with humanity,” he said glumly “Aren't you satisfied it's up with humanity? I am. We're down; we're beat.”

I stared. Strange as it may seem, I had not arrived at this fact; a fact perfectly obvious as soon as he spoke. I had still held a vague hope; rather, I had kept a lifelong habit of mind. He repeated his words, “We're beat.” They carried absolute conviction.

“It's all over,” he said, “they've made their footing good and crippled the greatest power in the world. They've walked over us. And these are only pioneers. They kept on coming. These green stars – I've seen none these five or six days, but I've no doubt they're falling somewhere every night. Nothing's to be done. We're under! We're beat!”

I made him no answer. I sat staring before me, trying in vain to devise some countervailing thought.

“This isn’t a war,” said the artilleryman. “It never was a war, any more than there’s war between man and ants.”

Suddenly I recalled the night in the observatory.

“After the tenth shot they fired no more – at least, until the first cylinder came.”

“How do you know?” said the artilleryman. I explained. He thought a moment before concluding; “something wrong with the gun. But what if there is? They’ll get it right again. And even if there’s a delay, how can it alter the end? It’s just men and ants. There’s the ants builds their cities, live their lives, have wars, revolutions, until the men want them out of the way, and then they go out of the way. That’s what we are now – just ants. Only—”

“Yes,” I said.

“We’re edible ants.”

We sat looking at each other.

“And what will they do with us?” I said.

“That’s what I’ve been thinking,” he said, “that’s what I’ve been thinking. After Weybridge I went south – thinking. I saw what was up. Most of the people were hard at it squealing and exciting themselves. But I’m not so fond of squealing. I’ve been in sight of death once or twice; I’m not an ornamental soldier, and at the best and worst, death... it’s just death. And it’s the man that keeps on thinking comes through. I saw everyone tracking away south. Says I, ‘food won’t last this way,’ and I turned right back. I went for the huge women like a sparrow goes for man. *Nearer* to them! While all round” –he waved a hand to the horizon– “they’re starving in heaps, bolting, scuffling with each other...”

He saw my face, remembering my plight regarding my wife and halted awkwardly.

“No doubt lots who had money have gone away to France,” he said. He seemed to hesitate whether to apologise, met my eyes, and went on: “There’s food all about here. Canned things in shops; wines, spirits, mineral waters; and the water mains and drains are

empty. Well, I was telling you what I was thinking. ‘Here’s intelligent beings, these girls,’ I said, ‘and it seems they want us for food. First, they’ll smash us up; ships, machines, guns, cities, all the order and organisation. All that will go. If we were the size of ants we might pull through. But we’re not. We’re big enough to notice – big enough to make it worthwhile stomping us out. Eh?’”

I assented.

“I’ve thought it out. Very well, then. Next... at present we’re caught as we’re wanted. A girl has only to go a few miles to get a crowd on the run. And I saw one, one day, out by Wandsworth, picking houses to pieces and routing among the wreckage. But they won’t keep on doing that. As soon as they’ve settled all our guns and ships, and smashed our railways, and done all the things they are doing over there, they will begin catching us systematic, picking the best and storing us in cages and things. That’s what they will start doing in a bit. Lord! They haven’t begun on us yet. Don’t you see that?”

“Not begun!” I exclaimed. The artilleryman had not seen what I had. He hadn’t observed the Venusian mealtimes. However I realised he was right on one point – they were only in and around London so far. They hadn’t started on the rest of humanity yet.

“Not begun. Cities, nations, civilisation, progress – it’s all over. That game’s up. We’re beat.”

“But if that is so, what is there to live for?”

The artilleryman looked at me for a moment.

“There won’t be any more blessed concerts for a million years or so; there won’t be any Royal Academy of Arts, and no nice little feeds at restaurants. If it’s amusement you’re after, I reckon the game is up. If you’ve got any drawing-room manners or a dislike to eating peas with a knife or dropping aitches, you’d better chuck ‘em away. They ain’t no further use.”

“You mean—”

“I mean that men like me are going on living for the sake of the breed. I tell you, I’m grim set on living. And if I’m not mistaken, you’ll show what insides you’ve got, too, before long.

We aren't going to be exterminated. And I don't mean to be caught either, and tamed and fattened and bred like a thundering ox. Ugh! Fancy the inside of one of those girl's mouths!"

"And what precisely do you mean to do?"

"I'm going on, under their feet. I've got it planned; I've thought it out. We men are beat. We don't know enough. We've got to learn before we've got a chance – learn how to beat them! And we've got to live and keep independent while we learn. See! That's what has to be done."

I stared, stirred profoundly by the man's resolution.

"Good lord, you're right!"

He grinned and resumed his practised speech.

"We're going to learn to live beneath them; beneath these girls... right under their noses, right under their feet! Around here there are hundreds of miles of drain; empty, clean as soon as it rains. There'll be none of those white cobweb-weeds down there! We'll make trips to the surface to collect books and things, and men like you will teach the children. Not poems and rubbish – science!" I listened intently, captivated. He continued, his excitement rising with every word. "We'll build houses and shops, and we'll play each other at cricket! We can build more cannons – we know those ladies are not indestructible– and we'll work out how to hide them better; protect ourselves from that smoke of theirs. Maybe some day we'll work out what makes them so big and we'll show them that some giant Earth girls can do a thing or two!"

After his speech he beckoned me to join him in celebration. He had found a bottle of sparkling wine and we dined and drank it, following our meal with a game of cards. There we sat, on the brink of the destruction of humanity, with no prospect but a horrible death between those women's teeth, yet we played cards. It was after one of several jokes and a hearty laugh that my thoughts went to my old life; to my wife, and to the world that was now gone. I suddenly felt a traitor to my kind.

The next morning the artilleryman showed me the tunnel he had begun digging towards the fulfilment of his plan. It was scarcely ten yards long and was still simply a trench. I could have dug that much in a day. At the sight of numerous discarded bottles of the sparkling wine I realised the true state of the man's conviction, and fathomed the gulf between his dreams and his ability.

That afternoon I left him, telling him –truthfully– that I was going to look for my wife.

## CHAPTER FOURTEEN

## DEAD LONDON

Upon parting from the artilleryman I was once again plunged into the unutterable, lonely silence. At the corner of the lane that runs to Putney Bridge station I found a man lying. I could get nothing from him but curses and furious lunges at my head. I think I should have stayed by him but for the brutal expression of his face.

I found sour, stale food in a baker's shop at Fulham. Except for the obvious signs of the plundering of wine and provision shops it may have been a quiet Sunday in the City; all shops closed and the streets still. Scattered on the ground before a jeweller's shop were some gold chains and trinkets, which I didn't bother to touch – there was scarcely a point.

The farther I penetrated into London, the profounder grew the stillness; the solitude was no different than in the country, but its effect was twofold since these empty streets should have been bustling with life and noise.

It was in South Kensington that I first heard her.

She was singing. The words were foreign, the melody extra-terrestrial, but it was indescribably sweet, despite the faltering in her voice. I knew it was *Meri*. Her failing voice suddenly gave the city life.

Her song emanated from somewhere in Regent's Park, and in desperate loneliness I headed in this direction. Each note lifted the pain, remorse and horror from my battered heart. I felt light. My weary footsteps were replaced by energetic, almost desperate strides as I neared her. She was not yet visible; she must have been sitting; perhaps filling a street and resting upon a building. The origin of her voice seemed to change direction as its sweet melody

echoed through the avenues of this dead, desolate city, leading me until I finally burst out into the open upon the Thames and beheld the sight of this giant woman who was the cause of all my grief but simultaneously the saviour of my tormented soul.

She was in a terrible, haphazard position; half her body was plunged into the water; one leg rose out of the river and was strewn over the Tower Bridge, her other foot smashed through a building's façade on the opposite side of the Thames, the wrecked shape of a boat pressed under her calf. Her arms were thrown back out of the water along the riverbanks on either side and her head swayed as she sang those sweet notes. Her voice now was all-encompassing; the only sound on the Earth.

An insane resolve possessed me. I would die and end it. And I would save myself even the trouble of killing myself. I marched on recklessly towards this Titan, this girl, who seemed to have become the only being in my life.

I marched over the bridge, underneath the calf of the enormous leg that arched over it. I did not falter in this horrifying proximity to the woman who was going to take my life. Suddenly I was in the light on the other side of her leg and was looking over the railing of the bridge up at her face, which was higher than I was even on the bridge. Her half-submerged body was a vast plain of whiteness that loomed under the surface and her bare breasts formed two large, round protrusions into the water.

Suddenly she saw me, and her voice seemed to trail away. The silence hit like a clap of thunder. Our eyes were fixed; her giant beautiful eyes and –to her– my barely visible dots of colour on a miniature man's face. I can't describe the emotions that I saw in that face, but for one unmistakable look of pain. I saw thousands of thoughts run behind those eyes, until finally, after what could have been a second or an hour, I saw her face settle with resolve. At first I assumed she had concluded to end my life, and I waited for her hand to rise and take me, but then a new expression came across her huge, precious features. Relief. A weak smile widened and only then did I notice the paleness of her lips. I saw in those

eyes a calm happiness. I was about to shout and demand her to claim me; end my suffering, but in that expression I knew she was dying.

Her arms moved, propping herself up with an exhausting, straining, momentous effort, and even while she slid her shoulders into the water she never took her eyes off my tiny figure. The wrecked boat rolled over as she pulled one foot into the river, and then a shadow passed over me and there was a piercing squeal of steel as she dragged her leg off the bridge. I didn't even glance up to watch the damage nor to protect myself from the descending bulk of her leg – my gaze was fixed to hers. *Meri* laid her hands on the opposite banks and pulled herself with a calm, relieved resolution away from me and towards the sea.

I heard a sound which I realised to be my own voice, and saw my arm reaching out. Then her head, protruding out of the water and completely out of proportion with the belittled bridges and buildings around it, disappeared from view. She was gone.

## CHAPTER FIFTEEN

## WRECKAGE

Somehow I already knew that *Meri* was the last one – the war was over; the Venusians were gone.

Later I would realise, by piecing the pieces together, that it was the most basic element of our Earth that was our saviour; a part of our lives that we don't even know is there, and ironically it is the very same factor that gives our bodies the diminutive stature that allowed the Venusians to destroy us with their unlimited advantage in size.

Gravity. The moment the giant Venusians arrived, their bodies were subjected to the pervading force which compresses our flesh-and-blood beings into the tiny creatures that we are. The tallest men on Earth grow with weak hearts but can survive despite this, but these colossal women came here, unprepared for the immense gravity that is absent in their caves within the planet Venus. It pulled at their limbs and their organs while they strode over our towns, it sucked the very life from them downwards into the ground.

While I was trapped in the house by their encampment they had slowly departed under the painful pressure, heading towards the ocean or the river, where their giant bodies could attain a reprieve from the incessant pain of being slowly crushed by their own weight. *Meri* was the last. She had lain there in the soothing water until her time was right, and joined her comrades in the sea.

I am not certain what occurred after she abandoned me.

I awoke in Albert Hall, which was one of many places of refuge for the scattered survivors who had slowly emerged from the woodwork of the countryside just as I had. As soon as I was able, I caught the train to Woking. It was one of the first lines to

resume operation and limped along damaged track, stopping twice to change to carriages on the other side of destroyed bridges, but it carried a precious load of relieved, weary humanity.

Seeking my house at Maybury Hill was not difficult despite the terrain being a smashed, scattered version of itself, since it was in one of only several rows of houses still standing. I entered with a combination of feelings, but mostly relief and terrible dread. When I staggered into the front room, my heart rose to my throat at the sight of my wife.

Our gazes met with an indescribable emotion reflected on both our faces.

“I knew... I knew—” she stammered, before the tears began rolling down her cheeks, and she stumbled into my trembling arms.

## EPILOGUE

There is one more piece of my story that cannot go untold.

The weeks following my return to our house in Maybury Hill were times of mourning and consolidation. These weeks saw the gradual return of many other residents, some of whom arrived with relief at finding their home standing, others discovering a pile of debris in the bottom of a footprint. Some came not knowing the fate of their family, as did I. Not to return was of course the poor, unfortunate Patterson the baker.

However, his daughter did return.

Upon sight of the fair young maiden I was seized with inexorable terror. After having just achieved a conclusion to this terrible experience in which I had endured the most dreadful horrors executed at the hands of the young giant *Beli*, to see her likeness approaching me when I was in a state of necessary respite, was a load too much for me to bear.

Witnesses have said that I uttered a terrible, inexplicable shriek and collapsed to the ground, frightening the poor, innocent, and now fatherless girl to tears.

Over time I realised that no other resident of Maybury Hill had witnessed the youngest Venusian and survived – otherwise they might have reacted precisely as uncontrollably as I did, upon seeing her look-alike. Twice while on trips to London I noticed a man become startled at the sight of her face, and I guessed its reason. One of them backed away nervously and was almost struck by a hansom.

However I have jumped ahead without elaborating. The reason I know about these events in London is that my wife and I adopted her. Her real name is Jennifer and we love her as much as we do our own son.

Her likeness to the giant invader I have never confided to anyone. My collapse upon sight of her in those first days back at Maybury Hill was attributed to stress, which of course it was, but I never admitted the real cause. Of course my love for my adopted daughter is far stronger than the connection of her likeness to the horrible events I witnessed, and naturally we live as a happy family, the sight of *Beli* vaulted away with many memories I wish to suppress. However, every now and then, a particular movement that Jennifer makes might arouse in me an old, buried terror. She once slid an olive into her mouth with an idle, casual smile, and as –before my eyes– the shape of the olive became a tiny, writhing man sliding over her lips, I jolted with fright and was forced to retire to my bedroom in order to calm my beating heart, which for the first time in many months had experienced a sudden pang of terror akin to that of my time in imprisonment.

However, a few startling hallucinations once in a while are nothing compared to the joy that my beautiful adopted daughter brings to our family during the long rebuilding of our civilisation.

THE END