



He who sows wind...

*A Captain Future Novel
by Claudia*



HE WHO SOWS WIND

Chapter I

in which Ezra Gurney is honoured, someone feels treated unfair, the evening for Joan and Captain Future ends entirely different than expected, a determined officer of the planetary police brings the government into discredit and New York gets caught in danger.

Our story starts in New York, the capital of the Solar System. Tonight here takes place an honouring gala of the planetary police. Deserved agents shall be honoured within this scope. Below them is Marshall Ezra Gurney, who will be credited for twentyfive working years and special merits. One of his friends and close confidant of the planetary police is also invited: Captain Future. Though he had been able to accept last minute and so he had landed with the Cosmoliner on the top of the Federal Office Building.

When he opened the front-hood, one of the guards securing the roof of the building came up to him.

“Good evening, Captain Future! What a pleasure that you could arrange to come after all. Marshall Gurney will be pleased.”

“Yes, I finally managed it last minute. And thank you for letting me land on the roof exceptionally.” The guard laughed at him patronizing.

“Well, for you... Besides there is a pretty bunch of pressmen disporting over the main entrance...” Captain Future just wanted to return something, wenn a second space glider came in to land. Out of it got police President Anderson himself, accompanied by two broad-shouldered bodyguards.

“My goodness, what’s just up down there? These pressmen behave like bloodhounds! Ah, Captain Future, what a pleasure. Come on, let’s hurry, I’m late anyway.”

Anderson stepped forward fast, his securitymen close behind him. When they reached the hall, immediately Andersons PR-Manager rushed up to the police President. Because of his delay she seemed already quite upset, as she greeted Captain Future only by a nodding.

“Good evening, Mr. Anderson, finally! I’m afraid we have to make some modifications on your speech. Please excuse us...” And so both disappeared in the turmoil followed on the heels by the securitymen. Captain Future looked around for Ezra but couldn’t discover him anywhere. A waitress floated past him and offered champagne to him. He took a glass and at this moment someone lay a hand strongly on his shoulder.

“Captain Future, I just wanted to tow you into the bar. So I was well one second to late.”

Ezra Gurney laughed roaringly and seemed in best temper. They heartily shook hands and Ezra inquired about the other Future-Men.

“Grag and Otho are just quite busy helping Professor Simon with different projects.” Ezra and the Captain still talked a while but Future caught himself searching the crowd around him for a blond tuft of hair on an red uniform.

“Tell me Ezra, are you all wearing your gala-uniform tonight?”

“God forbid, no!” Ezra answered laughing. “They only compel the ones who are to enter the stage tonight. And I am glad, too, when I can get out of this stuff again. Or how do you feel in your suit?”

Future grimaced and made a deprecating gesture whereas he unfortunately pushed a lady talking next to

him. Immediately he wanted to excuse but was speechless at once when he realized who was standing on front of him. She wore a lilac-colored, off-the-shoulder dress made of dimly shimmering fabric, the blond curls framed her face enchantingly, decent make up, no adornment but a delicate watch. Gorgeous! rushed into his mind.

“Oh... Good Evening, Joan... Nice to meet you again. Please excuse my awkwardness.”

She had been standing backwards to him all the time and he hadn't realized her! Ezra looked a little embarrassed when he became aware of his mistake.

“Ah, excuse me please... Somehow I thought, you both had already met tonight. Joan was that nice to accompany me...”

But Future had not really listened. He looked at Joan on whose cheeks a rosy touch had lain and on her neck he could see the pulse beat.

“I'm pleased to see you again, too. We'd already thought you wouldn't come anymore, Captain.”

“But I could never have done this to Ezra.” he answered good humored.

“Come on, let us sit down before I'm going to stumble over further social conventions.” Ezra sighed and lead his friends to a table reserved for them. Finally the PR-Manager of the police President entered the stage under applause and turned over to the audience.

“Dear guests, regarded representatives of the media, thank you very much, for following the invitation of the police headquarters in this great number. Now in this solemn scope we wish to credit our most approved colleagues. Please welcome with me the President of the police headquarters of the Solar System.”

She stepped aside and Anderson entered the stage under applause. Experienced he went to the microphone, greeted the guests, too, and started a longwinded speech about the police in general, its difficult tasks, the often limited ways and means and came after all to the persons, who had distinguished in a special measure in fulfilment of this tasks. They were requested up to the stage and Ezra rolled his eyes when he stood up. Joan pressed his hand encouraging.

“It will be all right.” she whispered at him.

Arrived on the stage, the women and men received their credits out of Andersons hand. Ezra stepped to the desk to speak some words of thanks vicariously for his colleagues and hurried so much with it that the simultaneous interpreters for the extraterrestrial guests would almost have skidded. The official part was now finished and Ezra returned relieved to his seat.

“My goodness, so I fight around with unscrupulous criminals on strange planets and my knees are shaking because of having to talk to some people from a stage. I think I first need a drink now. Will you come with me?”

Future and Joan changed an amused look and followed him. Arrived at the bar they met some colleagues of Ezra who he well hadn't seen for a longer time because he greeted them effusively and became seized immediately. He just managed to order the drinks.

“Seems like my companion would let me down tonight.” Joan moaned with played desperation. Future yet hadn't touched the cocktail in front of him on the counter.

“... and I got the feeling you don't enjoy yourself very much, too, Captain.” she added frowning. He pinched his lips and sighed.

“So you rumbled me, Joan. Events like this don't matter a great deal to me.”

She thought briefly and emptied her martini in one draught.

“But maybe you would like to dance with me?” She beamed on him so much that he couldn't refuse.

“With pleasure, Joan. Really, I can't help admiring your courage...”

She took his arm and they mixed with the other couples on the dance floor. Once more he had to admit to

himself how wonderful it was to hold her in his arms and Joan's full attitude made clear how good she felt with him. But a certain embarrassment between them didn't let turn up a real conversation.

"Will you stay in New York for longer, Captain?" Joan asked finally.

Future looked at her and it seemed he first had to think about an answer. Under his hand on her back he could feel naked skin and the smell of her hair and her perfume seduced him additionally.

"Ahm, I'm afraid no... Professor Simon is busy working on a... a series of experiments and I don't want to charge him with that alone for a longer time."

"Sounds interesting," returned Joan slowly. "What's it all about?"

Now Future really seemed to get in embarrassment, but to his relief the musicians made a break at this moment.

"Well Joan, how about returning to the table and eating something?"

Joan stifled a sigh and agreed. They helped themselves with the rich buffet and took their seats at their table again. Ezra hadn't returned yet and also their other table fellows were not on their seats. They just wanted to start to eat when someone let fall himself so hard on the chair beside them that the glasses on the table clinked. Joan and Future rose up startled. The man stared at him with glassy eyes at which it obviously took some doing to fix the Captain. He made an effort for an upright attitude what he could only manage by clinging to the back of the chair. The man seemed quite drunk.

"Good evening, Captain Future!" he said stammering. "How do you like the show?"

Future sent an asking look to Joan but she only shrugged her shoulders.

"As you already know me, would you be so kind to introduce yourself, too?" His table fellow grimaced contemptuously.

"You ask who I am...? Who cares by now... But as you wish to know: My name is Marcus Banks and I was dishonourably dismissed out of the office of a secret services agent of the Solar System." He troublesome turned on his chair and pointed to the stage.

"But actually me should have been standing up there tonight... and particularly my Sarah..." His eyes filled with tears and Joan and Future changed uncomfortable looks. Future touched him carefully at the shoulder.

"Mr. Banks, is everything all right?"

Banks whisked around and flashed at him angrily.

"Everything all right? You ask me if everything is all right???" He struggled to his feet. "My life is ruined and you ask if everything..." He interrupted when he saw Ezra returning to the table.

"Gurney!" Banks choked through his teeth.

"I'm gonna get him". He rose whereas he knocked down the chair and staggered to Ezra on whose face dismay came abroad.

"Marcus, what are YOU doing here?"

Banks made an animal sound and applied to the entirely consternated Ezra and within seconds there was a wrestle in which hastily approaching security men mixed in. The few permitted media representatives appeared on the spot and recorded the scramble eagerly in sound and picture. Banks suddenly seemed to have recovered again and it was quite obvious that he was taught in a combat sport, because he managed to beat back the security crew by directed punches and kicks. But finally all this had no effect anymore and he got overwhelmed. It was a quite embarrassing situation because of a curious crowd who had set up around the incident. Ezra looked breathless für Joan and Future, who disconcerted watched the scene. Future stepped to him.

"Ezra, what's up here at all? Who is this man?"

“I can’t explain this quickly, Captain. Please take Joan home, I’ll report to you tomorrow.” Ezra returned to him and then followed the security men who pulled Banks out of the hall. Future returned to Joan and looked at her inquiring.

“Do you know who this was and what suddenly came over him?”

Joan seemed to make up her mind. “Somehow his face felt familiar to me, maybe I’ve already met him at the head quarters.” Their full plates still stood on the table untouched, but both had lost their appetite.

“Well, Joan, Ezra asked me to take you home...”

“That’s all right. The mood is spoiled anyway.”

Joan grasped for handbag and stole, Future took her arm at the elbow and together they pushed themselves to the entrance, in opposition to the curious crowd of people.

“I’m here with the Cosmoliner, Joan. We need to go up to the roof.”

When Future opened the front-hood of the Cosmoliner, Joan’s evening gown proved to be quite unpractical; she couldn’t do the large step which would have been necessary to get in without ripping her dress. Future laughed and guessed that somehow he had made a bad mistake in constructing the spaceglider by not considering this problem.

Joan felt quite embarrassed about this situation but he went over it by taking her around the waist and lifting her up. That last only a moment but this little gesture touched her deeply. She looked at him with affection while he took place beside her and if the space between the seats wouldn’t have been that big she would have dared to put her head on his shoulder. Future started the glider and they took off.

“Really a funny thing about this Banks, isn’t it?” he said after a while.

“There you are pretty right. But actually I owe it to him that I’m now taken home by YOU, Captain.” Joan answered teasingly and amused herself about the embarrassed look in his dark eyes. She took a view down to the nocturnal New York covered by slight mist.

“Just have a look, Captain, how beautiful the city is. Just like looking down upon a galaxy...”

“Really, Joan. A fascinating sight.” Just like you tonight, he added in mind.

After Joan’s instructions they finally arrived at their aim and Future landed the Cosmoliner on the flat roof of the building. He got off and reached his arms for her to take her down. She rested on his shoulders and even didn’t let go when her feet had already touched the ground. The moon poured everything around them with its silver light, a mild breeze fluttered in their clothes, played with their hair and the magic of the moment easily seemed to demand a parting kiss. But even before she could finish this thought, Future let her off for closing the front-hood of the Cosmoliner. Disappointed she tightened the stole around her shoulders and doubted about herself.

“I’ll yet take you to the door, Joan.”

“Of course.” she answered and Future didn’t seem to notice the frustrated undertone in her voice. Arrived in front of the door of her apartment she turned to him once more. “Probably there are more entertaining things one could do on a Saturday night in New York but taking part in a stiff honouring gala and enduring one speech after another, but apart from this strange incident I really enjoyed this evening.”

“I liked it, too, Joan. With a less talented dancing partner I wouldn’t have cut a fine figure.”

They both were silent and if she had no further idea he would say goodbye. You are a grown up and selfconfidant woman, rushed into her mind. Why don’t you take what you desire for so much? She made a brave step towards him and kissed him slightly. But his only reaction was that he didn’t react. While their lips were still touching she opened her eyes and looked into his, glancing at her entirely surprised. The embarrassment of this moment let her heart sink. She let him off and wished ashamed to sink into the bothom.

Now she had gone too far.

“E... Excuse me... actually that’s not my kind... I only wanted to say thanks for...” But she couldn’t finish the troublesome wrested sentence because he unexpectedly drew her to himself and kissed her so affectionated that she fainted. Finally the protecting wall he had erected around himself had broken down and she put her arms around his neck and returned the so long desired kiss from the deep of her heart. But even this couldn’t abandon the thought of his constantly practised selfcontrol towards her. It was not his kind to show emotions and the moments in which they came closer were few. Alone the imagination of not seeing him again for weeks or months let her heart beat faster und before thinking about she whispered “Stay with me!” into his ear. After a short hesitation he touched her chin, turned her face to him and seemed to look for an answer in her blue eyes. She only could make a guess how much he was torn between emotion and selfcontrol. And as she knew how disciplined he was, she prepared herself for him leaving her politely but certainly. But he raised his hand and stroke her hair.

“Joan, at this moment, there is no wish I would prefer to fulfil to you.”

With shaking fingers she finally opened the door with her ID-Card an the numerical code and together they entered her flat, which was only scantily lightened by the lights of the city and the moon. Joan wanted to reach for a light switch but Future hindered her from that by reaching for her hand, drawing her to him again and kissing her. So Joans hands drove under his jacket, slipped it over his shoulders and put it over the back of an arm-chair. Under kisses she solved his tie an threw it aside. When she started to open his shirt button by button, he suddenly hesitated and looked at her breathless. If he wanted to say something it however didn’t come over his lips and so Joan went on and let every opened button be followed by a kiss on his breast. With her lips on his skin she could feel the shudder she unleashed by doing that and finally the shirt was put to the jacket. Future kissed her neck and her shoulders and out of her mouth came delightful sounds. Carefully and a little bit clumsy he then opened the zipper of her dress, Joan slipped the carrying-straps over her shoulders and with a low rustle the dress fell down. For imprints not being seen through the delicate fabric of the gown, Joan wore only a touch of underware and together with the high heels she still had on she offered an especially seductive view. She stepped off the dress to her feet and when Future saw her like this he really doubted if he was awake. Joan put her arms around his neck, looked deep into his eyes and in the darkness they were as black as his.

“Is this really happening or is this just a dream?” he whispered and Joan laughed lowly.

“It’s a dream we made come true finally.” she answered and kissed him cravingly. Future took her on his arms and carried her to the bed, standing in an optically separated niche of the 1-room-apartment which was lightened softly by the full moon through the high windows. Here they took off the rest of their clothes and made passionate love to each other, like almost dying with durst but finally reaching the oasis after all. Every single moment of this would burn forever into both memories. Now they lay closely to each other, almost touching the other ones tip of the nose. She stroke his cheek and would have liked to tell him the words burning her tongue, but didn’t dare however. Didn’t he know anyway?

“You are so beautiful.” he broke the silence of this intimate moment. “How could I deny this to myself for such a long time?”

“And I wasn’t about to believe anymore that you would forget your principles for me.”

“Nobody but you could have done this after all.” he answered and kissed the inside of her hand. He left after a tender goodbye at dawn and left behind a painful feeling of emptyness, in her apartment, her bed and most of all in her heart. With no word he raised hope for soon meeting him again and it was entirely uncertain how this relation would go on, if it would go on at all... She heard the sound of the Cosmoliner fade away and with his smell on her skin and the sheets she finally fell asleep.

The penetrating sound of the televisor woke her up roughly from deep sleep. It seemed to her that she had just been fallen asleep and her eyelids, through which she anticipated the scanty daylight and so the early daytime, just didn't want to open. In half sleep she groped for her pillow to hide her head under it but couldn't find it. Finally she yet opened her eyes to look for it in the grey morning light. It lay on the floor and when she lifted it up a tie came to light. When she realized it set free an adrenaline attack which made her wide-awake abruptly. The televisor still buzzed. Curtis!!! it hit her mind and hastily she wrapped the sheet around herself, ran her hands through her hair, rushed to the televisor and switched to receive. But she became disappointed. Not Curtis but a middle-aged agent of the planetary police with a dark plait appeared on the screen.

“Good morning, Ms. Randall. My name is Riccarda Demuro, Marshall of the planetary police. Please excuse the early disturb outside your service but there is an incident which makes your immediate presence in the headquarters necessary.”

“What happened, Marshall Demuro?”

“Unfortunately I have no good news. At the honouring gala of the planetary police yesterday occurred an incident. A former officer, who illicitly lingered there, had caused a pretty affray and...”

“I know about that, because I had been there myself by invitation of Ezra Gurney. His name is Marcus Banks, isn't it?” she was interrupted by Joan. Surprisedly Demuro lifted the eyebrows.

“So you must have left the building just in time, Ms. Randall. It turned out that all this had just to serve as red herring. While all the security-staff was busy with Banks in the hall, a group of gunmen, disguised as reporters, managed to intrude the building, to overwhelm the watchmen and to take hostages. Until now no requirements were defined, but people were injured during the raid, there are about two hundred fifty persons in their grip and...” Demuro's voice stumbled.

“Police President Anderson and Marshall Ezra Gurney are under the hostages.”

Joan jumped up astounded.

“Aside from that, on the observation cameras which were not directly destroyed, equipments could be seen, which were identified by our experts as components of thermodetonators.” Demuro continued. “I don't need to tell you what one can perpetrate with such a weapon...”

“I'll set off without delay, Marshall.”

“Thank you, Ms. Randall, we're expecting you.”

Joan switched off the televisor and derangedly sat down again on her bed. Only because Curtis and her had left the festivity so early, they had escaped from a hostage-taking! And deep concern about Ezra grabbed her heart cold as ice.

“Mr. Carthew, everyone is present now.” With this words the President's secretary put a thick file in front of him on the table. It was just about six a. m.

“Thank you, Ann. Please bring us some more coffee and mineral water.” He cleared his throat and turned to his swiftly formed crises management group.

“Ladies and gentlemen, thank you so much for coming this fast at such an early hour.” The President was pale, he had dark circles around the eyes and it was obvious that he had not or too little been sleeping.

“The situation of the hostages is uncertain by now, unfortunately there was yet no possibility for an approach. The Federal Office Building is surrounded and spaciouly sealed off. The air space is observed and our experts for thermonuclear warfare and a team for the precautionary installation of a radiation shield are on location. But first lets have a look on the construction plan of the Federal Building to discuss a probable grasp

by the police. Please have a look here...” The President handed on the documents to his advisors.

“Marshall Demuro, would you please explain the planned procedure?”

“Thank you, Mr. President.”

She rose, activated a kind of beamer and a threedimensional hologram of the office building of the federation appeared above the middle of the table. Several regions of the virtual building were marked by coloured light spots.

“Ladies and gentlemen, our aim in this dramatic situation must be called: How to achieve a maximum success in the shortest time without collateral damage if possible. How can we do that? I’d like you to focus your attention at first to this area of the building...”

She just wanted to direct her laserpointer on the hologram for an explanation when Carthews secretary contacted through the televisor.

“Excuse me, Mr. President. The leader of the hostage-takers has just contacted and wants to talk to you.”

“Put it through on the wide-screen, Ann.”

Pearls of sweat arised on Carthews forehead. Everyone turned heads and focused the view to the monitor. A man appeared on the screen, at whose sight exclamations of surprise from some of the attenders came aloud. He seemed to be no stranger. His match-short dark hair was brushed acutely, his view from grey eyes was clear and competent, the uniform of the elite-agent without a pleat or a dust particle. Even before Carthew could say something the man rose to speak.

“Ladies and gentlemen! My name is David S. Henderson, agent of the secret police of the Solar System in the rank of an officer first degree. I’m responsible for 238 people being hold on against their will and I apologise for that. But there are cogent reasons for this action which leave no other choice to me. Mr. President, you know me. You know, that I’m a man of honour and that honest acting belongs to my highest priorities.”

Henderson left these words standing in the room and waited for a reation. Carthews face sanguined and on his forehead arched an alarming pulsative vein.

“I know that.” the President returned, well considered about his choice of words. “Please go on.”

Henderson tightened his body even a little more and his voice became a sharp undertone.

“My main concern is that the word honour seems to have no meaning to the government you represent and is spurned by the highest representatives!”

Carthew became obviously more nervous. “I really have no idea, what you are talking about...”

Hendersons jaw muscles tensed and by turning to everyone in the room he went on.

“I’d like to come to the point. The men and women of our special squad are chosen to execute secret orders all over the Solar System. Sometimes these orders are of such brisance that in case of failure they are completely denied by government and head quarters. If agents don’t return from these missions they tell their families any fairy tales about their destination and refuse a compensation to them. In the course of my whole career I would almost have choked on this lies!”

He made a break and on his subtly trembling lips one could realize how much he had to push himself together.

“As you all may know, there occured some kind of attempted coup on Ganymed four weeks ago. There two of the five office holding governors died within a few days and the left three ones used this chance to claim the independence of their colonies by the assistance of the local military and the support of the native population. However the autonomy of the Ganymede Colonies wouldn’t have been in the interest of some influential corporations and speculators of the Solar System. So our order meant,” and here Henderson turned directly to the President, “to interfere unnoticed, to charge the leaders of the insurrectionaries before there could be made

further requests and to deploy confirm governors again.”

Carthew sat stiffed and pale as clay in his armchair, cold sweat on his forehead, unable to return something. Henderson went on.

“However a group of unterrified journalists uncovered these intentions and a scandal threatened. For this reason the government felt impelled to deny the mission I was leading. I didn’t get the permission to remove my unit from the combat area as we were not on location officially and so I was forced to forsake my command. Your creator may punish you for imposing me with that, Mr. President! Twentyfive members of my unit died in this mission against the military of the revolters.” Henderson lowed his voice and came quite close to the monitor.

“These men and women died on duty for the government of the Solar System and didn’t even receive an official funeral. And there were no credits awarded post mortem and their families didn’t get a compensation... This situation is unsustainable.” He tightened again and his voice returned to former loudness.

“I’ll pack up this here and today. Three thermodetonatores are in position to achieve a lethal impact on the civil population of Greater New York. You will transfer 35 million dollars from the account of the Red Planet Trading Company to an account of my choice. From this money each of the twenty five families will receive a compensation of one million dollar. The rest I will distribute on my own discretion. Take measures for secrecy being preserved. In case you should engage the media or refuse the payment I’ll use the thermodetonatores. You got thirty hours, until tomorrow at noon, to transfer the money. Further instructions will follow. Henderson over.”

The screen became black. Shocked views wandered from face to face and at first no one was able to say a word.

“Mr. President, are the accusations made by Mr. Henderson according to the facts? asked Christopher Nielsen, a member of the crisis management, with troublesomely restrained disgust. As if he was in a trance Carthew liftet his arm mechanically to loosen his tie.

“I feel more than miserable, but unfortunately I can’t deny this shameful circumstances.” Breathing became obviously difficult to him.

“Can somebody explain to me who or what the Red Planet Trading Company is? I never ever heard about it.” asked Nigel Bennett, who sat beside Nielsen. In this moment something fell down on the floor and everyone turned heads. Riccarda Demuro, still standing by the table, had dropped the laserpointer at Bennetts question and was too appalled to lift it again.

“You may as well tell him.” Carthew said lowly. “It’s not imperative anymore.”

“But Sir, the secrecy...”

“Tell him!” the President cut her short rigorously.

“Yes, Sir.” Demuro returned reluctantly.

“The Red Planet Trading Company is a disguised monetary stock, formed of incomes from nonofficial weapon-transactions through the planetary police...”

“I can’t believe what I’m hearing!” Joan started up aghastly and banged her fist on the table. “How many monstrosities else are coming up to the surface now? I’m almost starting to bring up appreciation to this Henderson!” Her cheeks glowed and she shivered with anger.

“Ms. Randall, please calm down! Your behaviour isn’t quite conductive in this situation!” Dr. Bruce Jackson, her neighbor, hissed at her.

“I’m sorry?” she flew in his face.

“Because of this hanky-panky it yet has come so far at all. Otherwise we hardly would have to worry about

our captured colleagues, do we?”

Demuro looked at her cold. “Ms. Randall, it seems you are not aware of how many hostages were confident with these activities. In case you do, can this be a authorisation to call the planned operation into question? I guess not. Well, if you like to suggest something constructive do it now. Anything else only wastes our time.”

Joan stayed speechlessly open-mouthed and all color faded from her face. Unable to return something she sank back into her chair. Her colleague Diane O’Connor bridged the displeasing situation by turning to Carthew with a question.

“Mr. President, you mentioned the planned erection of a radiation protection shield. How serious is the threat to the city at all if this shield is applied?”

Carthew cleared his throat, but didn’t bring out a tone. He implied Dr. Jackson to answer the question.

“Apart from the federation building changing into a cluster of ashes with everyone inside, the protection shield is strong enough to protect the rest of the city. The real problem is another: Under the pretense of a on-site inspection Henderson had managed to abstract special microchips from a magazine of the planetary police, for the purpose to deactivate such protection shields, and it will be difficult to develop appropriate counteractive measures. I mean to say, its impossible.”

“But we can yield to this blackmailing in no way.” Carthew said croakily.

“I’m of your opinion, Sir!” Riccarda Demuro agreed with him impatiently. “We have to intervene immediately, free the hostages and track down these maniacs! Mr. President, if I might continue with the explanation of the planned grasp...”

Carthew nodded weakly and Demuro resumed her comments where she had been interrupted.

Henderson and his narrowest combatants had converted the control room for the electronic of the federation building to their command center. Only one staircase separated them from the roof, where five space gliders waited in the wings for the departure.

“Gentlemen,” Henderson turned to his men in this moment. “until now we have adhered to our schedule minutiously. If everything works according to the plan, we’ll leave the earth in less than 36 hours, protected by hostages, in hyper space ships, equipped with thermodetonators. Our aim is, to reach a planet without extradition treaty, so you will never be able to enter the earth again. For your services each of you will get one million Dollar, which will make this step considerably easier. Are there yet any question concerning the course of action? No? Then you all take your posts without delay. Mr. Banks, as agreed you will now release the service staff and the injured. The left remaining hostages you will place in one of the small conference rooms, to have them better in a watch.”

Banks saluted smartly and left the room. Henderson stepped to the window, folded his hands on his back and looked down on the morning ado in the streets. Well none of the fleeting New Yorkers, the stressed out taxi pilots or the flying street hawkers guessed even in dreams something about the sword of Damocles floating above them.

“Who sows wind, will reap storm.” Henderson muttered.

Chapter II

in which Captain Future is a bit confused and therefore has a very private discussion with Professor Simon, Joan is harassed by doubts, a group of brave ones dares to enter the lion's cave and once more little mistakes get punished at once.

Future landed the Cosmoliner in the hangar of the moon base. The main air lock closed, air flowed into the hall again, but instead of leaving the spacecraft, he remained inside, staring at the windscreen and looking out into the deserted hall. Although the others must have heard him, none of them appeared. Because of high sun activity and the electromagnetic interferences that went together with this phenomenon, the return flight had asked for his full attention, but now the tension seemed to fade, and he let his mind go.

Images passed through his mind like a movie: Her sweet mouth... the tiny little hairs on her neck which straightened up when he kissed her there... the birthmark on her right shoulder... the irritating but at the same time exciting feeling, when she stripped off his clothes... the faint rustle of the fabric, when the dress slid down her body and onto the floor... her breath and her lips on his skin... her breasts which seemed to fit into his hands exactly... Future opened the seat belt, bent forward and pressed his forehead onto the cool metal of the control shelf. Never before in his life he had felt being turned so 'upside down', a feeling which confused him as much as it had been tearing down his self-constraint. And like a mild breeze after the roaring thunder, both were left afterwards within a feeling of fulfillment and completeness... He took a deep a breath as he rose, then he activated the security systems and left the spacecraft. Tiredness overcame him and the desire for coffee, a shower and his bed. If he had guessed that Grag and Otho were staying in the kitchen area, he would certainly have done without the coffee, because he didn't feel in a mood for talking. So he noticed both of them just when the kitchen door slid aside in front of him.

"Ah... Good morning... I'm back."

Grag just fed Yiek with some kind of metal trash, Otho sat on the table and was gazing at the electronic edition of the "New York Times", a paper-thin, flexible-foldable digital media in size of a "real" newspaper.

"Ah, Captain, your'e back... The sun-winds seem to be quite intense. The updating of the paper definitely lasts awfully long." As he pushed the corresponding symbol on the electronic newspaper, the letters, columns and images organized themselves in a new way.

"Oh boy, the electronics of an entire space ship can be severely disturbed by such an energetic shower of particles, and you worry about this stupid newspaper," said Grag and rolled his eyes. "As if we didn't have the best information systems of all, here in our base!"

Future turned away and focused his attention to the coffee machine.

"Please don't quarrel now. By the way, I didn't have any problems during the return flight."

Otho swallowed the verbal attack against Grag and turned to the Captain again. "So, did you have fun at least?"

The question caught him totally off guard, so that he nearly spilt his coffee.

"Ahm... I'm sorry?"

Otho looked at him, feeling a bit confused. "Well, the Gala for Ezra. It was a great event, wasn't it?" he added uncertainly.

"Ah yes, that was quite nice..." He focused on his coffee cup. "Excuse me please, I really need a shower now!" Balancing the cup in his hand, Future left the kitchen quickly.

"What's the matter with him?" Grag asked astonished. "He's behaving pretty weird this morning..."

"Weird and confused," Otho returned with a big grin. "And also he's forgotten his tie... must have been a real big party. Maybe he should go and paint the city red with Marshall Gurney more than once a year."

Grag laughed, Otho joined in and together they tried to imagine what Future and Ezra might have done that night.

The hot shower was like a blessing. Clouds of steam surrounded him, as he was leaning against the wall of the shower cabin, letting the jets of steaming hot water splash directly onto his neck.

He had been sleeping shortly but restfully, and the confusion about last night had now turned into an entirely new and pleasant feeling of delight. Nevertheless he was uncertain about how this should go on, as there opened a path to him but seldom trodden – and he knew this kind of terrain only insufficiently, he had to admit to himself.

He turned off the water and grabbed for a towel. As he had put on his space suit again, he felt being himself again, and with a new confidence he dialed Joan's private code. While the connection was to be established, he ran his fingers through his damp hair. Down on Earth, it was Sunday morning, so she might be at home. But on the screen appeared only a fixed image of her which smiled at him friendly, and her recorded voice told him that she could not be reached at the moment and that he could leave a message to her. Probably it was yet to early and she was still sleeping.

"Good morning, Joan, this is... ah... Curtis. Well... what I wanted to say... ahm – regarding yesterday... it was really... incredible." What else should he say, especially to an automat? "Well, it seems you are still sleeping, so I will try to reach you later. Good bye, Joan." He ended the connection with the feeling of not having said the right.

"... Another indication for the existence of Dark Matter is also given by the rotation speed of the galaxies. Without this shadow-substance the speed might drop off rapidly... Curtis, are you listening to me at all?" Professor Simon looked up from the data he had gathered by his experiment, and hovered closer to the desk. Future, again caught off guard, raised his head and answered automatically.

"Ah yes, the gravitation of their visible masses isn't sufficient enough to compensate for the centrifugal forces and to keep this heap of galaxies together... I think the proof of Dark Matter is really one of the most difficult experiments of physics we ever started... isn't it?"

Simon kept quiet and looked searchingly at Future, who seemed to be somewhere else in his mind.

"...What is troubling you, Curtis?"

Future looked into the professor's artificial eyes. Surely he could discuss with him any complex, scientific question without hesitation, but what was absorbing him now was as far away from science as Pluto from the sun, and he wasn't sure if he should talk to him about it.

"Simon," he began slowly, " ahm - something happened yesterday, which has turned me completely upside down..."

"So I've noticed..." The professor looked at him attentively. " Curtis, we've already solved so many problems together. So perhaps you'd like to tell me first what it is all about?"

Future rubbed his temples and rose. "Well, it's quite a personal matter and I'm not sure whether - hm... well – it's about Joan and me, and we..." He took a deep breath and seemed to search for the right words.

"Simon, you know me better than anybody else, and I think therefore you couldn't help noticing that I... well, how much Joan means to me since we first met on Jupiter. But I've tried to ignore these feelings. The thought of letting her come closer to me and perhaps having to lose her again – well, it left me with no other choice but

creating a distance between us. I'm behaving always friendly but reservedly towards her... Well, this rather worked out fine until yesterday night..."

Placing himself upon the desk, the Professor looked at him patiently and made no efforts to interrupt him.

"...Simon, you should have seen her! She was looking that gorgeous that I couldn't resist her any longer - and actually I didn't want to anymore. It seemed to me so easy and so damned right, and so we..." He interrupted himself, not knowing where to look at. "...And - and so I slept with her."

The last sentence came over his lips with the satisfying relief of a confession.

Simon let these words weigh upon his mind, feeling sympathy and understanding which he unfortunately wasn't able to express by mimic.

"At least," he answered laconically.

Future looked at him surprised. "... ahm - that's really your opinion?"

The professor rose from the desk and hovered up to meet the eye level of his opposite. "Dear Curtis, in the whole Solar System creatures of all kinds have profited from your courage, your compassion and your great knowledge. But nobody can expect you to do nothing else but that, and of course nobody can ask you to live in celibate as well. And I also daresay that it was not the intention of your parents that you should spend all your life with a robot, an android and a bodiless, aging brain.

Future was so amazed that he couldn't find any words.

"And just one more comment, if permitted..." Simon continued. "We never talked about it, but I have to admit that I'm at least one of the reasons for your - well, let's just call it a little bit antiquated - attitude."

Future's eyes widened as he wanted to object, but Simon continued unwaveringly.

"Well, when I was a young man, which is quite long ago, people tended to question the women's working abilities. We men had to protect them and care for them. And apparently, I have passed on this image to you, through all the years. But even I was able to realize that Joan can look after herself very well. She is courageous, she's acting decisively and taking responsibility. And certainly you won't forget that she saved your life more than once. With all respect, Curtis, I'm afraid you should think over your attitude towards women."

Future swallowed. Never before, Simon had talked to him like that and after a moment of astonishment he couldn't help but laugh.

"I can't believe what you are saying to me, Simon. Am I really that bad?"

"Probably I shouldn't answer this question." the professor mocked. "But how Joan could go along with you for such a long time, is quite a secret to me. A less persistent woman would already have turned to somebody else. I think she really loves you very much."

Future became seriously again and looked at the professor directly. "Simon, what shall I do now?"

If the professor could have frowned, he would have done now. "Well, Curtis, we dabble into the secrets of Dark Matter, trying to explain the strange phenomena behind it, but I think that love between human beings is probably such a strange phenomenon, too. Maybe we'll never be able to find an answer to this question... That you *are* the way you are now, we both know well enough. But the tragic death of your parents shouldn't keep you from having close relationships. The first aspect is not connected to the latter. Just think it over."

Future looked at the professor, feeling relieved. "Thank you so much, Simon... Now let's turn our attention to the Dark Matter again... Where did we stop?"

Simon hovered back to his data and just wanted to continue his explanation when the television screen sprang to life with that special buzzing which normally announced President Carthew. Future switched it on immediately. But when he saw the President's face, he suspected nothing good.

"Good morning, Mr. Carthew. You're looking concerned. Something wrong?"

The President took a deep breath and described in few words what had happened. "To make it short, Captain, in the name of my whole crisis management I'd like to ask you urgently for your assistance. There is an ultimatum running."

Future nodded seriously. "We'll get started without delay, Mr. President."

At their arrival in the government building, the Future Squad were received with great relief, and immediately they were told the plans of the proposed rescue action. The most worries were due to the stolen microchips used for deactivating the protection shield.

"And you really think it's impossible to develop any suitable counter-measures in the time we still have got?" Future asked Dr. Bruce Jackson.

"Well, research on this field goes on constantly, and even in this moment in the laboratories, the work on developing even better microchips of this kind still continues." Dr. Jackson returned. "But now, no chip exists which is developed enough to..."

"Perhaps there are already new prototypes we could bring into action?" professor Simon interrupted. Dr. Jackson lifted his eyebrows.

"But I already told you that at this moment, there is nothing that..."

"It's a chance we'll have to take," Future interrupted him. "Dr. Jackson, would it be possible, that you and Prof. Simon Wright would visit one of the warfare development laboratories of the government? Yours and professor Simons knowledge combined together with the newest technology could be the chance we're looking for."

Jackson still was skeptic but as there was no time for a lengthy discussion, he finally agreed. A space glider brought him and Simon without delay to Halifax on the Atlantic coast, where the biggest military research laboratory was located.

Altogether, nothing much was changed about the operation planned for securing the Federation Building. Besides the Future Squad, Joan Randall, Christopher Nielsen, Riccarda Demuro, Nigel Bennett, Diane O'Connor, two further members of the crisis management and a ten-headed special forces squad would take part in the operation. Just the moment they had heard that Henderson would set free some of the hostages and for not endangering their lives, they decided to wait for this action. The rescue action would then take place at night. For preparation purposes, everyone was summoned to the headquarters.

Joan was just checking her equipment in her office when Future knocked carefully on the frame of the open door. "May I come in?"

Joan looked up from her proton gun which she had been examining. "Certainly."

In her eyes was an expression he couldn't really understand. He stepped up to the desk and watched her for a while. During the meeting, she hadn't said much more and then had accepted the planning without any objections.

"I think I can imagine what's bothering you, Joan. These are really bad accusations against the Planetary Police, which this Henderson guy made, and it looks to me as unbelievable as it looks to you."

Joan put her weapon aside, head sagging and her hands rested on the tabletop. She sighed.

"I just don't want this to be true. Everything I was believing in has tumbled down like a house of cards."

Future rested on the tabletop, too, to look directly into her eyes which were filled with doubt.

"But definitely you don't have to accuse yourself in any way, Joan. And I'm sure that some people will have pay for the way they acted, right at the end of this case."

For a moment, something like confidence flashed up in Joan's eyes, and she rested her head on his

shoulder. He kissed her hair gently, caressing her back encouragingly. In this moment she seemed to him even more fragile than ever, and he felt a sudden urge to protect her.

"Joan - do you really want to expose yourself to the danger of this mission? This Henderson seems to be quite determined. I would be easier if you would support us from the head office."

Her upper body tightened suddenly, and with a mixture of rage, helplessness and defiance she stared at him. "It's always the same! Nothing has changed! What actually gives you the right to treat me like that every time there is the slightest threat of danger? After all, I was trained to do this work!"

"Joan, I didn't mean it that way..."

"Oh yes, you did, and I listened to you more than one time. But in this case, things are a little bit different. It's all about an internal matter of the Planetary Police, and I 'm part of the official operation team. Besides that, the accusations are of such a seriousness that I need to defend my own honor." She swallowed. "Can't you understand this?"

Future was taken by surprise by this sudden outbreak of emotions. But immediately he recalled what Simon had said about Joan. And if he didn't wanted to lose her, he had to give in, as hard it was for him. "You're right, Joan. I'm sorry. I shouldn't have tried to keep you out of this."

Joan already had made up an answer for defending her case, so that Future's apology caught her totally off guard. "Oh... thank you for your understanding. That means quite much to me." She went around her desk and sat down beside him on the edge with a forgiving expression on her face. "I'm sorry, too, for shouting at you like that, but you've got a certain way to make me loose my temper with just one little remark."

Future moved a bit closer to her and put his arm around her shoulders.

"I'm sorry, too, Joan. You really mustn't believe that I'd underestimate yourself or think that you might be incapable of taking part in such actions. But I..." He gently stroke a curl out of her face and searched for the right words. "...The very thought of the fact that something could happen to you is – is driving me mad. I'm getting sick of fear for you."

"Is that really true, Curtis?" she whispered. Out of his mouth such a confession was like a declaration of love. He nodded seriously and Joan hugged him that passionately that he almost lost balance.

"You won't have to worry about me, Curtis, I promise. And no matter how this operation ends, I want you to know, that I..." She took his face into her hands and looked at him directly with big eyes.

"...that I love you, Curtis. You and nobody else. And therefore I will do my very best for us to get out of this operation unhurt and..."

Steps echoed on the corridor and spontaneously they separated from each other. The voices of Grag and Otho could be recognized, and just one moment later both appeared in the door frame. A strange scene was presented to them: Joan, with rosy cheeks, rummaged aimlessly through her equipment, Future leaned at the desk, whereas his casual attitude stood in harsh contrast to the deeply stirred expression on his face. Both immediately realized that something was in the air, without getting a clear picture what exactly this could be. Therefore Otho made a really harmless remark.

"These new combat suits we were provided with by the Planetary Police are really fantastic. Grag and me have already examined them. Infrared radiation almost doesn't go through and general radiation protection is already integrated. An enormous advantage concerning the flexibility, isn't it, Captain?"

"Ah yes, Joan and me checked the equipment, too. Really very impressive. Well, the meeting point in the head office is just at 23:00 hours. I'll use the spare time for a little rest. See you." Without hesitating he left the room.

"Can we yet do something for you, Joan?" Grag asked helpfully.

"Thanks, that's very kind of you, but it's really not necessary. I've already worked with this equipment."

"Then see you later, Joan." said Otho and left demonstratively. Grag followed him, and behind them the door was closed again.

"That was just a strange atmosphere inside there. Do you think they had a quarrel because of the Captain wanting to talk Joan out of this operation?" Grag asked.

"Quarrel?" returned Otho with an intonation that made clear how improbable he thought this matter was.

"Well, Grag, I guess we've just been at the wrong time at the wrong place." he added grinning.

At 22:45 hours all were gathered in the central office of the head quarters and anyone was already wearing the combat suits. The frequencies of the communication systems were coordinated, all weapons checked and secured. Sharply at 23:00 hours, Riccarda Demuro directed the word to all attendants.

"Ladies and gentlemen. Tonight we have to deal with a difficult task, and to me in personal, it's one of the most tricky operations of my previous career. So I may trustingly hand over the word to one of the most experienced men of our department. He'll lead this mission, and, I'm sure about that, will bring it to an successful end: Marshall Christopher Nielsen."

Demuro stepped aside for the 1,90 metres high, muscular man. The stubbles on his shaved skull pointed to blonde hair color, and above the protecting collar of his combat suit, a tattoo wound up it's way behind his left ear. Nielsen's nose seemed to be reconstructed more than one time and added up to an absolutely martial appearance.

"Thank you, Marshall." Nielsen returned to Demuro. "As already discussed, we will part into two teams. The task of team one will be to overpower the hostage-takers and to free the hostages. This team is under my command. The second team will secure and deactivate the thermal weaponry. This operation will be lead by Captain Future and his crew who are standing by our side with their great knowledge and experience tonight. Thank you, Captain!" Murmurs and sounds of approval arose and Future sent a nodding into the round.

Nielsen went on. "The plans for the rescue action are already discussed in detail, but yet I want to point out one thing. The man we have to deal with cannot be compared to a terrorist. David Henderson is an extraordinary tactician and several times was awarded for his courage. Don't underestimate him, don't act thoughtless. He's a perfect warrior who will use every fault of yours immediately against you. So, at least - good luck to you all!"

All grabbed for their weapons, laid hand on their equipment and then left the head quarters in direction to the hangar. With disguised gliders they should come as close as possible to the Federation Building. As it wasn't possible to imagine what kind of radar Henderson was using, the two gliders landed in some distance in the park of the City Hall, where the lighting had been switched off precautionary. The Federation Building was only two streets apart and this area had been closed down for the public. Nielsen led the team on the fastest way through the streets. Exactly at 23:33 hours, there would be a faked power failure, lasting for twenty seconds so that they could pass the protection shield without the need to open it separately. Henderson of course would notice this power failure but thanks to his emergency aggregate he could ignore this incident. Just before the power failure, the team arrived at the agreed point. It was the former delivery entrance of the Federation Building. The street had been turned into a dead end road because of the reconstructions around Ground Zero, and the delivery entrance was located in an area which couldn't be reached by driving vehicles. The storage rooms behind the entrance were also not used anymore for their original purpose, as supplies were delivered in the meantime via the air route, and therefore the rooms used for storage lay in the topmost floors. All members of the operation team watched tensely from behind the shadow of the alley trees as the bluish shimmering of the

protection rose up in front of them.

Suddenly there was a buzzing in the air and one moment later all lights in the surrounding area went black. At the same time, the protection shield broke down as well. Nielsen gave a sign with his hand and almost soundless, with the weapons ready, everyone ran to the gate. The team had just vanished in the shadow of the entrance when the lights already started again everywhere.

"That worked out nicely," Nielsen told his team about the comlink in his helmet. "We can only hope that the rooms behind this door are as left and unguarded as we imagined. Captain Future?"

Future nodded. Nielsen looked at him, and after they had roughly torn off the rampantly growing ivy, they managed to open the old security lock with their proton guns. Behind them lay a gullet of darkness, and what the night binoculars revealed were piles of boxes, palettes and other stuff, all covered with a thick coat of dust and cobwebs. No one had been in here for a long, long time.

"Looks quite good," Nielsen said and made the first step into the building.

"Try to avoid whirling up the dust, so that the sensors of our instruments are not being disturbed," Future warned his team, and carefully, one after another, they entered the building. They crossed some rooms which looked similar to the first one and then reached some kind of hall, probably the center of the former, now entirely deserted dispatch department. Here they would part. As the celebrations had taken place in the Great Hall on the first floor, Nielsen would go there with his team while Captain Future with his crew, Joan, Nigel Bennett, Diane O'Connor and five other agents would look for the thermal detonators. Nielsen grinningly lifted his thumbs up and vanished with his team into darkness.

"Like Dr. Jackson explained to us, we probably won't find anything in the western part of the building. Thermal detonators are short-distance-arms and as the Hudson is quite near, there wouldn't be much damage in western direction of the Federation Building. There are numerous possibilities for a better positioning and for a more effective use of this weapons." said Nigel Bennett.

"The most obvious place would have been on the roof, but as the air space control couldn't detect any weaponry like that, I would make a guess for the topmost floor," Future added.

"Exactly." Bennett returned. "And most of the windows directed to north-west might be of interest. In this way Henderson could wipe out almost the biggest part of the Manhattan peninsula, possibly even parts of Brooklyn..."

"But that sounds awful, Mr. Bennett!" Joan answered. "What are we going to do against this?"

"Well, on the one hand we can look for the single artilleries and destroy the microchips and the navigation modulus. This will need some time. On the other hand, we could try to find their control room and interfere with their equipment. This could be done more quickly, but is also more risky and even more difficult."

"What would you think about getting parted to try both parallel? This would increase our chances for success," Future suggested. Bennett didn't seem convinced but he agreed finally. He, Grag, Diane O'Connor and three further agents would try to find the control room. Captain Future, Joan, Otho and the two other agents, Ruben Vasquez and Colin Hillard, went on, trying to find the thermo-artillery.

In the meantime Nielsen and his team had reached the first floor unnoticed. For not presenting a target to snipers, the hostage-takers had switched off the lights everywhere. Only the greenish emergency lights were left on and lit the scene dimly. The big door-wings of the hall stood open, but everything looked dark inside, and no single move could be observed. Nielsen and his team carefully passed both sides of the door in total silence. A chameleon drone was set out which crisscrossed it's way through the hall, and its 360 degrees swiveling lens eyes sent its infrared pictures to the wristwatch mini-screens which everyone was equipped with.

The tables were still laden with food, filled glasses and knocked over chairs completed the scene. The instruments of the musicians were still there, just as the band were only having a break. Finally the drone came back to its starting point without any damage.

"There's no human soul inside anymore, boss." One of the men whispered into his comlink.

"OK," said Nielsen. "Evidently there are no movement sensors. We'll now secure the room. Five men will give us backing from outside."

With the weapons in position they silently set foot into the hall, securing every angle and corner, but still nothing was moving. Finally they gathered to discuss the further course of the action.

"Probably they felt the hall was too big and unclear, so they took the hostages to a smaller room," Riccarda Demuro supposed.

"Henderson is no monster. Probably he keeps the hostages in a place where sanitary facilities are close by," Nielsen added.

"The conference rooms?" asked Demuro. Nielsen nodded.

"Possible. We'll find it out. Lets go on."

The team moved on to leave the hall in direction to the northern wing, when suddenly a spotlight flashed up, directed precisely at Nielsen and his team. They immediately were ready for fight, but without knowing where to aim at. The light was that blinding that outside of its range nothing could be seen.

"My respect, Marshall Nielsen. Concerning fast action, you definitely have earned your reputation." Hendersons voice came from the darkness above them. He seemed to stand upon the gallery from where he looked down onto them. "But unfortunately you just stumbled into a simple light barrier. In this situation, this is a inexcusable negligence of yours."

Nielsen furiously opened the visor of his helmet. "Show yourself!" he shouted and stared up into the darkness above him.

"I'd like to do that, but first I want to point out that there are proton guns directed at you and your team. You have no chance. And now, lay down your weapons first."

"Sir, I have my orders and I must ask you to surrender!" Nielsen returned.

Henderson laughed. "My good Marshall, we both know that you are not in the position to make any requirements. Let the weapons be lain down – right now."

"And you know quite good that I cannot give this order! Sir, you stand up for a noble aim and nobody will appreciate that more than me, but the methods you are using to reach this aim are more than dubious and unworthy to an agent of your position. So I ask you once more: Surrender!"

"Nice attempt, Marshall, but you won't achieve anything with psychological tricks. I'll ask you now for the very last time, in the interest of your whole command, to lay down your weapons without delay or..."

Suddenly somewhere, a glass was broken, and this sound made both sides release a lethal shower of proton rays.

Horrified, Henderson switched on the light immediately.

"Stop fire!" he cried out into the noise and screaming. His men stood around the gallery and fired on their enemies down in the hall, who fired back – at least those who were still able to do so. Also some of Henderson's men had fallen - down over the balustrade and into the hall.

"Stop fire! Stop fire!!!" he shouted once more desperately, but it was already too late. The situation had entirely gone wrong, Niensens Team was all erased, six of his men were dead as well. A massacre, within seconds...

"Damn, how could this happen?" Henderson shouted into the silence, as the noise of warfare had faded

away. Marcus Banks walked up to him, acting like dumbstruck.

"Sir, I don't know... there must have been a champagne glass left on the balustrade, and one of us... must have kicked it down in the darkness..."

Henderson rested on the wall behind him, staring up to the ceiling and breathing heavily. "I didn't want that... For everything I regard as sacred, I didn't want that!" he shouted.

"Sir," said Banks, "right from beginning, we had to take into account the death of persons."

"Yes," Henderson managed to answer after a few seconds. "Let's move back to the central office."

Chapter III

in which first dangers are banned, Otho changes sides, freeing and failure are close together per view of reflection, a protection shield means not only protection, and Joan has to stand bad fears, but gets rewarded for it plentifully.

The noise and the screams let Futures Team hold on. They already had reached the fifth floor in search for the thermodetonators.

"Oh god, where does this come from?" Vasquez asked alarmed.

"It comes from downstairs." Joan said dismayed.

"That must be Nielsen's Team!" Through his comlink Future tried to get in touch with the other team but didn't get a reply. They turned on the spot and ran down the stairs again. On every floor it was entirely quiet and dark, but at the first floor it was conspicuous, that the hall was enlightened. Carefully they sneaked to the door-wings and Future and Vasquez dared a look inside. What they saw there took their breath away. The bodies of Nielsen and his whole team lay crosswise on the floor, nobody seemed to be alive anymore. Slowly they entered the hall came closer carefully. Joan shaking avoided the pools of blood on the parquet, she had been dancing on even yesterday and which was now entirely ruined. The dead lay partly in strangely distorted positions, over the burned holes in the combat suits had formed blackish crusts of blood. Henderson's helmet lay beside him and his face was disfigured unrecognisably. Only by his tattoo he could be identified.

"This rotten pig..." stammered Hillard, pale from terror. "He shot them all cold-blooded into the back."

"I don't believe that." Otho returned. "Here lie also some of Henderson men. They must have collided unexpectedly and so it came to a fight."

"I'm afraid we now have to hurry even more." Future said grimly. "Henderson has realised that his plan doesn't work the way he wanted. We must find the hostages as fast as we can." The comlink in his helmet flashed and Future switched to receive.

"Captain, this is Grag. We are in the topmost floor and in one of the glass elevators we've discovered one the thermodetonators... Entirely unguarded and we're afraid it could be a trap. What shall we do?"

"Grag, can you make out with your eyes or ears any other light- or sound frequents? It could be possible that Henderson has put up invisible barriers."

It last a moment until Grag answered. "No, Captain. Nothing to see and nothing to hear. Even the observing camera in the elevator is destroyed."

Future thought shortly. "OK Grag, try your luck, but please with utmost caution! We'll go on looking for the hostages again. Unfortunately Marshall Nielsen can't support us anymore... He and his team are dead."

Grag was silent in dismay but didn't ask any further questions. "Good luck, Captain. Grag over."

Bennett, this is your turn." Diane O'Connor said and pointed with her chin in direction of the elevator. Please no mishap now, listen?"

"Your trust really encourages me, O'Connor." Bennett said sarcastically. "If we get out of this alive you owe something to me, at least a dinner, I mean. Grag, would you please help me?"

The robot nodded and together, the weapons in position, they carefully got closer to thermo-artillery and finally reached it completely unhindered. Bennett kneaded his fingers that it cracked and opened cautiously the back case-covering of the thermoweapon. He activated a flat switch on the inside and a shining stainless steel

tube with a display on the top slid out to keystroke. A short proton ray was enough and under the destroyed display appeared the electronic of the weapon. Bennett took out the microchips for navigation, firing and protection shield and put it into Grag's metal hand.

"Always unbelievable what such little things can cause. Your turn, Grag.

The robot grinned widely and crunched the chips between his fingers. Diane O'Connor and the others came closer.

"Unbelievable how easy that was." she said honestly amazed. "Good work, Bennett!"

Bennett himself seemed at least as relieved as his colleague. "Thank you, O'Connor. We should make a report to the others and immediately go on with searching."

Captain Future, this is O'Connor. Bennett has deactivated the thermode-tonator and destroyed the microchips. No trace of Henderson and his men."

"That are good news. Though I'm a little bit worried that there was no resistance at all. Please be extremely carefully furthermore!"

"All right. Good luck. O'Connor over." Her voice had just faded when the comlink in his helmet swept quietly and for a moment a babble of voices was to hear. He listened and almost thought he would have misheard when the sound was to hear once more. He gave signs to the others to activate their comlink and so they heard it, too.

"What's that and where does it come from." Otho asked amazed. Future lifted his view and looked around. They had left the hall through the bar and were now in one of the service rooms. On the ceiling loudspeakers could be seen.

"What we've just heard could have been a feedback. Someone is quite near." The sound rang again and this time voices could clearly be made out.

Suddenly Joan turned pale. "My God, this is Ezra! Just listen!"

They listened and also realised the voice of their friend, however details were not to understand.

"Henderson released thirty two persons, so he has further 206 hostages in his force. The only possibility to get them into one room are the conference rooms." said Vasquez. "They're located on the other side of the corridor, in northern direction."

"So, lets go, Captain?" asked Otho.

Future nodded determined and they went on. They came to the storerooms of the kitchen when the door opened suddenly and the light switch were activated. The five just managed in time to hide behind a shelf. With the breath held on they could see how one of Henderson's men entered the room and clamped two big water bottles under his arms. Future soundlessly turned the intension regulator down, aimed and shot. The man collapsed unconsciously and the water bottles fell down crashing.

"Otho, this is your occasion. Hurry up!"

And while Vasquez and Hillard fast bound the man, muzzled him and pulled him behind a shelf, Otho acquired his figure. The others hid just in time for not being discovered by the man who entered the room now.

"Brooks, I would have expected a little bit more professionalism. Or how can you justify making such noise while the enemy is on our heels?"

"Excuse me, Sir. These things slipped down." said Otho alias Brooks. The other pointed strictly with chin to the outside and both left the storeroom, the light was switched off and the door was closed again.

"Otho's got no comlink anymore. How can we follow him now?" asked Joan.

“He carries the chameleon drone with him. I hope we can follow its signal.” returned Future and looked at the miniscreen, he was wearing on his wrist like all the others. “OK, I think they’re far away enough to follow them.”

Carefully they left the storeroom and peered down the dark corridor. Nobody was to see. They followed the course of the corridor whereas the carpet swallowed every sound of their steps. The drones signal on their miniscreens led them along the corridor and they followed it until it widened significantly. When Future dared a look around the next corner, he saw at the other ending a large enlightened room with glazed walls towards the corridor. Behind it he could see the outlines of several people, but the shaded bubble-glass didn’t let recognise any details. Without a sound, the weapons in position, they sneaked closer and found defence behind a wardrobe.

“What a pity that Otho can’t use the drone, otherwise we could achieve a much better broad view about the situation inside.” Vasquez said regretting.

“I need to know now, how Ezra is.” said Joan impatiently and wanted to leave the defence, but Future grabbed her arm. For one moment it looked like he tried to hold her back and she returned his look all determined.

“Take care for yourself, Joan!” he just said and let her off. She nodded and left the defence. Clinging to her weapon with both hands, she stalked in a squatting position to the first pane and peered cautiously inside.

“The room measures about twelve to eight metres and is with more than 200 people hopelessly overcrowded. The captives sleep in chairs and the ones, who are awake, look quite overtired and exhausted.” Joan told the others through her comlink. “Three of Henderson’s men guard the hostages, they’re armed with proton guns.” She went on searching the room with her eyes. “And there I can see police President Anderson... and there’s Ezra, too!” Joan was relieved. “As I can judge from here, nobody is hurt. Otho’s just putting in one of the bottles into the water dispenser and he’s got Brooks proton gun. What are we going to do now?”

Future just wanted to return something when Joan threw herself with a catlike jump back behind the wardrobe. “Somebody’s leaving the conference room!” she said breathlessly and yet the door opened.

A woman stepped uncertainly out to the only from the emergency lights enlightened corridor, an armed guard on her heels, and stumbled in direction to the opposite toilet. There she vanished and the guard posted himself in front of the door. Hillard drew his proton gun soundlessly and aimed.

“Are you nuts?” snorted Vasquez appallingly through his comlink and pushed down Hillard’s wrist. “So why don’t you just fire a signal rocket?”

The guard turned his head and looked in their direction.

“Damn, I think he’s noticed something.” Future hissed angrily and lifted the weapon. The post slowly went on to the wardrobe and looked around suspiciously. Finally he was so close that the sweat on his face could be seen gleaming in the pale light. However Joan’s attack surprised him that much that he later wouldn’t remember how it actually happened. She had jerked forward, had grabbed his arm and with all the force she was able to had hurled him over her shoulder down to the floor. Simultaneously she transported with a kick the proton gun out of his reach right before Futures feet. The guard jerked by pain and surprise before unconsciousness released him. Vasquez and Hillard jerked to him and put bonds and a toggle at him. Future picked up slowly the proton gun and stepped to Joan with real admiration.

"That was really excellent..." was all he brought over the lips in his surprise and her eyes gleamed with proud for his praise when suddenly the door of the conference room flung open and, alarmed by the sounds, a further guard entered the corridor. The situation left no time for hesitation to Future and so he raised the gun he still held in his hands and shoot. At the same moment Otho hit the third guard in the conference room unconsciously

with the heavy water-bottle .

Nigel Bennett and his colleagues had reached the topmost floor of the north-eastern corner of the Federation Building in search for the other thermodetonators.

"On the top is the so to speak delivery place to land. The rooms beneath actually offer the most ideal positions for a thermoweapon. I would be surprised if we wouldn't find something here." said Bennett directed to the others. "I suggest we look for the central acceptance office."

They went on stalking the dark corridors and finally discovered a glazed office, in which two of Henderson's men sat. A desk was pushed to a window and the thermo-artillery was installed on it. Suddenly the two men seemed to receive an important message, because they looked at each other astonished, unsecured their weapons and ran out of the room down the corridor where they vanished.

"I can't believe it. Are they running away from us, so what?" Grag asked amazedly.

"I think there is breaking out bare panic under them." Bennett returned. "They rely on firing their arms by remote control from their head office."

"But that doesn't look like a thought over plan anymore." said Diane O'Connor.

"There you are right." Bennett agreed with her. "Thus, lets take advantage of this."

They entered the acceptance office and like the first thermo-artillery they deactivated the second, too.

The female hostage peered terrified out of the door of the toilet.

"Come out, Miss, it's over!" Colin Hillard called at her encouragingly.

"Who are you?" she asked mistrustfully.

"Planet Police, we're here for freeing you." She came out and first hesitating then quickly she ran to him looking for shelter. In the conference room also the sleeping hostages had woken up by the noise caused by Otho, and a scared babble of voices rose.

"Calm down, it's all right." he begged with lifted hands, when Future, Joan, Vasquez and Hillard with the woman entered the room. The released hostage ran immediately to her husband who took her into his arms relieved. Anderson and Ezra pleased came up to their liberators.

"Captain Future!" I knew you would help us." said the police President and shook his hand with enthusiasm.

"Yes." Ezra said moved. "One just can rely on the Captain."

"Yet that was natural." Future repelled the eulogy. "Is anybody hurt?"

"By luck not." returned Ezra. "We've been treated very respectfully."

"Please listen!" Future now turned to everyone. "You've gone through a whole lot and you will be in freedom again soon. Unfortunately we yet couldn't overwhelm all the hostage-takers, but nevertheless we need to get you out of here as fast as possible. These agents will take care for you to leave the building insecure." He pointed to Vasquez, Hillard and the other three. Under the hostages relief came abroad audibly. Vasquez used this to step closer to Future.

"I hope you already have made up your mind how we can do that, Captain. It's one thing to deactivate the protection shield for twenty seconds. But it takes uneven more time to get more than two-hundred overtired and scared people out of here. To deactivate the protection shield that long, I regard as extremely dangerous as long as not all thermodetonators are deactivated."

Future looked at Vasquez strongly. "Your doubts are absolutely substantiate, Mr. Vasquez. But I'm confident that we can find and deactivate the third and last thermodetonator fast. So the people can at least leave the building, even if we haven't found Henderson and his men until then."

Henderson nodded seriously, but agreeing. "OK, folks, you've heard it. We'll get the people out of here now." He nodded once more to Captain Future and then turned to the crowd with some security advices.

"Certainly I'll support you in your further intentions." Ezra turned to the Captain. "How will you go on, Future?"

"Thank you, Ezra, I really estimate that. But please rather care for the security of the police President. He makes a quite worn-out impression." He made a step towards the Marshall. "And to be honest, I think you could endure a little rest as well."

Ezra lowered his eye-lids tired and took a deep breath. "Thank you, Captain." he said, looked at him and put a hand on Future's shoulder. "I don't want this to sound condescending but I'm very proud of you. Good luck."

Then he turned and followed with Anderson the people, who already left the conference room calmly and carefully. Vasquez left as last, showed them yet his lifted thumb and then Future, Joan and Otho, who had changed to his normal figure again, were alone. Through his comlink Future got in touch with Bennett and asked for their position.

"After having set the second thermoweapon out of engagement, we went on searching." Bennett applied back. "And then... Thus, to make it short, I guess we've discovered their head office. It's the supervising technical room, directly opposite the stairs to the topmost floor. We've taken position in the stairwell."

"OK, Bennett, don't do anything yet. We'll come upon you. Future over."

As fast and as quiet as they could they ran up the stairs and finally met Nigel Bennett, Grag and the others at the end of the stairs.

"The hostages are free." Future told them first. "Vasquez and Hillard are just taking them to the exit, and as soon as the third thermodetonator is deactivated, our head office will drive down the protection shield for the people to leave the building."

Henderson had all his men gathered in the head office. He was deeply uncertain, but it was to owe to his iron self-discipline that this couldn't be regarded.

"Gentlemen, unfortunately our plan didn't work the way it should. We've lost the hostages and I'd like to give you the possibility to retire from this mission. By assistance of the chips in the thermoweapons I'll then deactivate the protection shield, for you to leave the location unharmed."

None of the men moved at first, but then Marcus Banks finally stepped forward. "Sir, with respect, but I think a retreat does neither serve the honour of our unit nor the bereaved families." Only laboriously he could hide how indignant he was. "Surely you didn't forget that my wife is under the dead and I won't admit her and the others memory being shed unnoticed and denied in the soil of Ganymed!" he shouted furiously.

"Keep attitude, man! We're agents of the planet police!" Henderson retorted untouched.

"Wrong, Sir!" Banks answered and his eyes narrowed. "From the first second of this mission we became mercenaries and mercenaries get paid! You will now inform the head quarters that the ultimatum is cancelled and that the money is to transfer right now. Otherwise New York will go to rubble and ashes! Come on!" And to accent that he meant it, he drew his proton gun. Immediately all the others drew their weapons, too, whereas some of the men aimed at Henderson, some at Banks.

"You're completely insane." Henderson said disdainfully and wanted to turn away from him tenaciously. But Banks pulled the trigger and hit him right between the shoulder-blades. Henderson fell down on his knees and above his head the rays of the proton-arms flashed.

"What's up there inside?" Future, who was just discussing the further action with the others, turned his head.

"Don't they have activated the thermodetonator?" Otho asked worried.

"No, it sounded like intense proton fire." Joan returned. "And now it's damn quiet inside there."

"We've to take a look." Future said and went carefully to the heavy steel door. No sound was to hear. The weapons in position they posted themselves right and left beside the door and Bennett switched the door-opener. The door slid aside and the shocking view, which had offered to them in the hall, repeated here. Henderson's men lay dead on the floor and a disgustingly burned smell was in the air.

"That can't be true." Bennett brought out laboriously. "Either they didn't agree yet about their further action or this is collective suicide for desperation."

Future kneeled beside Henderson and searched for signs of life but he was dead.

"Please ascertain, if yet somebody is still alive." Future just asked the others when they all heard a groaning. Before they could find out where it came from, they suddenly saw how the electronic of the thermodetonator activated and the navigation adjusted with a buzzing sound. Future froze when he realized what that meant.

"On the spot out of here!" he shouted horrifiedly, grabbed Joan's hand and ran with her outside and down the steps, followed by the others.

"Bennett, how much time have we got, until the weapon inclusive the chip is completely armed?" Future asked breathlessly.

"I don't know exactly, but I would guess in maximum about five minutes!"

This statement caused everyone to run even a little faster. When they reached the basement of the building, the released hostages were just leaving the building. They all pushed forward relieved through the old delivery entrance and that didn't go on fast. Without spreading panic they urged the people to hurry.

"But Captain! Even if we're getting out of here, the protection shield won't stand and we'll spoiled by the detonation." Otho whispered to Future.

"I know. Professor Simon and Dr. Jackson are our last hope." They now stood in the open and in front of the dawn as background, they could clearly recognise, how the protection shield drove down. Hopefully this is caused by our head office and not yet by the microchip, Joan thought anxiously. The released hostages and the command of the planet police in front of them, the Future-Men left the site finally, too. In the tree-lined alley in front of them were already parking several ambulances and fire brigade vehicles, ready for deployment. Suddenly a deep growl vibrated in the air and let everyone look up. The protection shield built up again but unfortunately its line proceeded somewhere else than before, hit Future who had left the site as last, and pushed him down. Joan just wanted to jerk to him, when a loud bang let the ground shake and she fell down. The Federal Office Building trembled in its foundation walls, seemed to expand shortly and finally exploded in a white-glowing fireball. Joan had lain her hands protecting above her head and thought herself to be at the end of her life, but slowly the ground stopped shaking and she dared to look up. The protection shield still stood and its surface frizzed under the shockwaves of the explosion. The Federation Building had vanished. She looked around. New York still stood. This seemed to be realised by others, because the people stood up and started a loud cheering. Joan looked for Curtis and startled she had to realize, that he still lay on the ground. On hands and knees she crawled to him, took off his helmet and lay her finger on his neck. No pulse. Hastily she also took off her helmet, lay her ear on his mouth and listened. No breathing. Oh no, please not! rushed through her mind and she felt panic rise.

"Grag! Otho!" she shouted with a shrill voice for the both, who immediately were by her side. "Fast, to one of the ambulances with him. The electromagnetic field of the protection shield has caught him."

Future opened his eyes. What had happened? He darkly remembered of being hit or having caught a severe

punch, but he felt no pain at all. Slowly he rose and found himself in an ambulance, surrounded by medical apparatus. And he lay on a bed. Or just his body? An ambulance-man tinkered about some instrument, Joan sat completely deranged by his side and he stood beside and watched. And watched his own body. A strange view, which however didn't worry him in any way. In contrary, he felt easy and free and when he looked up, he realized a strange light falling into the vehicle. Without the slightest sound he opened the door of the ambulance and looked onto an almost endless-seeming area, filled with this light. And in this light shadowy outlines of people could be guessed. He jumped out and wanted to come nearer to better recognize them, when he could hear Joan's desperate crying like from far away.

"Curtis, stay with me! I don't want to lose you..."

He hesitated. What she said seemed once to be important to him, but he didn't know why. It seemed to have no meaning anymore. He went on and between all the nebulously diffuse faces he finally discovered one he knew. There stood his mother Elaine, like she was in his memory and smiled at him friendly. And suddenly he was a child again, ran on and wished to fly into her arms like in early times, but as much as he tried he couldn't reach her. And she just stood there and smiled at him. He slowed his step and looked at her irritated. Something was wrong.

"I must be dreaming." he said finally and felt his voice sounding strangely contorted.

"That's true." his mother answered smiling. "And you have to wake up."

Future felt a sudden pain in his breast and looked at her insistent.

"But I don't want to wake up. I want to stay here with you." She looked at him with affection.

"And me with you, my heart, but now you have to wake up."

Again pain seized Future. It felt like a wire-rope tightened to strong around his breast and someone heavily pulling on it.

"Wake up, Curtis..." he heard his mother say one more time, but there he already couldn't see her anymore. Again somebody pulled painfully on the rope around his breast, so he thought he could no longer breath.

"Don't leave me, Curtis, don't do this to me!"

The desperate cry came to his consciousness like through cotton wool and once more a torturing jerk on the rope around his breast seemed to pull him back on the bed, he felt the upholstery under himself, felt his body again.

"You mustn't let me down by now. Just wake up..."

When he recognised the voice, a pleasant warmth streamed through him and he felt life really flow back into his body.

"Joan..." he whispered lowly and opened his eyes laboriously. The ambulance-man held on immediately and put the electrodes of the defibrillator back into its posture. He ripped the prepared injection with the heart-rhythm-drug out of its sterile wrapping and gave it to him as calm as the hurry speed of the ambulance allowed. With the scraps of the combat suit, which he had ripped laboriously with a scalpel, he poorly covered the upper body of his patient and spread a thermo-blanket above him.

"No need to worry anymore, Miss. I guess he's through it." said the ambulance-man with a calm voice, patted her hand encouragingly and turned then to his instruments for observing the life-functions of his patient. Joan turned to Curtis again and looked at him as if she wished to memorize every detail of his face, lovingly caressed his hair and stroke his cheek.

"How are you, Curtis?" she asked with a shaking voice and took his hand.

He turned his head and looked at her. She seemed exhausted and tired but in her eyes glowed a warmth more effective than any thermo-blanket.

"What happened?" he asked faint.

"You got caught by the electromagnetic field of the protection shield and had a cardiac arrest."

Future nodded weakly and closed his eyes again. What was that he had been seeing?

Until the evening he had recovered quite well, but should spend one night in the hospital for observation. Grag, Otho and Ezra had just been waiting for permission to visit him and entered his sick-room.

"Future, you really gave me a fright. And that after the mission seemed to be finished so successfully. I'm very released to meet you in good health."

"Thanks, Ezra, I'm fine. Tell me, how did it come that the protection shield just held?"

"Well, this we owe to our genius Professor Simon." Grag said proudly. "And of course Dr. Jackson, too. The both succeeded in developing a prototype that far, that the microchip couldn't mind the protection shield. And that literally in the final second!"

"Yes, once more he made it really exciting, didn't he, Joan?" Ezra said to his colleague.

"Excuse me, what did you say?" Joan said surprised, when she realized the word directed to her. She just couldn't take off her view from Curtis. Ezra smiled and turned to Grag and Otho.

"Well, I don't know how you think about that, but I feel a bit displaced. Come on, I invite you to a little dropping down. Then, good recovery to you, Captain!" Joan blushed and broadly grinning the three left the room. Joan took a stool, sat down close to Curtis' bed and looked at him urgently.

"Now we're gone through it, Joan." said Curtis finally and took her hand. Unintentionally tears shimmered in her eyes.

"I'm so glad that you are still with me, Curtis. Just now in the ambulance I thought for a moment I would lose you." One single tear ran over her cheek. Future blinked when he remembered the strange experience he had made.

"I had really gone quite far, Joan. But you got me back." His words sent a shower down her spine and she lay her hand on the mouth to suppress a sobbing.

"How should I have go on without you?" she whispered suffocated.

"Joan..." Future looked deeply into her eyes and tenderly wiped a tear from her cheek. This surreal meeting with his mother had touched him on his deepest inside and he realized, that there were yet more important things in life than what he thought to be his priorities.

"Now I know that something was missing in my life, but I wasn't conscious of what it was. I'd like to change that now, I want to change ME, really! But after so many years I can't do this from today to tomorrow. Please give me some time." Joan nodded wordless and managed a smile.

"I love you, Joan. And I guess you don't even suspect how much." This confession came over his lips with a naturalness that surprised himself, and after all this nerve-racking tension of the last hours this brought her out of self-control completely. Unrestrainedly sobbing she put her head on his breast and let the tears of relief flow. It was already late when they finally had to part because of the night nurse had reminded them strictly, and so she left him after a long and tender good-bye.

It was a clinging cold day in December. A closed greyish-white cloud-cover formed the sky above New York and didn't want to give a chance to sun. Rather soon snowfall announced. The whole city was already decorated for Christmas and the streets seemed to be fixed with hectic and hurry even more than usually. On the ice-rink at the Rockefeller-Center countless people cheerfully romped about, in the break of the dawn brightly towered by the metres-high, widely visible Christmas tree with its thousands of lights. Warmly wrapped

Joan and Curtis stood at the border of the ice-rink and watched the lively swirling. They had seen each other often during the past three months, however always just short and mainly in connection with the official investigation process to their last mission. Now all statements were made and the case now occupied in the first line courts, public prosecutors and lawyers. After the last official appointment they had met this morning again and had thereupon spent the rest of the day together, and Curtis seemed to waste no thought to the returning flight. Now she looked at him dreamy from beside, and once more she realized just how attractive he was. Especially when he wore something ordinary like turtle-neck, down-filled jacket and jeans instead of his space suit.

"That was a very nice day today, Curtis." she said and slipped her hand into his. "I don't want to miss a second of it. I mean, almost there would have been not much left of this great city and we wouldn't stand here today..."

"That's right. One should really enjoy every moment of life. Though to me in personal it's always a bit difficult when so many people are around like here." He blinked embarrassedly. "Probably I'll never get used to this. Usually there's not that much going round on moon."

"Funny that you mention that, but..." She drew him to herself gently and leaned on his breast.

"In case you once should feel too lonely on the moon, you could visit me again and we can have such a wonderful day like today."

She looked at Curtis expectantly with her blue eyes, like a child short before the giving out of the Christmas gifts. He had to smile.

"And in case you wish to escape New York's hectic you'll visit me on the moon, alright?"

Joan lifted her face quite close to his. "For being alone we only would have to go a few blocks further and a few floors higher..." The seductive look in her eyes said more than words. He let her hand off and put his arms around her instead.

"Like I said before, to my taste here are too many people anyway. But to fly to the moon lasts much too long for now. Thus, where do we have to go?"

Joan laughed, kissed him and arm in arm they went home.