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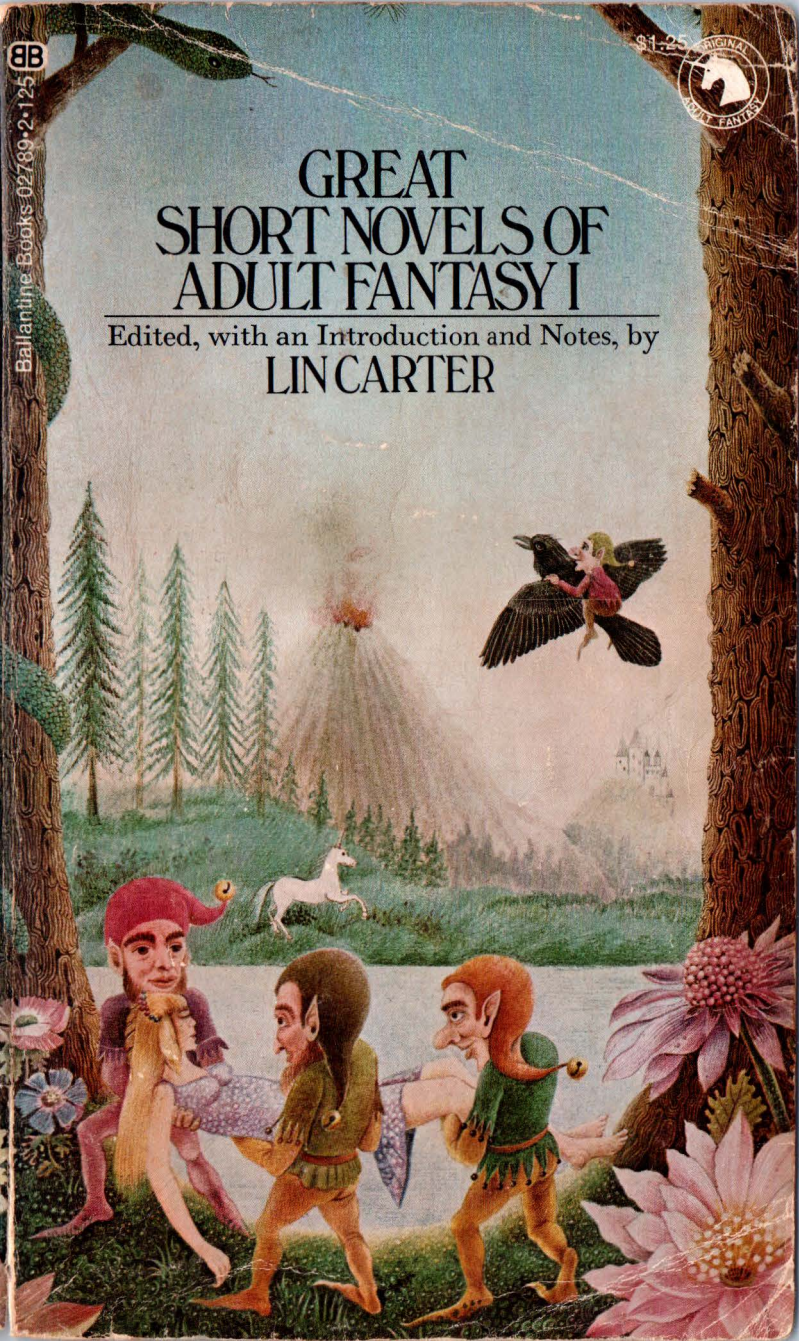
ORIGINAL ADULT FANTASY

GREAT SHORT NOVELS OF ADULT FANTASY I

Edited, with an Introduction and Notes, by

LIN CARTER



FIVE GRAND MASTERS— AND FOUR WORLDS OF WONDER

This collection is an admirable demonstration of the marvellous diversity of adult fantasy writing. Indeed, it would be difficult to group such a widely disparate pride of authors as Pratt, de Camp, Anatole France, Robert Chambers and William Morris, except in the worlds of the fantastic.

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Contents

Four Worlds of Wonder

It has been three years now since Ballantine Books first invited me to select classic fantasy novels and books of short stories for revival in this Adult Fantasy Series. In so doing I had reluctantly passed over certain stories simply because of their awkward length.

I refer to the short novel of twenty or thirty thousand words—the so-called "novella." Since most of the books we have been publishing under the Sign of the Unicorn's Head average around eighty or eighty-five thousand words, obviously a novella is just too short for our use.

Every year I have assembled an anthology of wonder literature for Ballantine—books such as *The Young Magicians* (1969) and *New Worlds for Old* (1971). In such cases as these, a novella would be—not too short, but—too long. Were I to include many novellas, I would not have enough room for a broad selection of short stories.

Great Short Novels of Adult Fantasy represents an ideal compromise and a perfect solution to this problem. With a little judicious balancing, I can fit at least four such short novels together in one book. The initial result is now in your hands, and it is the first of what I envision as a series of annual collections.

The range of the stories in this first anthology is rather surprising. One of the stories, that written by

Anatole France, is the work of a Nobel Prize-winning French *littérateur;* another tale, by Fletcher Pratt and L. Sprague de Camp, is a humorous adventure yarn drawn from the lowly pulp magazines of yore. A third story is the work of a British novelist of the last century, while a fourth comes from a popular American writer of the 1920's.

The choice of this wide range of dates and styles and nationalities and literary significance, I will have you know, is deliberate. It is done to suggest the enormous scope of Adult Fantasy, and it is indicative of things to come.

Since each of the four excellent fantasy novellas herein will have its own particular introduction, I shall be brief here. I would, however, like to say something that needs to be said, and this is as good a place to say it as any. When we launched the Adult Fantasy Series back in 1969, neither my publishers nor myself could be certain what sort of reception readers would give it. There is a myth, popular among the editors and publishers of paperbacks, that says "fantasy does not sell." The books published thus far in the Series have happily debunked this item of common belief: you, the reading audience, have bought each volume Ballantine has published under the Adult Fantasy sigil, and the enthusiasm of your response has been very heartening.

There is, of course, no way either I or my publishers can thank you for your support . . . except to continue to see to it that the finest fantasy ever written continues to appear on your newsstand month after month, under the Sign of the Unicorn's Head!

—LIN CARTER

I.

WALL OF SERPENTS

Fletcher Pratt

and

L. Sprague de Camp

(1953)

Editor's Note

The *spectacular writing team* of Fletcher Pratt and L. Sprague de Camp brightened the pages of Street & Smith's famous fantasy magazine, *Unknown Worlds,* during its all too brief career; and to many nostalgic readers of that splendid magazine, myself certainly included, the by-line of Pratt & de Camp sums up and typifies the peculiar blend of wacky Lewis Carroll logic and intelligent, mature story-telling that *Unknown* is famous for.

On solo terms, each writer has produced fine work in the field of modern fantasy. Fletcher Pratt's down-beat (and offbeat) "unheroic" heroic fantasy novel, *The Blue Star,* appeared in the Adult Fantasy Series three years ago. Again, in 1970, Pratt opened the second year of our fantasy renaissance with his and de Camp's marvelous classic from *Unknown,* puzzlingly never before in paperback, *Land of Unreason.* L. Sprague de Camp has been represented inadequately in the Series thus far, due simply to the fact that his books are almost all in print from other publishers.

Pratt & de Camp's most popular contributions to the golden era of *Unknown* were a cycle of tales about the wild and woolly adventures of an experimental psychologist named Harold Shea. The first of these delightful yarns appeared in *Unknown* back in May, 1940, to instant acclaim by the readers, who

wanted more. The Harold Shea stories are a particularly entertaining blend of *Alice in Wonderland* nonsense, straightforward heroic fantasy, and humor of the slapstick-and-pratfall variety.

So popular did this series of short novels become that it survived even the demise of the magazine which saw its birth: Years later the early stories were collected in hardcover books, titled *The Incomplete Enchanter* and *The Castle of Iron,* which subsequently went into paperback editions so popular that I believe they are both still in print.

What has escaped the newer converts to the deliciously entertaining adventures of Harold Shea is that Pratt & de Camp briefly revived the series in the years immediately preceding the untimely death of Fletcher Pratt in 1956. *Wall of Serpents* was one of these last adventures: It appeared in 1953 in a short-lived but superbly literate magazine called *Fantasy Fiction;* edited by Lester del Rey, this excellent little magazine survived for only four issues, and its departure was much regretted.

Harold Shea ventures into the almost-worlds of legend and of literary invention. He does this by means of a formula of symbolic logic. In early tales he traveled into the man-made worldscapes of Spenser's *Faerie Queene* and Coleridge's "Kubla Khan." In *Wall of Serpents* this so-called "syllogismobile" takes him and his friends into the lands of Finnish legend—to be precise, into the world created by a Finnish scholar named Lönnrot, who compiled a sequence of folk sagas into a glorious national epic called the *Kalevala.*

I was quite surprised, some time ago, to learn that this splendid yarn had never appeared in a paperback; and I am happy to repair that omission here.

—L/C

WALL OF SERPENTS

ONE

The mail was neatly stacked on the table in the front hall. Belphebe said, "Mrs. Dambrot is having cocktails on the fifteenth. That's Thursday, isn't it? And here's a note for the maid, poor wretch. The Morrisons are having a lawn party Sunday and want us to come. This one's really for you; it's from that McCarthy wittold who was in your class last semester, and he wants to know when he can call on us and talk about pspsionics."

"Oh, that," said Harold Shea. He pushed back his black hair and stroked his long nose.

"And will we subscribe five dollars to the Guild for . . ."

"Hell!" said Shea.

She cocked her head to one side, eyeing him from under arched brows. He thought how pretty she was and how remarkably she had adapted herself to his own space-time continuum since he had brought her from the universe of the *Faerie Queene,* and later rescued her from that of the *Orlando Furioso,* whither his collaborator Chalmers had accidentally snatched her while angling for Shea to help him out of a private predicament.

"My most sweet lord," she said, "I do protest you want in courtesy. When you cozened me to wed with you, 'twas with fair promise that my life would be a very paradise."

He slipped an arm around her and kissed her before she could dodge. "Life anywhere with you would be a paradise. But lawn parties! And the home for homeless poodles, five dollars!"

Belphebe laughed. "The Morrisons are gentle folk. There will be lemonade and little sandwiches. And we shall probably play charades, 'stead of being pursued by barbarous Moors."

Shea seized her by both shoulders and looked intently at the expression of wide-eyed innocence she had assumed. "If I didn't know you better, kid, I'd say you were trying to persuade me to get out of it somehow, but getting me to make the proposition. Just like a woman."

"My most dear lord! I am but a dutiful wife, that loves but to do her husband's will."

"When it's the same as your own, you mean. All right. Ohio bores you. But you don't want to go back to Castle Carena and that gang of tin-plated thugs, do you? We never did find out who won the magical duel, Atlantes or Astolph."

"Not I. But come, sir, let us reason together on this." She led the way into the living room and sat down. "In serious sooth, though we are but newly returned and though this Ohio be a land of smiling peace and good order, I think we too lightly promised each other to wander no more."

"You mean," said Shea, "that you can take only so much peace and good order? I can't say I blame you. Doc Chalmers used to tell me I should have taken to politics or become a soldier of fortune instead of a psychologist, and damned if . . ."

"It is not solely that whereon I think," she said. "Have you any word further on your friends who were lately with us?"

"I haven't checked today, but none of them had come back yesterday."

She looked worried. In the course of their incursion into the continuum of Ariosto's *Orlando* epics, they had left no less than four colleagues and innocent bystanders scattered about sundry universes. "That were a week complete since our return."

"Yes," said Shea. "I don't know that I blame Doc Chalmers and Vaclav Polacek for staying in the world of the *Orlando Furioso*—they were having a good time there. But Walter Bayard and Pete the cop were stuck in Coleridge's Xanadu the last I knew, and I don't think they were having a very good time. Doc was supposed to send them back here, and he either couldn't make it or forgot."

Belphebe said: "And there are those who would take it amiss if they did not come? Even as you have told me that the police sought you out when I was missing in the land of Castle Carena?"

"I'll say so. Especially since one of them is a cop. In this land of peace and good order it's a lot more dangerous to monkey with a policeman than with a professor."

She looked down and moved one hand on the edge of the couch. "I feared as much. . . . Harold."

"What's the matter, kid?"

"There is a kind of knowledge we woodlings have that those in the cities do not know. When I went abroad today, I was followed both here and there without once being able to see by whom or for what purpose."

Shea leaped up. "Why, the dirty skunks! I'll . . ."

"No, Harold. Be not so fiery-fierce. Could you not go to them and tell them the simple truth?"

"They wouldn't believe it any more than they did the last time. And if they did, it might start a mass migration to other space-time continua. No, thanks. Even Doc Chalmers hasn't worked out all the rules of transfer yet, and it all might turn out to be as

dangerous as selling atomic bombs in department stores."

Belphebe cupped her chin in one hand. "Aye. I do recall how we were ejected from my own dear land of Faerie, never to return, in spite of your symbolic logic that changes all impressions the senses do receive. Yet I like the present prospect but little." She referred to Shea's final desperate spell in his conflict with the wizard Dolon. Dolon had been destroyed, but Shea had worked up so much magical potential that he had been thrown back into his own universe, dragging Belphebe with him.

Belphebe's brows went up. "Never before have I known you so lacking in resource. Or is it that you do not wish to go? Hark!—is there not some frame of thought, some world to which we could remove and find a magic strong enough to overcome this of Xanadu? Thus we might outflank our trouble rather than essaying to beat it down by assault direct."

Shea noticed that she was assuming the question of whether she should accompany him to be settled, but he had now been married long enough to know better than to make an issue of it.

"It's an idea, anyway. Hmm, maybe Arthurian Britain. No—all the magicians there are bad eggs except Bleys and Merlin. Bleys is pretty feeble, and Merlin we couldn't be sure of finding, since he spends a lot of time in our own continuum." (Merlin had put in an appearance in the final scene of their Orlandian adventure.) "The *Iliad* and *Odyssey* haven't any professionals except Circe, and she was a pretty tough baby, not likely to help either of us. There aren't any magicians to speak of in *Siegfried* or *Beowulf*. . . . Wait a minute, I think I've got it. The *Kalevala!*"

"What might that be?"

"The Finnish epic. Practically all the big shots in

it are magicians and poets, too. Vainamoinen could be a big help—'Vainamoinen, old and steadfast. . . .' A guy with a heart the size of a balloon. But we'll need some equipment if we go there. I'll need a sword, and you had better take a knife and a good bow. The party might get rough."

Belphebe glowed. "That lovely bow of the alloy of magnesium, with the sight, that lately I used in the contest for the championship of Ohio?"

"N-no, I think not. It probably wouldn't work in the Finnish frame of reference. Might turn brittle and snap or something. Better use the old wooden one. And wooden arrows, too. None of these machine-age steel things you're so crazy about."

She asked, "If this Finland be where I think, will it not be uncomfortable cold?"

"You bet. None of that perpetual summer you had in Faerie. I've got enough backwoods clothes to do me, and I'll make out a list for you. This sounds like a breeches-and-boots expedition."

"What kind of country would it be?"

"Near as I can make out, it's one vast sub-arctic swamp. A flat land covered by dense forest, with little lakes everywhere."

"Then," she said, "boots of rubber would serve us well."

Shea shook his head. "Nothing doing. For the same reason that you shouldn't take that trick magnesium bow. No rubber in this mental pattern. I made that mistake among the Norse gods and nearly got my ears beaten off for it."

"But . . ."

"Listen, take my word for it. Leather boots, laced and well greased. Wool shirts, leather jackets, gloves . . . you'd better get a pair of those mittens that leave one finger free. After we get there, we can get some

native clothes. Here's the list—oh, yes, woolen underwear. And drive slow, see?"

He looked at her as sternly as he could manage; Belphebe had a tendency to drive the Shea Chevrolet as though she were piloting a jet fighter.

"Oh, I'll be a very model of prudence." She shifted from foot to foot.

"And while you're gone," he continued, "I'll get out the symbol-cards and grease up our syllogismobile."

When Belphebe returned two hours later, Harold Shea was squatting cross-legged on his living-room floor with the cards laid out in front of him. They looked something like the Zener ESP cards, except that the symbols were the little horseshoes and cruces ansata of symbolic logic. He had ordered these cards on the Garaden Institute's money when he brought Belphebe from Faerie into his own continuum, and they were ready on his return from the *Orlando Furioso*. They ought to make the task of leaping from one universe to another considerably easier than by drawing the symbols on blank cards or sheets of paper. Beside him lay a copy of the *Kalevala,* to which he referred from time to time as he tried to sort out the logical premises of the continuum for proper arrangement of the cards.

" 'Lo, sweetheart," he said abstractedly, as she came in with the big bundle. "I think I've got this thing selective enough to drop us right into Vainamoinen's front yard."

"Harold!"

"Huh?"

"The slot-hounds are surely on the trail. Two men in a police car sought to follow me on my way home."

"Oh-oh. What happened?"

"I spun sprackly wise about a few corners and so eluded them for the time, but . . ."

"Oh, boy. They'll have your license number and be here any time."

"A pox and a murrain on them! What is there more to assemble? I'll have all ready in half an hour's space."

"Not half an hour. Now. Stay there! No, don't try to put on those new clothes now. Hug the bundle and it'll come along with us. Get your bow and stuff."

He jumped up and ran up the stairs. Presently his voice came, muffled from the depths of a closet. "Belphebe!"

"Yes?"

"Where the hell are those thick wool socks of mine?"

"In the big carton. You haven't used them since last winter."

"Okay. . . . And that yellow scarf? Never mind, I found it. . . ."

Minutes later, he reappeared in the living room with his arms full of clothing and equipment. To Belphebe he said, "Got your bow? Good. And plenty of arr-"

The front doorbell rang.

Belphebe took a quick look out the window. " 'Tis they! There squats their car! What's to do?"

"Beat it for the *Kalevala,* quick. Sit on the rug beside me and hold my hand with one hand and your duffel with the other."

The bell rang again. Shea, throwing himself into the lotus posture of Yoga, concentrated on the cards in front of him.

"If A is not not-B, and B is not not-A. . . ."

The room went out of focus.

There was nothing in front of him save the cards,

arranged in a square of five cards on a side. Twenty-five cards.

". . . . and if C be the Land of Heroes, the *Kalevala*. . . ."

On went the spell. The cards dissolved into a million little spots of light, whirling in a rigadoon of their own mysterious meaning. Shea tightened his grip on Belphebe's hand and his bundle of gear.

There was a sensation of being borne, feather-light, along the avenues of a gale. Colors. Sounds that could not quite be heard. A feeling of falling. Shea remembered how he had been scared witless the first time this happened to him—and how at the end of it he had landed in Norse myth at the Ragnarok instead of the Irish myth he had desired. . . .

The whirling lights sorted themselves out into a fixed pattern, solidified, materialized. He was sitting in long, worn grass, with Belphebe and a couple of piles of clothes beside him.

TWO

The grasses, nodding to a gentle breeze, closed in the view around them. Overhead a blanket of close-packed low clouds marched across Shea's vision, shutting off the sky. The air was mildly cool and moist. At least they had not arrived in the midst of one of those terrifying Finnish winters.

Shea gathered his long legs under him and rose with a grunt, pulling Belphebe up after him. Now he could see that they stood in a wide meadow. To their right, the meadow ran out into the edge of a forest of mixed birch and fir. To their left . . .

"Hey, kid! Look at those," said Shea.

"Those" were a group of animals grazing around a big old oak that stood alone in the meadow. Shea

made out three horses, rather small and shaggy, and another animal, belonging to the deer family. With antlers. Either a caribou or a very large reindeer.

"We shall not lack for meat," said Belphebe. "Certainly this is a noble stag, and too proud to fear."

The four animals, after a ruminant look at the time-continuum travelers, had returned to their grazing.

"It must be a reindeer," said Shea. "They use them for draft animals around here."

"Like the gift-giving sprite called Santa Claus in your legends of Ohio?"

"Yeah. Let's get our junk over to that fence and put on our woods clothes. Damn, I forgot toothbrushes. And extra underwear. . . ."

He thought of other items he'd forgotten in their haste to get away, such as grease for their boots. However, there were two of them, and they had his well-tempered epee and her longbow, not to mention his command of magic. By the use of these in such an environment, it should be possible to get whatever else was really necessary.

The fence was one of the wood-rail, Abraham Lincoln type. As they neared it, picking up their feet to force them through the long grass, the forest opened out a bit, and Shea glimpsed a group of low, long log houses, half hidden among the trees. A thin blue plume of smoke issued from a hole in the roof of one. There was a faint sound of voices.

"People," said Shea.

"Grant they may be friendly," said Belphebe, glancing toward the buildings as she inserted herself into an angle of fence and began to pull her dress over her head.

"Don't worry, kid," said Shea. "Vainamoinen's the best egg in this whole space-time continuum."

He began to change to his woods clothes.

"Oh, Harold," said Belphebe. "We brought with us no scrip or other carrier wherein to transport our possessions, and I am loath to leave this good dress. It was the first you bought me, when we were in New York."

"Fold it up, and I'll make a bag out of my shirt. Hello, company's coming!"

They hurriedly completed their change and were lacing their boots, when the man who had appeared from the direction of the houses reached the gate in the fence and came toward them.

He was a short man, of about Harold Shea's own age (in other words, on the naive side of thirty), with a snub nose, wide Mongoloid cheek bones, and a short, straggly black beard. His thumbs were thrust into a broad embroidered leather belt that gathered in a linen blouse-shirt which fell over a pair of baggy, woolen pants, which in turn were tucked into boots with hair on the outside. A cap of some high-grade fur sat precariously on one side of his head. He swaggered notably.

Shea buckled on the scabbarded epee and said: "Good day, sir!" confident that his transition to this continuum had automatically changed his language to the local one.

The man cocked his head on one side and combed his beard with his fingers, surveying them from head to foot. Finally he spoke.

"Oh, ye funny-looking strangers,
It is plain for all to witness,
Ye are from a foreign country!
Tell me of yourselves, O strangers;
Whence ye come from, what your station,
Who your forebears, what the purpose
Brings you to the land of heroes?"

Oh, no you don't, thought Shea. I've read the *Kalevala,* and I know that when you get the ancestry of a man you can clap all sorts of spells on him. Aloud he said courteously, "I'm Harold Shea, and this is my wife, Belphebe. We come from Ohio."

"Harolsjei? Pelviipi? Ouhaio?" said the man.
"Truth to tell, I do not know them.
From a distant land ye must be,
Farther than the realm of Hiisi,
Than the dreaded deeps of Mana.
Though ye come a long way hither,
Never shall ye lack for welcome,
So that beautiful Pelviipi
Ever smooths the path before you
By her smile so warmly radiant,
Warmly radiant as the sunbeam."

"Thanks," said Shea drily. "And if it's all the same to you, I'd just as soon you spoke prose. My wife was bitten by a poet once, and it gave her an allergy that makes her uncomfortable when she hears more of it."

The man glanced at Shea suspiciously and at Belphebe appreciatively. "Hear me now, O Harolainen . . ." he began, but Belphebe, playing up nobly, made a face and a slight retching sound, so he checked, and lowering his voice, said, "Is it not that in far Ouhaio you control your women?"

"No, they control us," said Shea rapidly.

Belphebe frowned; the stranger smiled ingratiatingly. "In our noble land of heroes early do we learn the manner of teaching women their places. Now will I make you the fairest of offers—we shall for one wife exchange the other, and fair Pelviipi shall be returned to you, made most obedient, and with a knowledge of poetry gained from the greatest singer in all Kalevala, all the land of heroes."

"Huh?" said Shea. "No, I don't think I'd care to go into a deal like that . . ." and as he caught the stocky man's frown ". . . at least until I know more about your country. Is Vainamoinen up there at the houses?"

The stranger had been leading them toward the gap in the fence. He said sullenly, "Not there now nor ever will be."

"Oh," said Shea, thinking that he must somehow have made a positional error. "Then whom does this establishment belong to?"

The man stopped, drew himself up, and with as much hauteur as a shorter man can give himself before a taller, said,

> "Stranger, it is clear as water
> You are new to Kalevala.
> No one from the land of heroes
> Could mistake great Kaulkomieli,
> Oft as Saarelainen mentioned.
> Surely have the fame and glory
> Of the lively Lemminkainen
> Wafted to your distant country!"

"Oh-oh," said Shea. "Pleased to meet you, Lemminkainen. Ye-es, your fame has come to Ohio."

He shot a nervous glance at Belphebe. Not having read the *Kalevala,* she was in no position to appreciate exactly how serious the positional error was. Instead of reliable old Vainamoinen, they had made contact with the most unreliable character in the whole continuum: Lemminkainen, the reckless wizard and arrant lecher.

But trying to pull out now would only make things worse. Shea went on, "You have no idea what a pleasure it is to meet a real hero."

"You have met the greatest," said Lemminkainen, modestly. "Doubtless you have come to seek aid

against a fire bird or sea dragon that is laying waste your country."

"Not exactly," said Shea, as they reached the gate. "You see, it's like this: we have a couple of friends who got stranded in another world, and the magic of our own world isn't strong enough to bring them back. So we thought we'd come to a country where they had real magicians and find somebody with skill enough to manage the job."

Lemminkainen's broad face assumed an expression of immense craftiness. "What price shall be offered for this service thaumaturgic?"

Damn it, thought Shea, can't the man speak plain language? Aloud he said, "What might you want, for instance?"

The stocky man shrugged. "I, the mighty Lemminkainen, have few needs of anybody. Flocks and herds in plenty have I, fields of rye and barley, girls to kiss and serfs to serve me."

Shea exchanged a glance with Belphebe. As he stood there, debating whether to mention his own technique in magic, Lemminkainen went on, "Perhaps, if the beautiful Pelviipi . . ."

"Not on your life!" said Shea quickly.

Lemminkainen shrugged again and grinned. "As you wish, O Harolainen. I have no desire to haggle —and in any case, I have my own wrongs to right. Curses on the Mistress of Pohjola, who refused to let me wed her daughter, and not only that, did not even invite me to her wedding with Ilmarinen the smith. I will slay these wretched people of the land of fog and darkness!"

He suddenly snatched off his cap, flung it on the ground and danced up and down in a paroxysm of rage. Shea tried to recall his *Kalevala*. There was something about a journey of revenge like that in it,

and it had not turned out too well for Lemminkainen, as he recalled.

"Wait a minute," he said, "maybe we can make a deal at that. This Pohjola is a pretty tough nut. If you take the two of us along, we might be of a good deal of help in cracking it."

Lemminkainen stopped his capering. "Shall a hero of my stature fear the land of frost and midnight?" he asked. "Tall you are, but lack the mighty thews of Kalevala's heroes. You might help if the battle were with children."

"Now look here," said Shea, "I may not be built like a truck-horse, but I can do one or two things. With this." He whipped out the epee.

At Shea's draw, Lemminkainen's hand flashed to the hilt of his own broadsword, but he refrained from producing it when it was evident that Shea had no immediate intention of attacking him. He looked at the epee.

"Certainly that is the oddest sword-blade ever seen in Kalevala," he said. "Do you use it as a toothpick or with thread to patch your breeches?"

Shea grinned in his turn. "Feel that point."

"It is sharp, but my wife Kylliki does my darning."

"Still, it wouldn't do you any good if it poked into you, would it? All right, then. Want to see how I use it?"

Lemminkainen's short, broad blade came out.

"No, Harold," said Belphebe, putting down her own bundle and beginning to string her bow.

"It's all right, kid. I've dealt with these cut men before. Remember the hillside near Castle Carena? Besides, this is just practice."

"Do you wish to try at flatsides?"

"Exactly. Ready?"

Clang-dzing-zip! went the blades. Lemminkainen, pressing forward, was as good a swordsman with the

edge as Shea had ever encountered. He swung forehand, backhand and overhand with bewildering speed, not seeming even to breathe hard. His theory seemed to be to get in close and hit as hard and as often as possible, and to hell with the consequences.

Shea, backing slowly, parried the vicious swings slantwise, wondering what would happen if one of them caught his thin blade at a square enough angle to snap it off. A crack like that could maim or kill a man, even though only the flat of the blade was used. Once Shea tried a riposte; Lemminkainen leaped backward with cat-like agility.

Round and round went Shea, giving ground steadily, trying to save his own breath. Once his foot was not quite firm; a swing almost got him and he had to stagger back three steps, with Belphebe's "Oh!" in his ears. But at last the whirlwind attack slackened. The epee slid out and scratched along Lemminkainen's forearm.

"You can tickle with that piece of straw," admitted the hero. He swung again, not so accurately this time. Shea turned the blade aside and the epee darted forward to scratch Lemminkainen's shoulder.

"See," said Shea. Lemminkainen growled, but a quick attack brought the point squarely against his midriff before he could even begin an attempt at a parry.

"Now what would happen if I pushed?" said Shea.

"Boastful stranger, that was but a chance occurrence."

"Oh, yeah? Well, let's try it again, then."

Dzing-zip-tick-clang went the blades. This time Lemminkainen, though not in the least winded, was frowning and overanxious. There were only a couple of exchanges before he was off balance and once more Shea put his point against the broad chest

before him. He said, "That, my friend, was no accident. Not twice in a row."

Lemminkainen sheathed his blade and waved a contemptuous hand. "Against an unarmored foe your tricks might gain you a few minutes more of life. But the men of black Pohjola go to war in mail. Do you think that little skewer will do them damage?"

"I don't know what kind of armor they have, but it had better be tight at the joints if they're going to keep this point out."

"I will take you to Pohjola—but enough has not been shown me that I should put the service of my magic to your need. You may be my servant."

Shea shot a glance at Belphebe, who spoke up. "Sir Lemminkainen, the men of your land are marvelous boasters, it appears, though falling somewhat short of the fulfillment of their claims. Yet if losing a contest makes one a servant, you shall be mine, for it would greatly astony me could you or any of yours surpass me in archery."

Shea suppressed a grin. Belphebe might not have any formal training in psychology, but she knew how to deal with braggarts. The trick was to out-brag them on some point where you knew you could deliver the goods.

Lemminkainen squinted at Belphebe and said, "Harolsjei, I withdraw my offer. In this wife of yours I see she a vixen who needs nothing but chastisement. Wait for my returning."

They were close to the buildings now. Shea noticed for the first time a row of ill-class serfs who had been watching the contest with their mouths gaping open. "My bow!" shouted Lemminkainen as they fell back before him.

Presently he was back with a crossbow under his arm and a fistful of bolts stuck in his belt. Shea noticed that the instrument had a bow of steel, with

a strip of copper for backing and silver inlay. Quite a handsome piece of artillery, in fact.

"Harold," said Belphebe, softly, "not so certain am I that I can in truth best this knave. A strong crossbow of steel in practiced hands can prove most deadly sure."

"Do your best, kid, you'll slaughter him," said Shea, feeling a good deal less confident than he sounded.

Lemminkainen said, "Will you have a fixed mark, red-haired baggage, or shall I set a serf to run that we may have the better sport?"

"A fixed mark will do," said Belphebe. She looked as though the only moving target she wanted was Lemminkainen.

The hero waved a hand. "See that knot in yonder fence-post, distant from us forty paces?"

"I see it. 'Twill do as well as another."

Lemminkainen grinned, cocked his bow and let drive. The steel-tipped bolt struck the fence-post with a loud crack, three or four inches below the knot.

Belphebe nocked an arrow, drew the string back to her ear, sighted a second and let go. The shaft grazed the edge of the fence-post and whistled off into the long grass.

Lemminkainen's grin widened. "Another, would you?" This time he did even better; his bolt struck the post squarely, about an inch above the knot-hole. But Belphebe's shot stood quivering about the same distance below.

Lemminkainen shot another bolt, then shouted: "I will not be outdone on this turn." He seemed to be right; his quarrel was squarely in the knot.

A little frown appeared between Belphebe's eyes. She drew, held her draw for a couple of seconds, then lowered the bow and brought it up again to the

release point in a single motion. The arrow struck the knot, right beside the bolt.

Shea said, "Seems to me you're both about as good as you can get. . . . Hey, why not try that?"

He pointed to where a big crow had flung itself on flapping wings out across the meadow, emitting a harsh *haw!*

Lemminkainen whipped up his crossbow and shot. The bolt whizzed upward, seeming to go right through the bird. A couple of black feathers drifted down, but after staggering in its flight, the crow kept on.

As the crow steadied, one of Belphebe's arrows sang upward and struck it with a meaty thump. It started to tumble; three more arrows streaked toward it in rapid succession. One missed, but two hit, so that the bird plummeted to earth with three arrows criss-crossing in its carcass.

Lemminkainen stared open-mouthed. There were murmurs from the serfs around the buildings. Belphebe said calmly, "Now, sirrah, I should like my arrows back."

Lemminkainen swung an arm to indicate that the serfs should take up the task. Then he brightened, and tapped his own chest. "I, the lively Lemminkainen, am still the greater hero," he said, "because I have excelled in two contests and each of you only in one. But it is not to be denied that you are very good persons of your hands, and in exchange for your help I will chant for you the magic runes you wish."

THREE

Two women appeared at the door of the main house as they approached in a little procession, with serfs now carrying the bundles. One of the women

was old and wrinkled, the other young and rather buxom. It occurred to Shea that with a little makeup and a Mainbocher dress, she would be a very nice dish indeed. Lemminkainen seemed to be a good picker.

He said, "Get you to the kitchen, women. We will have food, quickly, for it never shall be said that the great Kaukomieli is less than the most generous of hosts."

As the pair started to turn away, Belphebe stepped forward and extended her hand to the older one. "Gracious dame," she said, "forgive Sir Lemminkainen's seeming want of courtesy in not making us known to each other. He has no doubt been too much concerned with high matters. I am Belphebe of Faerie, wife to Sir Harold Shea here."

The old woman grabbed Belphebe's hand. Her eyes filled with tears, and she murmured something unintelligible; then she turned and toddled rapidly into the depths of the house. The nice dish curtsied. "I am known as Kylliki, the maid of Saari, wife of Lemminkainen," she said, "and she there is his mother. You are welcome."

Lemminkainen regarded her sourly. "Women always must be gabbling," he said. "Come, guests from Ouhaiola, let yourselves sit down and tell me of this conjuring you wish. I need the names and stations of the persons you wish brought here; who were their forebears, where they now may be, all that is known of them. Moreover, though your skill in magic may be small as compared with that of so accomplished a wizard as myself, it were well if you added your spells to mine; for it is by no means to be concealed that this is a very difficult task, to draw men from one world to another."

Shea frowned. "I can tell you a good deal about one of them. Dr. Walter Simms Bayard, Ph.D. in

psychology from Columbia University, class of—umm—nineteen-forty. He's from—mmm—born in Atlantic City, New Jersey, I believe. Father was—Oswald Bayard, a businessman. Had a department store in Atlantic City. Died a couple of years ago."

Lemminkainen said, "Strange and hard are the names you pronounce, O Harol! And the mother of this Payart? I must have the smallest details of his pedigree and background."

Shea gave what little he knew about Bayard's mother, who lived in New York with another son of the family, and whom he, Shea, had met briefly.

Lemminkainen closed his eyes in an effort of memory, then asked, "And the other whom you would draw to the land of heroes?"

Shea scratched his head. "That's a tough one. All I know about him is that he's a detective of our police force, that his name is Pete and that he breathes through his mouth. Must have adenoids or something. A suspicious character and not too bright."

Lemminkainen shook his head. "Though it is well known that I am one of the greatest of all magicians, I can have no power over one so meagerly depicted as this."

Belphebe spoke up. "Why don't you try getting Walter here first by himself? Perchance in Xanadu, where he is now, he will have learned enough of this Pete to enable Lemminkainen to conjure him up."

"Okay, kid, I think you've got it. Go ahead with Bayard, Lemminkainen, and we'll worry about Pete afterward."

Just at this moment the women came back from the kitchen with another wearing the crude clothes and deferential air of a serf, all three carrying big wooden plates. Each plate bore a huge hunk of rye-bread, a couple of pork chops and a wedge of cheese

the size of Shea's fist. Another serf followed with huge mugs of beer.

Lemminkainen said, "Eat as you will. This little snack should edge your appetite for supper."

Shea's eyes bugged. He said to Belphebe: "I wonder what these people would call a real meal."

Lemminkainen said, "We must eat whole mounds of victuals to enhance our souls for such a journey."

The old woman, his mother, gave a little cry. "Do not go, my son. You are not proof against death."

Lemminkainen spoke around a huge mouthful of food. "No, it is now a thing decided. Little though a hero of my prowess needs the help of others, it is still true as the proverb has it, that bare is the back with no brother behind it, and these strangers of Ouhaiola may help me much."

"But you promised me you would not go," said Kylliki.

"That was before I met these strangers with the strange sword and the strange bow."

The old woman began to cry, wiping her eyes with the hem of her dress. "You are not wanted there. They will set traps of magic all across your way as soon as they know you are coming, and neither the strangers nor your own strength can keep you from death."

Lemminkainen laughed, spraying the table with fragments of cheese. "Fear is for the women only—and not all of those," he said, and gave Belphebe an admiring glance. Shea began to wonder whether he had not been a little hasty in persuading this buck to accept their services. "Now, go fetch me my finest shirt, for I will no longer delay in starting to show those snakes of Pohjola how we keep feast in the land of heroes."

He stood up and walked around the table toward Kylliki with one hand drawn back. Shea wondered

if the hero was going to hit her and wondered what he himself would do if Lemminkainen did, but the nice little dish saved him the trouble of doing anything by getting up hastily and scuttling out of the room. Lemminkainen came back, sat down, took a long drink of beer and wiped his mouth on the back of his hand.

"Let us to our spells, O Harol," he said amiably. "I must think a moment that the verses run smoothly."

"So must I," said Shea, producing pencil and a piece of paper from his pocket, and beginning to set up a sorites. He would have to allow for the fact that the poetic element in this Finnish magic was very strong indeed, and probably interminably long. Belphebe slid down toward the end of the bench where Lemminkainen's mother was sitting and began talking to her in a low tone. She seemed to be getting results, too, because the old lady was looking noticeably less woebegone.

After a few minutes Kylliki came back with a clean white shirt, and another of some kind of leather with fishscale metal plates sewed onto it in an overlapping pattern, which she laid on the bench beside Lemminkainen. The hero rewarded her by pulling her down beside him.

"Now you shall hear one of my greatest spells," he said, "for I have composed well and truly. Are you ready, Harol?"

"About as ready as I will be," said Shea.

Lemminkainen leaned back, closed his eyes, and began to sing in a high tenor voice.

> "O, thou distant Valter Payart,
> Caught in Xanadu's enchantments,
> I am sure I know thy father,
> Since thy father's name was Osvalt . . ."

There didn't seem to be much of a tune, or rather each line had a tune of its own.

"Osvalt of Atlantic City,
And thy mother's name was Linda,
Of the New York City Jacksons,
See I know of all thy people . . ."

He droned on and on, while Shea tried to concentrate on the sorites. With the back of his mind he was forced to concede that the big lug was probably a pretty good magician. His memory was prodigious, for he hadn't left out a single item of the Bayard biography and connections, though he had heard them only once.

Lemminkainen's verses came faster and faster, until with his voice climbing the scale, he ended,

"Come thou now, O Valter Payart,
From the pleasure-dome of Kubla,
To the land of Kalevala.
Thou canst not resist my singing,
Canst not delay your coming;
Thou art standing here before us!"

Lemminkainen's voice rose to a scream on the last words; he stood up and swept both hands around his head in a series of magical passes.

Foomp!

There was a rush of displaced air, which rattled the wooden plates around the room, and there was Dr. Walter Simms Bayard of the Garaden Institute, Ph.D. in psychology.

Not, however, standing before them. He was sitting cross-legged on the floor, and lying on her back across his lap, clinched in a passionate kiss with him, was one of the houris of Xanadu, wearing about as

much as a burlesque queen at the climax of her performance.

Bayard removed his mouth from that of the girl to look around him with amazed eyes.

Lemminkainen said, "Now is it to be seen that I am truly the greatest of wizards. For not only have I conjured this man from another world, but his handmaiden also. O Valterpayart, fitting it is that you should give her to me in reward for my services."

As Bayard released her and both of them began to scramble up, Belphebe plucked at Shea's arm.

"Look at Kylliki," she said in a low voice. "She looks as though she wanted to scratch somebody's eyes out."

"She'll get over it," said Shea. "Besides, if I know Walter, he isn't going to fall for Lemminkainen's bright ideas any more than I did."

"That's what I mean. Harold." Her voice became still lower. "Isn't it true that in this continuum if you know everything about a person, you can always put some kind of spell on them?"

"Gee, you're right, kid. I never thought about it. We'll have to keep an eye on Walter."

FOUR

Bayard's face slowly turned the color of a well-ripened strawberry. "Look here, Harold," he said, "these tricks of yours . . ."

"I know," said Shea, "you were just getting acclimated." Belphebe giggled and Lemminkainen guffawed. "Skip it—we haven't got time for temperament. This is Lemminkainen. He's a hero with a capital H."

"How do you do," said Bayard, a trifle loftily, and held out his hand. The hefty man, grinning all over

his face at the complimentary description, did not appear to notice it, but ducked a kind of bow from where he sat on the bench. It occurred to Shea that the custom of handshaking probably hadn't been introduced in this continuum.

The thought apparently did not occur to Bayard. He frowned darkly, placed a protecting arm around his houri's shoulders, and said, "This is Miss Dunyazad—Mrs. Shea, Mr. Harold Shea. Now, Harold, if you'll tell me how to get out of this Norse madhouse, I'll get about it. I don't blame you for bringing me here, of course, but I haven't your taste for adventure."

"It isn't Norse, it's Finnish," said Shea. He grinned. "And I don't think you're going to get out right away. I don't think it would look good if you turned up at the Garaden Institute with your Miss Dunyazad and without Pete the cop. At least Belphebe and I found it that way. By the way, I hope he didn't get himself impaled or anything?"

Bayard looked a little mollified as the houri snuggled closer to him. "Oh, he's making the best of a bad business, trying to beat off the Rockette chorus. He's really a very proper Presbyterian, a deacon of the church. The last thing I heard him doing was trying to teach one of the girls the doctrine of original sin. By the way, is there anything solid to eat around here? I'm fed up to the ears with that sticky mess they gave us in Xanadu."

Lemminkainen had been engaged in a huge yawn that showed his tonsils and a great deal else. Now he brought his mouth closed with a snap. "True it is, O noble guestlings, that in the fatigue of my mighty magic, I forget the first duty of a host. Kyllikil Mother! Fetch supper." He counted guests on his fingers. "A couple of dozen ducks will do. Valtar-

·payart, I see your handmaiden is dressed for the bath. Does she wish one prepared?"

"No," said Bayard, "but I think she could use the loan of some clothes if you have a few to spare. Couldn't you, my dear?"

Dunyazad nodded dumbly and, as Lemminkainen shouted for clothes, Bayard led her over to a bench and sat down. Shea noticed it was as far as possible from Lemminkainen.

Bayard said, "I don't wish to cavil, Harold, but I really don't see why it was necessary to involve me in this escapade of yours."

Shea explained the magical reasons for the flank attack on Xanadu. "But we still haven't got Pete the cop, and if we ever want to get back to Ohio, we'd better. How much do you know about him? Irish, isn't he?"

"I should say not! I talked with him enough to find out that in spite of being a Presbyterian, his real name is Brodsky, and he's about as Irish as Jawarharlal Nehru. He only wishes he were Irish, tells Irish jokes and sings Irish songs. With that polyp or something he has in his nose, the result is below Metropolitan Opera standards."

Kylliki came through the door, bringing with her an odor of cooking duck and a long, loose dress which she threw at rather than handed to Dunyazad. Lemminkainen's eyes followed the houri admiringly as she struggled into it. Then he yawned again and said, "Scanty is the tale you give me of this Piit whom you are seeking."

"Well," said Bayard, "let's see. He was promoted to second grade detective for the work he did on the Dupont case. I've heard that a dozen times. He works out of the Madison Street station. His mother is named Maria, and his father was named Pete, too, and was a bricklayer, and wanted him to tend bar

when he grew up. He himself had the idea of being a pro football player. Will that do?"

Lemminkainen shook his head gloomily. "Only such a master of magic as I would dare attempt the passing-spell with materials so scanty. And even I must meditate on it until morning, for I am foredone with labors mighty."

"Why not now?" Bayard appealed to Shea. "I'd like to see how this is done. I may be able to use it."

Shea shook his head. "Won't do, honest, Walter. You don't know the first thing about magic yet. It has rational rules, but they follow a different kind of logic than anything you've had any experience with. And I wouldn't advise you to stay around while Lemminkainen is fishing for Pete, either. You've worked up quite a bit of magical potential by being pulled here from Xanadu. So if Lemminkainen does fetch Pete, and you're right here handy, you're a little bit apt to pop right back into Xanadu along the lines of weakness created by the spell while he's coming here. Remember the trouble we had, dear?"

"Marry, that do I," said Belphebe. "But let us not dwell upon it, for here's our sup."

This time there were seven servants in the procession. Each bore a wooden tray upon which a mountain of bread was surrounded by three whole roast ducks except the one who served Lemminkainen. He had six.

When he had finished the last of them, with one of the ducks Shea was unable to eat, he stretched, yawned again, and said, "Harol, friend and helper of the lively Lemminkainen, you shall have tonight the lock bed. Will you lead Pelviipi to it? As for these guests, the late-comers, they shall have my best of bearskins to compose them by the hearth-fire. Come, Kylliki, lead me bedward, for I cannot walk unaided."

Shea thought the spell must have taken a lot out of the big oaf at that as he watched him stagger toward his sleeping quarters, but had to admit that Lemminkainen was cheerfully keeping to his side of their bargain, even if he did talk in that phony poetry.

One of the servants with a rush torch showed him and Belphebe down to the end of the hall where the lock bed was. It was bigger than a Pullman section, but not very much, and both of them had to roll up clothes for pillows . . .

"What the hell's that?" said Shea, sitting upright and cocking an ear toward the foot of the bed.

Belphebe giggled where she lay. "That, my most puissant and delectable lord, would seem to be the hero and his spouse engaged in a sport we wot of—to wit, a quarrel within the household. Hark! She has just called him frog spawn."

Shea gazed at the partition which separated them from the room to which Lemminkainen had retired. "Well, I hope they get over it soon," he said. "With your woods-trained ears, you can make out what they're saying and enjoy the show, but all it sounds like to me is a racket."

They did get through with it fairly soon, at that. But now the reindeer skins that served as blankets were too hot when they were on and he was too cold with them off. Besides, the straw mattress resembled a relief map of the Himalayas, and he never could get used to sleeping in a place where there weren't any windows, even if cracks in the outer wall did admit enough air.

Something scratched at the door of the lock bed.

Shea listened for a minute, then turned over.

The something scratched again, this time in what was clearly a signal, for the scratching came one—two—three.

Shea jackknifed to a sitting posture in the Pullman berth and slid the door of the lock bed open a crack. Down the hall, the fire on the hearth was at the ember stage, throwing a red light over the two mounds beside it that must be Bayard and his Dunyazad. It gave just illumination enough for Shea to make out the figure of the nice little dish, Kylliki, bending over at the entrance to the lock bed. One finger went to her lips and then beckoned.

Shea experienced a dreadful if momentary sinking of the heart at the thought he might have a female wolf on his hands, but Kylliki settled the question for him by sliding the door of the lock bed farther open and reaching past him to touch Belphebe into wakefulness, then sat down on the edge of the lock bed. When the couple had taken their places beside her, she leaned close and said in a stage whisper, "There is treason afoot."

"Oh—oh," said Shea. "What kind?"

"My husband, the hero Kaukomieli. Who can resist him?"

"I dunno, but we can give it the old college try. What's he up to?"

"I learned but now his purpose. 'Tis to evade the making of the spell for bringing from hence to hither your other friend. Such wizardries leave him always weak and foredone, as you saw but this evening."

"Why, the . . ." began Shea, reaching for his epee, but Belphebe said, "Hold, Harold, there must be more in this than meets the eye, and meseems it's more a matter for craft than violence." She turned to Kylliki. "Why do you give us this tale? It cannot be a matter of concern for you whether this Pete be summoned or no."

In the darkness they could plainly hear the girl grind her teeth. "Because of the other wing to his bird of thought," she flared. "Instead of going to

Pohjola, he'd be off to the lakes with that immodest she-devil who wears no clothes."

"Dunyazad. What do you want us to do about it?"

"Be off," said Kylliki. "Take him to Pohjola with the dawn. It is the lesser peril."

Shea thought of Lemminkainen's barrel-like chest and huge arms. "I don't see how we're going to make him do anything he doesn't want to," he said.

Kylliki laid a hand on his arm. "You do not know my lord. This night he lies weaker than a newborn reindeer calf with the back-whip of his spell-making. I have a rope. Bind him while the weakness is on him, and steal him away."

Belphebe said, "I think she has the key that will unlock our troubles, Harold. If we bind Lemminkainen tonight, then we can keep him tied up until he makes the spell that will bring Pete. And then he will be too weary to think on revenges."

"Good for you, kid," said Shea, heaving himself to his feet and reaching for his pants. "All right, let's go. But I think we'll need Walter to help."

Getting Walter was not so easy as it looked. He was sleeping the sleep of the just after his prolonged vacation in Xanadu, and shaking him only produced a series of contented grunts. Dunyazad's head came out of the bearskins though, to look at the three standing over her with mild, cow-like eyes, not saying a word, even when Kylliki hissed at her like a cat. Shea decided that Dunyazad belonged to the beautiful-but-dumb type.

After an interminable time, Bayard pulled himself together and accompanied Shea into Lemminkainen's room, where a rush-light held by Kylliki showed the hero sprawled cornerwise across the bed with all his clothes on, fully dressed and snoring like a sawmill. He didn't even move when Shea cautiously lifted a leg to put a coil of rawhide rope around it, and only

changed the rhythm of his snores as they rolled him back and forth, wrapping him like a cocoon in the tough rawhide.

Kylliki said, "His mother will think little good of this, the old harridan! She cares for nothing save that he stays by her hand. I could tear her hair out."

"Why don't you?" suggested Shea, with a yawn. "Well, come on, kid, let's try to get a little shut-eye. When that big lug comes to, it will be like trying to sleep in the same house as a steam calliope."

He was amply borne out after what seemed little more than ten minutes of slumber, and jerked out of bed to follow Bayard into the other room, from which a series of truly majestic howls were emerging.

Lemminkainen was rolling around the floor of the room, shrieking curses and trying to writhe loose, while Kylliki, with no attempt at all to disguise the sneer on her pretty face, was cursing just as fast at him. Suddenly, the hero relaxed, screwed up his face, and in his singing voice began to chant:

"Think you that I'll heed your wishes,
Now you've flouted and provoked me,
By your stratagems and insults?
I will live to see you, strangers,
All except the fair Tunjasat,
Hurled into the depths of Mana,
Down to Hiisi's kingdom tumbling!
Think you that this rope can hold me,
Me, the wizard Kaukolainen?
Just observe how from my members
Are the cords impotent falling!"

Shea stared; it was true. The cords around his feet were working loose. He tried to think of a counter-spell.

Bayard said, "Hey, cut that out!" He seemed to

be addressing a point a foot or two beyond Lemminkainen.

"Cut what out?" asked Shea.

"Untying him."

"But if his magic . . ."

"Magic my foot! I'm talking about the old lady."

"What old lady?" said Shea.

"I guess she's Lemminkainen's mother. Are you blind?"

"Apparently I am. You mean she's there, invisible, untying him?"

"Certainly, but she's not in the least invisible."

The coils of rope had worked themselves loose from feet, ankles and knees. The triumphantly grinning Lemminkainen gave a massive wriggle and came to his feet.

"Well, for Lord's sake, stop her!" said Shea.

"Huh? Oh, yes, I suppose so." Bayard stepped over to where Lemminkainen was standing and grabbed at the air. There was a scream; a couple of feet away from the hero, Lemminkainen's mother materialized with her hair over her eyes, glaring as Bayard held both her hands. Kylliki glared right back at her.

"Now, now," said Shea. "We're not going to hurt your son, lady. Only make sure that he carries out his part of the bargain."

"An evil bargain. You will take him to his death," croaked the old woman.

"And you would make him a woman-bound weakling instead of a hero," snapped Kylliki.

"That's right," said Shea. "Must say I'm disappointed in you, Kauko."

A portentous frown had replaced Lemminkainen's smile. "How mean you?" he demanded.

"Here I thought you were the greatest hero of

Kalevala, and you get cold feet over the Pohjola project."

Lemminkainen gave an inarticulate bellow, then subsided to a mere roar. "Me, afraid? By Jumala, loose me from these bonds and I'll make you a head shorter to show you how afraid I am!"

"Nothing doing, Toots. You fetch Pete from Xanadu, and then we'll discuss any changes of plan."

The hero put on his crafty expression. "If your friend the spry detective is brought here from Xanadu, will you, Payart, give me the fair Tunjasat?"

"I really don't think . . ." began Bayard, but Shea cut him off with, "Nothing doing. That wasn't in the original contract. You go right ahead, or the whole deal's off."

"Well, then. But from these bonds you must release me, else my magic spells will falter."

Shea swung to Kylliki. "Can I trust him?" he asked.

Her head came up. "Fool! My husband is no promise-breaker. . . . But—he may put a spell on Payart to make him yield up the maiden."

Shea stepped across to Lemminkainen and began to untie knots. "That's right, Walter. And besides, there's the danger that you might get blown back into Xanadu by the spell. You better get out of here, as far away from the building as you can. I don't know what the local range of magic is, but it can't be very high."

Bayard made for the door. As the last loop fell from his arms, Lemminkainen stretched them over his head, sat down and corrugated his forehead in thought. At last he said, "Are you ready, Harold? Good—let us begin."

He tilted back his head and sang.

"Oh, I know thee, Peter Protsky,
And from Xanadu I call thee . . ."

He droned on. Shea quietly worked away on the sorites. Up and up went the voice of Lemminkainen, and just as it almost reached screaming pitch, in through the door came Dunyazad, her lovely, vacant face inquiring.

"Have you seen my lord?" she asked.

". . . . thou art with us!" finished Lemminkainen, on a high C.

There was a rush of air; for a moment only a cloud of burning sparks hung where the houri had been, and then they went out, leaving the space occupied by a solid-looking man in a rumpled brown American business suit.

FIVE

"What the hell is this?" Pete said, and then his eye fell on Harold Shea. "Shea! You're under arrest! Kidnapping and resisting an officer!"

Shea said, "I thought we'd been all through that."

"Oh, you did, did you? And you thought you could stash me away in that screwball fairyland while you went on and rolled your hoop? Well, you've got staging an indecent theatrical performance on top of the other charges now. How do you like that? You better come along with me."

"Come along where?" said Shea.

"Huh?" Pete Brodsky looked around the room and at the slumping Lemminkainen. "Bejabbers, where is this dump?"

"In Kalevala."

"And where would that be? Canada?"

Shea explained. "And here's the wife I'm sup-

posed to have kidnapped or murdered. Darling, this is Detective Brodsky. Pete, this is Belphebe. Does she look dead?"

"Are you really the dame that disappeared at that picnic, back in Ohio?" asked Brodsky.

"Marry, that I am," said Belphebe, "and through no fault of my husband's, either."

"And in the second place," said Shea, "you're out of your bailiwick. You haven't any authority here."

"You con-merchants always try to play it smart, don't you? The law of close pursuit takes care of that. Constructively, I've been in close pursuit of you ever since you pulled that fast one on me back in Ohio. Where's the nearest American consul?"

"Better ask Lemminkainen. He's the local boss."

"The big guy? Can he speak English?"

Shea smiled. "You got along all right in Xanadu, didn't you? You're speaking Finnish without knowing it."

"Okay. Say, mister . . ."

Lemminkainen had been sitting slumped over. Now he lifted his head. "Get you hence and let me sorrow," he said. "Ah, that by my own efforts I should be deprived of the embraces of the beautiful Tunjasat!" He glared at Shea. "Man of ill-omen," he said, "if I but had my strength, there would be an accounting."

Kylliki said, "Much strength will come to him who eats good food."

Lemminkainen appeared to brighten at the thought. "Then why do you waste time in foolish chatter when food is lacking?" he said practically, and Kylliki scuttled out, followed by his mother.

Shea went off to hunt up Bayard and explain what had happened to Dunyazad. The psychologist did not seem unbearably grieved. "An excellent

exercise for the libido," he said, "but I fear that in time she would have become importunate. Persons of her order of intelligence frequently consider that beauty entitles them to great consideration without effort." He accompanied Shea back into the house for breakfast.

Lemminkainen took his in his bedroom while the other three ate with Pete Brodsky, who did prodigious execution to a breakfast of roast meat, cheese and beer, belching appreciatively afterward.

"Maybe I got you Joes kinda wrong," he said, as he wiped his mouth with a dirty handkerchief. "You may be all right guys at that—sorta elect, if you get me. Gimme the pitch, will you?"

Shea told him as well as possible what had happened in the continuum of Ariosto's *Orlando Furioso* and why Vaclav Polacek and Dr. Reed Chalmers were still there. "But," he continued virtuously, "we couldn't very well leave you and Walter Bayard in Xanadu, could we?"

"I get it," said Brodsky. "You figured you had to spring us out of that reefer-dream or else pull a bit yourself. Okay, so you're a square. What's the next lay?"

Shea told him about the Pohjola project. Brodsky looked glum. "So we gotta go up there and crack this box with a lot of them door-shakers on the lay? Me, I don't like it. Why can't we just take it on the lam for Ohio? I'll kill the rap for you."

Shea shook his head. "Not me. Especially after the fuss I made about Lemminkainen running out on his end of the bargain. Listen, you're in a place where magic works, and it's funny stuff. When you get something by promising something else, and then try not to deliver, you're apt to find yourself without the thing you wanted."

"You mean if we went lamester, this Bayard and me would land back in that de luxe hop-pen?"

"Something like that."

Brodsky shook his head. "You're shot with horseshoes that you got a Joe with you that believes in predestination. Okay, when do we take it?"

"Probably tomorrow. Lemminkainen knocked himself out bringing you from Xanadu and won't be fit till then."

"I got it," said Brodsky. "What we got for today? Just bending the ears?"

Shea turned around and looked out the window. "I guess so," he said. "It seems to have started raining."

It was a long day. Kylliki and Lemminkainen's mother trotted in and out, carrying trays of food to the recumbent hero, and occasionally dropping one off at the table in the hall, where Brodsky and Walter Bayard had started an endless discourse on predestination, original sin, and Cartesianism. After a while, Shea and Belphebe wandered off into a corner and let them talk, since neither Kylliki nor the mother seemed very sociable. It had already grown toward evening and the lowering skies were definitely darker, though none of the rush-lights had been kindled, when Bayard and Brodsky approached the couple.

"Say, listen," said the detective. "Me and this Bayard, we been thinking, and we worked up a hot lineup. You know this magic stuff. How about you putting one of these spells on Lemon Meringue there, and make him drop his score on this Pohjola joint—just skip it? Then he just springs us back where me belong, see?"

Shea was doubtful. "I don't know. There's likely to be a kick-back. He's a pretty hot wizard, and playing on his home grounds, where he knows all

the rules and I don't. Besides, I warned you about what happens when you try to get out of a magical bargain."

"But look here," said Bayard, "we aren't proposing anything unethical, even in the terms of magic. All we're suggesting is a spell that will make him see things our way. He'll have the credit of having performed a great action in rescuing us, which these heroes of romance prize more highly than anything else, as I gather it. As a more material reward, you can leave him some of your artifacts. That sword of yours, or Belphebe's bow, for instance."

Shea turned to his wife. "What do you say, kid?"

"I like it none too well, but I can see no true argument contrarious. Do as you will, Harold."

"Well, I suppose doing almost anything's better than doing nothing." He stood up. "Okay, I'll try."

He managed to waylay Lemminkainen's mother to ask her something about the hero's background, bearing in mind that one of the requirements of Kalevala magic was a fairly intimate acquaintance with the person or thing you were going to put a spell on. It was like putting soap in a geyser; the old dame prattled away at a furious pace, and Shea soon discovered that his own memory was by no means the equal of Lemminkainen's, so that he had to reopen the floodgates a couple of times by asking her to repeat.

The process lasted through another of the gigantic Kalevalan meals; when it was over, Shea retired to the corner of the fireplace with a big mug of beer and tried to work out a chant in iambic tetrameters along the line Lemminkainen had used. The form wasn't very familiar to him and he kept forgetting lines, so he got a charred stick and tried scratching some of the key-words on the floor. While he was about it, the others drifted off to bed. Bayard was

already snoring from his pile of bearskins when Shea, satisfied at last, took one of the rush-lights, made his way to the door of the hero's bedroom, and in a low voice, chanted his composition.

As he finished, something seemed to flash before his eyes and he felt a little dizzy. It might be the beer, but he rather thought the spell had worked, and he staggered weakly across to the lock bed, almost missing the bracket when he put the rush-light in it.

Belphebe sat up, with the skin-blankets gathered close around her chin; her expression was far from welcoming.

" 'Lo, sweetheart," said Shea. He hiccupped slightly, sat down on the bed and started to take off his boots.

Belphebe said, "Begone, sir. I'm an honest wife."

"Huh?" said Shea. "Who ever said you were anything else? And why the fire-alarm?"

He reached out an arm for her. Belphebe wriggled toward the back of the bed, her voice suddenly going high. "Harold! Walter! Help—I am beset!"

Shea looked at her in bewilderment. Why was she dodging him? He hadn't done anything. And why was she calling for "Harold" when he was right there?

Before he could think up anything intelligent to say, Bayard's voice said from behind him, "He's at it again—grab him and tie him up till Harold can do something about it."

"Is everybody crazy?" demanded Shea, and felt Brodsky grab his arm. He pulled loose and threw a punch at the detective, which the latter dodged with a slight movement of his head. Then the light went out.

Shea awakened with a splitting headache and a dark brown taste in his mouth. There had been too

much beer; and on top of that he was hog-tied even more efficiently than he had bound Lemminkainen the previous night. It was just about dawn; somewhere outside he could hear a clink of metal as a serf went about the early business of the house. The two piles of bearskins near him on the floor would be Bayard and Brodsky.

"Hey, you guys!" he called. "What happened?"

One set of snores bit off, a head lifted and Brodsky's voice said, "Listen, glom. We dropped you dead bang. Now dummy up before I let you have it again."

Shea fumed inwardly. From the feeling at the side of his cranium Brodsky had let him have it all right, and with a peculiarly solid blackjack. The prospect of another treatment had no appeal. But he could not understand why everybody was behaving that way—unless perhaps Lemminkainen had put some kind of spell on him while he was trying to work on the hero. That must be it, Shea decided, and lay uncomfortably, trying to work out a counter-spell in Kalevalan terms. While he was doing that, he must have drifted off into a doze again. He wakened to a roar of laughter.

It was fully light. The entire household was standing around him, including Belphebe with a worried expression, and the laughter came from Lemminkainen, who was doubled up, choking with mirth. Bayard merely looked surprised.

The master of the house finally got his breath long enough to say: "Fetch me a pail of water, Kylliki—ho, ho, ho!—and we'll give his proper semblance to this son of Ouhaiola."

Kylliki brought the pail. Lemminkainen crooned a spell over it, then dashed it into Shea's face.

"Harold!" cried Belphebe. She threw herself down on Shea and covered his wet and sputtering face with

kisses. "You left me burning anxious when you came not to me last night. I had thought you taken in some trap."

"Help me off with this rope," said Shea. "What do you mean I didn't come to you? How do you think I got in this jam?"

"Nay, I see it now," said the girl. "You put on the appearance of Lemminkainen. Was it to test me?"

"Yeah," said Brodsky. "Sorry I sapped you, Shea, but how the hell was we to know?"

Shea stretched cramped arms and scratched a stubbly chin. He had put a line about "As if we were twins identic" into his spell the previous night, and it appeared now that this had been a mistake. "I was trying a little spell," he said, "and I guess it must have backfired."

"You were twin to Lemminkainen," said the hero. "Learn, strange man from Ouhaiola, that the laws of magic tell us when a spell is falsely woven, all things wear another semblance. Nevermore seek to equal the master of magic until you know more of the art." He turned. "Mother! Kylliki! We must fall to eating, for we have a journey before us."

Belphebe said to Shea, "Harold, it is well to be warned. This saying that if a spell isn't accurate it will give another look to things is well to remember."

"Yeah, the laws of magic are different here. But I wish we'd known that last night."

They took their places at the table. Lemminkainen was in the best of humors, crowing over Shea's discomfiture and boasting of what he would do to the Pohjolans when he got to them. He seemed to have forgotten about Dunyazad or any other squab.

His mother looked more and more melancholy.

At last she said, "If you will not hear me for your own sake, at least listen for mine. Will you leave your mother alone and unprotected?"

"Little protection is needed," said the hero. "But such as you need, I give you. This Payart, this Piit shall stay with you. Not that the two together would be of one-third as much use as such a hero as myself."

"Harold . . ." began Bayard, and Brodsky said, "Hey, ain't we going with?"

Lemminkainen shook his head firmly. "Never shall I consent. This is hero's work. Harolsjei has shown he can be a fighting man of sorts, and this shield-maiden is not the worst archer in the world, though far from so good as I am—but you, frogs of Ouhaio, what can you do?"

"Listen, lug," said Brodsky, getting to his feet, "come on outside, and I'll show you. I don't care if you're as big as Finn McCool."

Bayard put out a restraining hand. "Just a minute, Pete," he said. "I rather thing he's right, at that. The kind of activity in which we are skilled is of little value in this continuum, and we might be more useful preserving the base, as it were." He glanced at Kylliki. "Besides, it occurs to me that perhaps you could improve the hour. I doubt if any of these people have heard of predestination and original sin."

"Say, you're a good head," said Brodsky, sitting down again. "Maybe if we make that grift good, I could get a couple of converts."

Lemminkainen was already on his feet, leading his way to the door. He took down a long rawhide lariat from a peg and headed out toward the meadow, where the same quartet of animals were grazing. They started walking away; the hero swung the rope and cast it over the nearest antler of an enor-

mous reindeer. Then, chanting something about "Elk of Hiisi," he climbed down the rope and made a loop around the animal's neck with the other end. The reindeer bucked; Lemminkainen gave one jerk and it went down on its knees.

Pete Brodsky's eyes opened wide. "Lord!" he said softly, "maybe I copped the right dope not trying to go on the muscle with that ghee."

Lemminkainen started back across the meadow, leading the reindeer as though it were a puppy. Suddenly he stopped and stiffened. Shea followed his glance and saw that a man, too well dressed for a serf, was standing at the door of the main house, talking to Kylliki. As they came closer, it was apparent that the man was about Lemminkainen's own height, but stouter, with a great gray Santa Claus beard. He turned a beaming smile on the hero; they fell into each other's arms and administered powerful slaps on their respective backs, then held each other at arm's length. The stranger declaimed,

> "Hail, the lively Lemminkainen!
> Is it true thou plan'st to visit
> In the fogbound land of Turja,
> And with help of foreign swordsmen
> Teach old Ilpotar a lesson?"

They fell into each other's arms and slapped again. "Will you go with me to Pohjola?" bawled Lemminkainen.

"Nay, I still seek a new wife!" shouted the graybeard, and both of them laughed as though this were a peculiarly brilliant jest.

Brodsky and Bayard pressed close to Shea and muttered questions. Shea said, "The old guy must be Vainamoinen, the great minstrel and magician. Damn, if I'd known where to find him, I wouldn't have made that deal . . ."

"What old guy?" asked Bayard.

"The one talking to Lemminkainen and whacking him on the back. The one with the beard."

"I don't see any such person," said Bayard. "He's hardly more than an adolescent, with only the beginnings of whiskers."

"What!"

"Not over twenty."

Shea exclaimed, "Then this must be another magical illusion, and he must be after something. Watch him!"

The pseudo-Vainamoinen seemed to be trying to question Lemminkainen, but every now and then one of them would get off five or six lines of poetry, they would fall into each other's arms and begin back-slapping again. Suddenly, at the beginning of one of these declamations, Brodsky leaped, catching the stranger's wrist just as it came sweeping down. The detective twisted deftly, pulled the wrist across his own shoulders and stooped forward. The man's feet flew up, he came down on his head in the long grass with a wicked-looking knife in his hand. Brodsky deliberately kicked him in the ribs. The knife dropped.

The man sat up, a hand pressed to his side and the Santa Claus face twisted with pain. Lemminkainen looked bewildered. Shea said, "Walter says this man is not what he seems. Maybe you better make him use his right face."

Lemminkainen crooned a spell and spat on the man's head. A sallow young face glowered up sullenly. The hero said, "So, my cousins of Pohjola send me greeting for my journey! Bow your head, spy of Pohjola." He drew his broadsword and felt the edge.

"Hey!" said Brodsky, "you can't just bump the ghee off like that."

"Wherefore not?" said Lemminkainen.

"He ain't gone up or got his bit or nothing. Where's the law?"

Lemminkainen shook his head in honest puzzlement. "Piit, you are surely the strangest of men, whose words are without meaning. Spy, will you bow your head, or shall I have the serfs deal with you in their manner?"

Shea said to Pete, "They don't have judges or trials around here. I told you this guy was the big boss and made his own law."

Pete shook his head. "Some connection man," he said as Lemminkainen's sword whistled through the air. The man's head thumped on the grass in a little fountain of blood.

"Serfs, bury this carrion!" Lemminkainen shouted, then turned toward the visitors from Ohio. Shea noticed that the expression of shrewdness had come back into his eyes.

"You have the gratitude of a hero," he said to Brodsky. "Never have I seen a wrestle-hold like that."

"Jujitsu," said Pete. "Any shamus is hep to it."

"On our trip to far Pohjola you shall go with us and show it." His eyes swept the group. "Which of you is so skilled in magic as to have penetrated the false shaping that deceived even me, the master of spells?"

"Why, I guess that was me," said Bayard. "Only I'm not skilled in magic at all. Not the way Harold is."

Shea said, "Walter, that must be just the reason. That's why Doc Chalmers couldn't get you out of Xanadu, too. And remember how you saw Lemminkainen's mother untying him when none of the rest of us could? You must be too rational or something, so that spells working a change of appearance

make no impression on you." He turned to Lemminkainen. "This guy would be more help on the trip than all the rest of us put together."

The hero appeared to be making a convulsive and prodigious effort to think. Finally, he said, "For your eyes, O Valtarpayart, so be it, since it is not to be concealed that many and strange are the enchantments that beset the road to this land of fog and darkness."

SIX

Under Lemminkainen's direction, the serfs dragged out the largest of four sleds that stood in a shed stacked high with harness and similar gear.

"What do you know!" said Pete Brodsky. "Is the big shot going to take a sleigh ride?"

"We all are," said Shea. "It's the only way they have of traveling here."

The detective shook his head. "If I tell them that back at the precinct, they'll think I'm on the snow myself. Why don't they get wised up and use a heap? Say, Shea, maybe we could dope one out for them! It wouldn't have to be no gold-plated boiler, just something that would buzz. These jakes always go for the big-sounding show."

"It wouldn't work here, even if we could build it," said Shea. "Any more than your gun. You want to remember that nothing that hasn't been invented yet will."

He turned to watch the serfs carrying out armfuls of deerskin blankets and vast sacks of food, which they lashed in position with rawhide ropes. Two of them trundled out a keg of beer and added it to the heap. It looked as though the Elk of Hiisi would have his work cut out for him; but, gazing at the

gigantic beast, Shea decided that it looked capable of meeting the demand. Lemminkainen bawled orders about the stowing of the gear and warmer clothes for Bayard and Brodsky, whose twentieth-century garments he regarded with unconcealed contempt.

Presently the tasks were done. All the serfs came out of the building and formed in a line, with Lemminkainen's two women in the middle. He kissed them smackingly, shouted the others into the sled, and jumped in himself. It immediately became crowded. As he cracked his whip and the giant reindeer strained forward, the whole line of serfs and women lifted their heads back and burst into a high-pitched doleful chanting. Most of them seemed to have forgotten the words of what they were supposed to be singing, and those who remembered were off key.

"Marry!" said Belphebe. "Glad am I, Harold, that these farewells do not come often."

"So am I," said Shea behind his hand, "but it gets Lemminkainen. The mug's eyes actually have tears in them!"

"I wish my schnozz was okay again," said Brodsky. "I used to could make them fill a bucket with eye-juice when I gave them 'Mother Machree.' "

"Then I'm rather glad you got the polyp or whatever it is that prevents you doing it now," said Bayard, and grabbed the side of the sled, as the Elk of Hiisi went into a swinging trot and the sled bounced and skidded along the muddy track northward.

"Now, listen . . ." began Brodsky, but just at this moment a flying clod of mud from the animal's hooves took him squarely in the face. "Jesus!" he shouted, then with a glance at Belphebe, "Write it on the ice, will you, lady? That was such a nut-buster I forgot for a minute that we gotta take what's laid

out for us in the Lord's book, even if he throws the whole package at us."

Lemminkainen turned his head. "Strange the language of Ouhaio," he said, "but if I hit rightly your saying, O Piit, it is that none may escape the course laid down for him."

"You got it," said Brodsky.

"Then," said the hero, "if one but knew the incantations, one might call forth the spirits of the future to tell what will come of any doing."

"No, wait . . ." began Brodsky, but Shea said, "They can in some continua."

Bayard said, "It might be worth trying in this one, Harold. If the thought-pattern is right, as you put it, the ability to see consequences might keep us out of a lot of trouble. Don't you think that with your magic . . ."

They hit a stone just then, and Shea collapsed into the lap of Belphebe, the only member of the party who had been able to find a place to sit in the jouncing sled. It was not that the road was worse than before, but the strain of hanging on and being bumped made it too difficult to talk. The trunks of birch and fir fled past them, close by on both sides, like the palings of a fence, the branches closing off all but fugitive glimpses of the sky overhead. The road zigzagged slightly—not, so far as Shea could determine, for topographic reasons, since the country was flat as an ironing board—because it had never been surveyed. Now and then the forest would clear a little on one side and a farmhouse or a small lake would appear among the trees. Once they met another sled, horse-drawn, and everybody had to dismount and manhandle the vehicles past each other.

At last, as they reached one of the lakes, Lemminkainen reined in his singular draft-animal, said,

"Pause we here a while for eating," jumped out and began to rummage among the foodbags.

When he had consumed one of the usual Gargantuan snacks, belched and wiped his mouth with the back of his hand, he announced, "Valtarpayart and Piit, I have allowed you to accompany me on this journey, but learn that for all your arts, you will be worse than useless unless you learn how to fight. I have brought swords for you, and as we take our ease, you shall learn to use them under the greatest master in all Kalevala."

He dragged a pair of clumsy, two-edged blades out of the baggage and handed one to each, then sat down on a root, evidently prepared to enjoy himself. "Cut at him, O Valtarpayart!" he said. "Try to take his head off."

"Hey!" said Shea, with a glance at the woebegone faces of his companions. "This won't do. They don't know anything about this business and they're likely to cut each other up. Honest."

Lemminkainen leaned back. "Or they learn the swordsman's business, or they go with me no further."

"But you said they could come. That isn't fair."

"It is not in our agreement," said the hero firmly. "They came only by my permission, and that has run out. Either they practice with the swords or turn homeward."

He looked as though he meant it, too, and Shea was forced to admit that legally he was right. But Belphebe said, "In Faerie, when we would teach young springalds the use of blades without danger to themselves, we use swords of wooden branch."

After some persuasion, Lemminkainen agreed to accept this as a substitute. The pair were presently whaling away at each other under his scornful correction with single-sticks made from saplings,

and lengths of cloth wound round their hands for protection. Bayard was taller and had the better reach; but Brodsky's jujitsu training had made him so quick that several times he rapped his opponent smartly, and at last brought home a backhand blow on the arm that made Bayard drop his stick.

"An arm was lost that time," said Lemminkainen. "Ah, well—I suppose not everyone can be such a swordsman and hero as Kaukomieli."

He turned away to harness up the reindeer again. Belphebe laid a hand on Shea's arm to keep him from reminding the hero of their own little bout.

The afternoon was a repetition of the morning's journey through country that did not change, and whose appearance was becoming as monotonous as the bumping that accompanied their progress. Shea was not surprised when even Lemminkainen wanted to camp early. With Bayard and Brodsky he set about building a triangular lean-to of branches, while Belphebe and the hero wandered off into the woods in search of fresh game for their evening meal.

While they were picking the bones of some birds that resembled a chicken in size and a grouse in flavor, Lemminkainen explained that he had to make this journey to Pohjola because he had learned by magic that they were holding a great wedding feast there and he had not been invited.

"Crashing the party, eh?" said Brodsky. "I don't get it. Why don't you just give those muzzlers the air?"

"It would decrease my reputation," said Lemminkainen. "And besides, there will be a great making of magic. I should undoubtedly lose some of my magical powers if I allowed them to do this unquestioned."

Belphebe said, "We have bargained to accompany you, Sir Lemminkainen, and I do not seek to

withdraw. But if there are so many present as will be at a great feast, I do not see how even with we four, you are much better than you would be alone."

Lemminkainen gave a roar of laughter. "O you maiden, O Pelviipi, you are surely not quick-witted. For all magics there must be a beginning. From you and your bowstring I could raise a hundred archers; from the active Harolainen set in line a thousand swordsmen—but not until you yourselves were present."

"He's right, kid," said Shea. "That's good sympathetic magic. I remember Doc Chalmers giving me a lecture on it once. What have you got there?"

Lemminkainen had picked up several of the long wing and tail feathers from the out-size grouse and was carefully smoothing them out. His face took on the expression of exaggerated foxiness it had worn once or twice before.

"In Pohjola they now surely know that the greatest of heroes and magicians approaches," he said. "It is well to be prepared for all encounters with something that can be used." He tucked the feathers in one of his capacious pockets, glanced at the fire, which was beginning to show brightly in the gathering dusk, and lumbered off to bed.

Bayard said, "It strikes me, Harold, that the magic in this continuum is quantitatively greater and qualitatively more potent than any you have reported before. And if Lemminkainen can turn you into a thousand swordsmen, can't the other people do something like that? I should say it's rather dangerous."

"I was just thinking of that," said Shea, and went to bed himself.

The next day was a repetition of the first, except that Brodsky and Bayard were so stiff they could

barely drag themselves from their deerskin blankets to go through the sword-exercises on which Lemminkainen insisted before breakfast. There was not much conversation in the sled, but when they assembled around the fire in the evening, Lemminkainen entertained them with a narrative of his exploits until Shea and Belphebe wandered off out of earshot.

It was followed by more of the same. On the fifth day, the single-stick practice at noon had progressed so far that Lemminkainen himself took a hand and promptly knocked Brodsky out. It appeared to improve relations all around; the detective took it in good part, and the hero was in the best of humor that evening.

But soon after the start the next morning, he began weaving his head from side to side with a peering expression and sniffing. "What's the trouble?" asked Shea.

"I smell magic—the strong magic of Pohjola. Look sharp, Valtarpayart."

They did not have to look very sharp. A glow soon became visible through the trees, which presently opened out to reveal a singular spectacle. Stretching down from the right and losing itself round a turn in the distance, came a depression like a dry river-bed. But instead of water this depression was filled with a fiery red shimmer, and the stones and sand of the bottom were glowing like red-hot metal. On the far side of this phenomenon rose a sharp peak of rock, where sat an eagle as big as a beach-cottage.

As Shea shielded his face against the scorch, the eagle rotated its head and gazed speculatively at the party.

There was no necessity to rein in the Elk of Hiisi.

Lemminkainen turned to Bayard. "What do you see, eyes of Ouhaiola?"

"A red-hot pavement that looks like the floor of Hell, and an eagle several times the size of a natural one. There's a kind of shimmer—no, they're both there, all right."

The giant bird slowly stretched one wing. "Oh-oh," said Shea. "You were right, Walter. This is . . ."

Belphebe leaped from the sled, tested the wind with an uplifted finger and began to string her bow; Brodsky looked round and round, pugnacious but helpless.

Lemminkainen said, "Save your arrows, dainty Pelviipi. I myself, the mighty wizard, know a trick worth two of this one."

The monster eagle leaped into the air. Shea said, "I hope you know what you're doing, Kauko," and whipped out his epee, feeling how inadequate it was. It was no longer than one of the bird's talons and nowhere near so thick.

The eagle soared, spiralled upward, and then began to come down on them in a prodigious power drive as Bayard gasped. But Lemminkainen left his own weapon hanging where it was, contenting himself with tossing into the air the feathers of the big grouse, chanting a little staccato ditty whose words Shea could not catch.

The feathers turned themselves into a flock of grouse, which shot off slantwise with a motorcycle whirr. The eagle, almost directly over them—Shea could see the little movements of its wing-tips and tail-feathers as it balanced itself on the air—gave a piercing shriek, flapped its wings, and shot off after the grouse. Soon it was out of sight beyond the treetops westward.

"Now it is to be seen that I am not less than the greatest of magicians," said Lemminkainen, stick-

ing out his chest. "But this spelling is wearisome work, and there lies before us this river of fire. Harol, you are a wizard. Do you make a spell against it while I restore myself with food."

Shea stood gazing at the redness and pondered. The glowing flicker had a hypnotic effect, like a dying wood-fire. A good downpour ought to do the trick; he began recalling a rain-spell he and Chalmers had been working up, in the hope of putting down the flaming barrier around Castle Carena during their adventures in the world of the *Orlando Furioso.*

He muttered his spell and made the passes. Nothing happened.

"Well?" said Lemminkainen, with his mouth full of bread and cheese. "When does the spell begin?"

"I tried," said Shea, puzzled, "but . . ."

"Fool of Ouhaiola! Must I teach you your business? How do you expect a spell to work when you do not sing it?"

That's right, thought Shea. He had forgotten that in this Kalevalan magic, song was an indispensable feature. With his own ability at versification, the passes Lemminkainen did not know how to make, and singing, this spell ought to be a humdinger. He lifted his arms for the passes again and sang at the top of his voice.

The spell was a humdinger. As he finished it, something black seemed to loom overhead, and the landscape was instantly blotted out by a shower of soot-lumps as heavy and tenacious as snowflakes. Shea hastily cancelled the spell.

"Truly, a wonderful wizard!" cried Lemminkainen, coughing and trying to slap the clinging stuff from his clothes. "Now that he has shown us how to make soot of the river of fire, perhaps he will tell us how to bring fog to Pohjola!"

"Nay," said Belphebe, "you shall not be so grace-

less to my lord. I do declare him an approved sorcerer—but not if he must sing, for he cannot carry one note beyond the next." She reached out one hand comfortingly.

Brodsky said, "If I could flag down a right croaker to fix my schnozz, maybe we could work something together."

"I must even do it myself then," said Lemminkainen. He tossed soot-contaminated beer from his mug, drew a fresh fill from the keg, took a prodigious swig, leaned back, meditated a moment, and sang:

> "Ice of Sariola's mountains,
> Ice of ten years' snows compacted,
> Forged into Turja's glaciers,
> Glaciers ever downward flowing,
> In the sea with thunder breaking . . ."

For a while it was not clear what he was driving at. Then a shimmering something appeared in the air over the fiery trench, and gradually hardened with a sparkle of color. A bridge of ice!

But just as Lemminkainen reached the climax of his song which should have materialized the ice and welded it into a solid structure, there was a slip. Down into the trench roared the bridge of ice in fragments, to shatter and hiss and fill the landscape with vapor.

Lemminkainen looked sour and started again. Everyone else held his breath, watching. This time the bridge melted and vanished even before it was complete.

With a yell of rage, Lemminkainen hurled his cap on the ground and danced on it. Bayard laughed.

"You mock me!" screamed the wizard. "Outland filth!" He snatched up his beer-mug from where he

had put it and flung the contents in Bayard's face. There was less than an inch of beer remaining, but even so it was enough to produce a lively display of suds.

"No!" cried Shea, reaching for his epee as Belphebe grabbed her bow.

But instead of leaping up in anger, instead of even wiping the beer from his face, Bayard was staring fixedly at the trench of fire, blinking and knitting his eyebrows. At last he said, "It's an illusion after all! There isn't anything there but a row of little peat-fires made to look big and only burning in spots. But I don't see how I came to miss it before."

Shea said, "Must be the alcohol in the beer. The illusion was so strong that you couldn't see through it until you got the stuff in your eyes. That happened to me once in the continuum of the Norse gods."

"The spells of Pohjola grow stronger as we approach their stronghold," said Lemminkainen, his anger forgotten. "But what counsel shall we take now? For I am too undone with spell-working to undertake the labor of breaking so powerful a magic."

"We could wait till tomorrow when you'd have your punch back," suggested Shea.

Lemminkainen shook his head. "They of Pohjola will surely know what has happened here, and if we are checked by one magic, another and stronger will grow behind, so that at each step the way becomes more impassable. But if now we break through, then their magic becomes weaker."

"Look here," said Bayard. "I think I can resolve this. If you'll give me some beer for eyewash, I can lead the way through. There's plenty of space, even for the sled."

The Elk of Hiisi snorted and balked, but Lem-

minkainen was firm with him as Bayard walked ahead, dipping his handkerchief in a mug of beer and applying it to his eyes. Shea found that although he was uncomfortably warm, he was not being cooked as he expected; nor did the sled show any signs of taking fire.

On the far side, they went up a little slope and halted. Bayard started back toward the sled and then halted, pointing at a tall dead pine. "That's a man!" he cried.

Lemminkainen leaped clumsily from the sled, tugging at his sword, Shea and Brodsky right behind him. As they approached the pine, its branches seemed to collapse with a gentle swoosh; then they were looking at a stocky man of about Lemminkainen's own proportions, his face wearing an expression of sullen bitterness.

"I had thought there must be someone near us for illusion-making," roared Lemminkainen, happily. "Bow your head, magician of Pohjola."

The man looked around quickly and desperately. "I am Vuohinen the champion, and I challenge," he said.

"What does he mean?" asked Shea.

"A true champion may always challenge, even in another's house," said Lemminkainen. "Whoever wins may take off the head of the other or make him his serf. Which of us do you challenge?"

Vuohinen the champion looked from one to the other and pointed to Bayard. "This one. What is his art?"

"No," said Lemminkainen, "for his art is the seeing eye that penetrates all magics, and if you challenge him, you have already lost, since he penetrated your disguise. You may have Harol here, with the point-sword—or the shield-maiden Pelviipi with the

bow, or Piit in wrestle, or myself with the broadsword." He grinned.

Vuohinen looked from one to the other. "Of the point-sword I know nothing," he said, "and while there is doubtless no bowman in the world half as good as myself, I have other uses for women than slaying them. I choose Piit in open wrestle."

"And not the lively Kaukomieli!" said Lemminkainen with a laugh. "You think you have chosen safely. But you shall see what unusual arts lie among the outland friends of Kalevala. Will you wrestle with him, Piit?"

"Okay," said Brodsky, and began shucking his shirt. Vuohinen already had his off.

They circled, swinging their arms like a pair of indifferently educated apes. Shea noticed that Vuohinen's arms reminded him of the tires of a semi-trailer truck, and the detective looked puny beside him. Then Vuohinen jumped and grabbed. Brodsky caught him by the shoulders and threw himself backward, placing the sole of his foot against Vuohinen's midriff and shoving upward as he fell, so that his antagonist flew over him and landed heavily on his back.

Lemminkainen gave a bellow of laughter. "I will make a song about this!" he shouted.

Vuohinen got up somewhat slowly and scowling. This time he came in more cautiously, then when at arm's length from Brodsky, suddenly threw himself at the detective, the fingers of his left hand spread straight for the other's eyes. Shea heard Belphebe gasp, but even as she gasped, Brodsky jerked his head back and, with a quickness wonderful to behold, seized the thumb of the clawing hand in one of his, the little finger in the other and, bracing himself twisted powerfully.

There was a crack; Vuohinen pinwheeled through

the air and came down on his side, then sat up, his face contorted with pain, feeling with the other hand of a wrist and fingers that hung limp.

"There was a creep in Chi tried to pull that rat caper on me once," said Brodsky pleasantly. "Want any more, or have you got the chill?"

"It was a trick," Vuohinen bleated. "With a sword . . ."

Lemminkainen stepped forward cheerfully. "Do you wish his head as trophy or himself to serve you daily?"

"Aw," said Brodsky, "I suppose he ain't much use as a patsy with that busted duke, but let's let him score for the break. The pastor would put the run on me if I hit him with the lily." He walked over to Vuohinen and kicked him deliberately. "That's for the rat caper. Get up!"

Vuohinen made the sled more crowded than ever and, as Brodsky has said, was of no great value as a servant, but he did make lighter the job of collecting firewood in the evening. Moreover, Brodsky's victory had improved relations with Lemminkainen. He still insisted that Bayard practice daily with the detective —they were at the point where they used real swords now—but now the hero himself practiced jujitsu falls and holds and tumbles almost daily. He was an apt pupil, too.

Around the travelers the air was colder; plumes of vapor appeared at their nostrils and those of the reindeer. The sun never seemed to break through the overcast any more. The trees became sparser and stunted, growing scattered among little grassy hillocks. Sometimes Belphebe brought home no game at all in the evening. More often than not, it would be two or three rabbits, which sent Lemminkainen

back to the stored provisions after he had eaten his share.

Still the sled bumped and slid along the muddy track northward, until one afternoon, as they came over a little hill from behind a group of trees, Lemminkainen cried, "Great Jumala! Look at that!"

Before them, stretching out of sight in both directions a prodigious fence ran across the valley. A row of palings, less than a foot apart and reaching almost to the low cloud canopy; but it was the sight of the horizontal members that really made Shea's scalp prickle. For the palings were bound together by an immense mass of snakes, wound together in and out, though whether they got that way because they wanted to or because someone had tied them in that grotesque fashion, it was impossible to tell.

As the sled slid up, the reindeer shying and trembling, the snakes turned their heads toward the party and began hissing like a thousand teakettles.

"It must be an illusion," said Bayard, "though at present I can't see anything but that mass of serpents. Give me some beer."

Lemminkainen drew some of the fluid from the cask. Vuohinen's face held a sneer of triumph. The reason was apparent as soon as Bayard dabbed the liquid in his eyes, stared at the remarkable fence again, and shook his head.

"They still look like serpents to me," he said. "I know it can't be true, but there they are."

Shea said, "Couldn't we just assume they're fakes and cut our way through?"

Lemminkainen shook his head. "Learn, O Harol of Ouhaio, that within this field of magic everything has all the powers of its seeming unless its true name be known."

"I see. And we're now right into Pohjola, where

their magic is really strong. You couldn't try a spell yourself to take this one off, whatever it is?"

"Not unless I know the real name beneath this false seeming," said the hero.

"Maybe we can play it straight," said Shea, and turning to Belphebe, "How about trying a shot with your bow at one of those beasties? The way I understand it, if you killed one, it would have to return to its proper form."

"Not so, O Harolainen," said Lemminkainen. "It would be a dead serpent merely until we learned its true form. And there are thousands."

They gazed at the spectacle for a moment or two. It was fairly revolting, but the snakes made no movement to leave their position.

Suddenly Pete Brodsky said, "Hey! I got a idea."

"What is it?" asked Shea.

Brodsky jerked a thumb toward Vuohinen. "This gummy belongs to me, don't he?"

"Under the laws of this country, I believe that's right," said Shea, and "He is your serf," said Lemminkainen.

"And he's on this magic lay in this joint?"

Shea said, "Why, so he is, now that you mention it. He must have been the one who worked the river of fire and the eagle."

Brodsky reached a hand out and grabbed Vuohinen by the collar. "All right, punk! What's the right name for them potato-water dreams out there?"

"Awk!" said Vuohinen. "Never will I be a traitor . . ."

"Bag your head on that stuff. Come across with the right dope, or I'll have shorty here let you have it." He pointed significantly to the sword that hung at Lemminkainen's side.

"Awk!" said Vuohinen again, as the hand twisted in his collar. "They are—made from lingonberries."

Walter Bayard said, "Why, so they are!" He walked across to the hissing, snarling barrier, reached out his hand, twisted the head off one of the serpents, and ate it.

Lemminkainen laughed. "Now there will be a removing of spells, and then we shall have lingonberry dessert to our meal. I thank you, friend Piit."

SEVEN

The lingonberry wall came down to a tangled mat of vegetation under Lemminkainen's ministrations, and they camped just beyond. The hero was in hilarious humor, making a series of jokes which nobody but Brodsky found diverting, and shouting with laughter over his own sallies, until Shea said, "For the love of Mike, Kauko, what's got into you tonight? You sound as though you had just won the first prize."

"And have I not, Harol? For I know well that we are through the last barrier that Louhi can throw against us, and tomorrow we shall arrive at Pohjola's hall—perhaps to fight."

Shea said, "I can see that would be just about the best thing that ever happened."

He himself didn't feel the same way, not even in the morning when they began to sight tilled fields with a few domestic animals. Presently there was a stead of considerable size visible among the tops of the low trees. Lemminkainen clucked at the Elk of Hiisi, and the giant reindeer pulled up beside a slow stream that wound across the featureless landscape.

The hero dug into the duffel at the rear of the sled for his shirt of scale-mail and put it on. "For you, my friends," he said, "I have brought armor second in quality only to my own."

He dragged out four sleeveless hip-length jackets of a double thickness of leather, tanned so stiff that Shea found it was all he could do to get into the thing. It was just as heavy as a well-made steel cuirass would have been, far more clumsy and less effective, but he supposed the metallurgy of Kalevala would not be up to such an article. Belphebe wriggled out of hers almost as soon as she was in it. "Marry," she said, "you may keep your beetle's bodice, Sir Lemminkainen. I shall need free arms if I'm to go to war."

Lemminkainen produced for each of them a skull-cap of the same thick leather, with a strip of iron around the rim and a pair of semi-circular strips that sprang from it to meet at the top of the wearer's head. These fitted better, though Brodsky's gave him the odd effect of wearing a rimless derby hat.

They climbed back into the sled. The Elk of Hiisi splashed across the little stream toward a group of buildings. Brodsky pointed, "These Hoosiers sure play it for the works. Look at them sconces!"

Shea saw that a nearby hillock was decorated with a row of stakes—about fifty, he judged—each stake surmounted by a severed human head. The heads were in various stages of decrepitude; only one stake, at the end of the line, lacked its gruesome ornament. A score of ravens flew croaking up from the heads as they approached, and Bayard remarked, "I'm glad there's only one vacancy."

Vuohinen said sourly, "You will soon learn how little the stakes of Pohjola are exhausted."

Lemminkainen pivoted round, hit him a solid backhand blow on the ear, and said, "Now my friends, you shall see that the handsome Kaukomieli is not less skillful with magic than he is with the sword."

He brought the reindeer to a halt, leaped to the

ground and, pulling a number of twigs from the stunted trees, began arranging them in rows, crooning to himself. Presently there were enough twigs to satisfy him; he stepped back, and his voice rose higher as he made a series of passes with his hands. Shea could see that they were sound magic, of a type he had seen in other space-time continua, but the hero moved too rapidly for him to follow the precise pattern. Then there was a little rush of air and, where the first twig had been, Shea was looking at a replica of himself, complete with epee, leather jacket, and iron-bound cap.

Another, and another, and another Shea flashed into being, a whole row of Harold Sheas, who at once began to crowd round the sled.

Belphebe gave a little squeal. "Am I wed to all of these?" she cried. But, as she did so, the quota of Sheas was apparently filled up, and Belphebes began to leap from the ground where Lemminkainen had arranged his twigs. They mingled with the simulacra of Shea as the magician's voice went up one more tone, and copies of Brodsky joined the growing crowd, shaking hands and clapping one another on the back.

Lemminkainen's song came to an end; the sled was surrounded by at least a hundred replicas of the three. In it remained one Lemminkainen, one sour-looking Vuohinen, and a single Bayard. Bayard said, "A brilliant piece of work, Lemminkainen, but could these reproductions actually cut somebody up, or are they phantoms? They look all right to me, but I haven't tried it with beer in my eye."

"Seek to wrestle with one of these Piits, and you shall see," said Lemminkainen. "They will have all the strength of life unless someone finds which is the real one and which the shadow and make a counter-spell, using the true name of the one."

"Wait a minute," said Bayard. "Haven't we got someone here who can identify all these people for the Pohjolans?" He pointed at Vuohinen.

"By the mill!" said Lemminkainen. "It is clear that I am wise as well as brave, for no one else would have thought to bring on this journey a person so capable of seeing through millstones as yourself. Piit, Harol, Pelviipi, you must mingle with your other selves and let some of those other selves come upon the sled, lest these people of Turja find the true ones."

Shea stared a second, then said to Belphebe: "He's right, kid. See you later." He squeezed her hand and jumped over the side into the mob. Walter came with him. "I don't want to lose sight of the real one myself," he said.

Behind them, three or four Brodskys tried to climb into the sled at once. The one who made it first promptly kicked Vuohinen. "Get wise, punk," he said. "Pull any fast ones on me, and I'll let you have it."

Shea observed that, while the various Brodskys had formed a compact group to march behind the sled, chattering with each other, most of the reproductions of himself and Belphebe had paired off. One of the unengaged ones sidled up to him and pressed his hand. It couldn't be the real one, and yet her touch was as cool and her step as light as though it were. It occurred to him that unless someone pronounced the counter-spell fairly soon, some neat marital problems would arise in a continuum that contained about thirty-five Sheas and as many Belphebes, all presumably supplied with the due quota of emotions.

Bayard said, "There's one point, Harold. It seems to me that it should be possible to tell within easily determinable limits how our presence here will affect the outcome of the epic. We have all the elements.

We know what happened in the original story, and we have fairly accurate information about ourselves. It seems to me that an equation could be set up . . ."

"Yeah, for one of those electronic thinking machines," said Shea. "Only we don't happen to have one, and if we did, it wouldn't work."

"There was a witch once in Faerie," said the Belphebe by his side, "that warned people from danger after she had looked in a pool by magic and seen to where a course would lead."

"That's what I mean," said Bayard. "Apparently you can do things by magic in this continuum that a calculating machine couldn't think of equaling. Now if before we start something—say going into that hall there—we found out it was going to turn out badly, then we could change it to the right kind of future by taking another action."

"That's a bum steer," said one of the Brodskys, who had fallen into step with them. "Get smart, will you? Everything that's gonna happen has been put on the line by God ever since the clock began to tick. It says so in t e Bible."

"Listen, my predestinarian friend," said Bayard, "I shall be glad to prove the contrary . . ."

"Not with magic," said Shea. "You're the only one it doesn't affect now, and if you got to working spells, you might lose your immunity. Hey, they've spotted us."

A man was running, shouting, toward one of the buildings from which came so ıds of revelry. The door of this building opened as the sled came to a stop, and several broad, black-bearded faces appeared in the opening. Shea saw one of the other Sheas put an arm around a Belphebe and felt a quite illogical pang of jealousy over the thought that this might be the real one.

Lemminkainen jumped out of the sled, followed

by a Shea, a Belphebe and a Brodsky, who clamped a wrist-lock on Vuohinen. Men began to file out of the hall and stand opposite the company of visitors, who drew up in a rough line. They looked much like other Kalevalans, though perhaps even shorter and with more Mongoloid faces. They were armed and looked thoroughly unpleasant. Shea felt a prickling at the back of his neck and loosened his epee in its scabbard.

But Lemminkainen looked unimpressed. "Hail, my cousins of Pohjola!" he said. "Do you wish to keep me standing here outside the hall of feasting?"

Nobody answered him; instead, more of them came frowning out. Lemminkainen turned.

"Fair Pelviipi," he said, "show them your art, that they may learn how silly it is to oppose the friends of the heroic Kaukomieli."

As though actuated by a single brain, thirty-five Belphebes placed one foot each against the ends of their bows and snapped the strings into place. Like so many Rockettes, they each placed an arrow on the string, took one pace back, and looked around for a target. One of the ravens from the palisade of heads chose that moment to come flapping over, with a loud "Kr-awk."

Thirty-five bowstrings twanged; the raven came tumbling downward, looking like a pincushion, transfixed by all the arrows that could find room in its carcass. "Nice work, kid," said Shea, before he realized he was talking to a simulacrum.

It impressed the Pohjolans, too. There was a quick, low-toned gabbling among them, and a couple disappeared inside. In a moment they were back and the company began to disappear through the door. Lemminkainen said, "Follow me!" and stamped up behind them. Shea hurried, not wishing to be left out-

side, and reached the door simultaneously with the Shea who had been in the sled.

"Sorry," said the other Shea, "but I came here to go to this party with my wife."

"She's my wife, too," said Shea, grabbing a Belphebe at random and leading her through the door behind the other couple. Thank Heaven, there were enough of them to go round.

Inside, several rush-lights flickered. A fire blazed on the central hearth, to some extent counteracting the inadequate illumination characteristic of Kalevalan houses. The whole long hall was crowded with benches and tables, at which sat scores of men and quite a few women. All heads were turned toward the newcomers.

Shea's eyes followed Lemminkainen's toward the center of the hall, where a table with some space about it was apparently the place of honor. At it sat the tallest Kalevalan Shea had ever seen; this was undoubtedly the bridegroom. There was a sharp-featured, snag-toothed, muscular-looking woman—Louhi, the Mistress of Pohjola, no doubt. The stout man with his eyes drooping sleepily and a mug of drink before him must be the Master of Pohjola. The girl with the fancy beaded headdress was probably the bride, Louhi's daughter.

The duplicate Shea touched him on the arm. "Even nicer dish than Kylliki, isn't she?" he whispered. It was odd to have one's own thoughts come back at one out of one's own mouth.

Lemminkainen strode to the nearest bench, reached out and pitched the last man on it to the floor. Then he slammed his muddy boot down on the bench and shouted:

"Greetings to you on my coming,
Greetings also to the greeter!

Hearken, Pohjola's great Master,
Have ye here within this dwelling,
Beer to offer to the hero?"

Louhi dug her elbow into her husband's ribs. He forced his eyes open, gave a grunt and replied, "If you care to stand quietly over there in the corner, between the kettles, where the hoes are hanging, we will not prevent you."

Lemminkainen laughed, but it was an angry laugh. "Seems to me that I'm unwelcome," he chanted:

"As no ale is offered to me,
To the guest who has just entered."

"No guest you," cried Louhi, "but a troublemaking boy, not fit to sit among your elders. Well, if you seek trouble, by Ukko, you shall find it!"

"Yes?" said Lemminkainen, sitting down heavily on the bench.

"Pohjola's illustrious Mistress,
Long-toothed Mistress of Pimentola,
Thou hast held the wedding badly,
And in doggish fashion held it. . . ."

He chanted on, comparing Louhi to various species of unpleasant fauna and extending the compliments to most of her guests. There seemed to be a routine about this sort of thing, Shea decided; the others merely sat, waiting till Lemminkainen had finished.

Behind him he heard the duplicate Shea say to Bayard, "All right, I admit it might work, and it's within the laws of magic. But if anybody's going to try it, you better let me. You just haven't had enough experience with it, Walter."

He whirled. "What might work?"

His twin said, "Walter's been watching Lemmin-

kainen, and thinks he's worked out a magical method for determining the future results of a given series of events."

"I just want to show up this predestination business for . . ." began Bayard.

"Sssh," said the duplicate Shea. "They've finished saying hello. Here comes the floor show."

The Master of Pohjola had at last opened his eyes fully and was chanting a spell. In the space between the table of honor and the hearth, there appeared a pool of water. The Master cried:

> "Here's a river thou mayst drink of,
> Here's a pool that thou mayst splash in!"
>
> "Ha, ha!" bellowed Lemminkainen.
> "I'm no calf by women driven,
>
> Nor a bull with tail behind me,
> That I drink of river water,
> Or of filthy ponds the water."

His tone went lower, and without apparent effort he sang up an enormous ox, under whose hooves the floor creaked alarmingly. The ox, after a vague look around the company, began schlooping up the water by the bucketful.

Shea said to his Belphebe, "Probably brought up in somebody's parlor, so he doesn't think a thing about it."

The Master of Pohjola was already at work on a new spell. Its result was a great gray wolf, which took one look at the ox and bounded toward it. The ox gave a bawl of terror, whirled, and thundered toward the door, while the Pohjolans fell over one another to get out of the way. It plunged through, taking part of the door-frame with it, and vanished, with the wolf right behind.

Louhi sneered. "You are vanquished in the contest of magic, O Kaukomieli! Now begone, or ever worse come upon you."

"No man who deserves the name would let himself be driven from any place where he chose to stay," said Lemminkainen, "least of all a hero like myself. I challenge."

The Master stood up. He moved lightly for so beefy an individual. "Let us then measure our swords together to see which is the better."

Lemminkainen grinned and drew his broadsword. "Little of my sword is left me, for on bones it has been shattered. But come, let us measure them."

The Master crossed over to the wall and took his sword from a peg. The Belphebe next to Shea said, "Shall I notch a shaft?"

"I don't think so," he replied. "It's not likely to turn into a general riot unless somebody breaks the rules. They're too nervous about those bows."

The contenders were measuring their swords in the cleared space. From where he stood, it seemed to Shea that the Master's was a trifle longer. The guests crowded forward to watch, while those behind yelled to them to sit down. At last the Master ordered them back to their seats.

"And you newcomers, too!" he shouted. "Back against the wall!"

That seemed to remind Lemminkainen of something. He said, "Before that we work out our challenge, I will challenge any present—to the point-sword against my companion Harol, or to the wrestle with my companion Piit. It will be rare sport to watch, after I have disposed of you."

The duplicate Shea said, "Isn't he generous?" But one of the Belphebes put her hand on his arm and he felt better.

"You will be watching no more sports," said the Master. "Are you ready?"

"I am ready," said Lemminkainen.

The Master leaped forward, swinging his sword up for a tremendous overhand cut, as if he were serving a tennis ball. The blow was never completed, however, for the swordblade struck a rafter overhead with a loud chunk. Lemminkainen made a pass at his opponent, who leaped backward with wonderful agility.

Lemminkainen roared with laughter, saying, "What has the rafter done to you, that you should punish it? But that is always the way with little men when confronted by a true hero. Come, there's too little room in here. And do you not think that your blood would look prettier on the grass outside?"

He turned and shouldered his way toward the door. As Shea followed him, Lemminkainen leaned close and, with his foxy expression, whispered, "I think that some of them are false seemings. Let your friend Payart watch sharply."

Before Shea could reply, the others were coming. Outside, the phantom company sat or stood on the grass, talking. Shea wondered whether, when the spell came off, he would find himself remembering what the others had said. He wished he had Doc Chalmers around; there were times when this magic business got pretty complicated for an incomplete enchanter.

The Master and Lemminkainen halted in the yard, between the main house and the hillock with its head-decorated row of stakes. A couple of serfs brought a big cowhide, which they laid on the grass to provide securer footing. Lemminkainen took his stance at one edge of it, stamping his feet to test the give of the hide. He jerked his thumb toward the heads, saying,

"When we finish, that last stake will no longer feel ashamed of its nakedness. Are you ready?"

"I am ready," said the Master of Pohjola.

Shea glanced at his companions. The version of Belphebe nearest him was watching with an intent, studious expression that showed duels were nothing particularly new to her. One of the Brodskys said, "Shea, this may be for the monkeys, but these birds are no flukers. If we could make TV with this show, there'd be enough scratch in it to . . ."

"Sh!" said Bayard. "I'm concentrating."

Clang! went the blades, the Master of Pohjola forcing the attack. His longer blade flashed overhand, forehand, backhand. "Wonderful wrists," said one of the phantom Sheas. Lemminkainen, not giving an inch, was parrying every swing. There was little footwork in this style of swordplay. They faced each other squarely, hewing as if trying to fell trees, pausing occasionally for a rest, then slashing away again.

Once the Master's blade came down on Lemminkainen's shoulder, but at a slight angle, so that the scale-mail slipped the blow aside. Then Lemminkainen got in a cut at the Master's neck that the latter did not quite parry in time. Blood trickled from a small cut.

"Ho, ho!" cried Lemminkainen. "Hearken, Master of Pohjola, true it is, your neck so wretched is as red as dawn of morning!"

The Master, stepping back half a pace, rolled his eyes downward for a fraction of a second as though to assess the damage. Instantly Lemminkainen, advancing so fast that Shea could not quite see how he did it, struck again. The blade went right through the Master's neck. The head, turning over in the air, fell in a graceful parabola, and the body, half-twisting as the legs buckled under it, fell spouting upon the cow-

hide. There was a gasping groan from the crowd. Louhi shrieked.

Lemminkainen, grinning until it seemed as though his mouth must meet behind, like Humpty-Dumpty's, cried: "So much for the heroes of Pohjola!"

He stepped forward, wiped his blade with care on the trousers of the corpse, and sheathed it. Then he picked up the head and strutted to the empty stake.

"Now, wicked wretches, fetch me beer!" he bellowed.

Shea turned to say something to the nearest Belphebe. It was not until that moment that he remembered Bayard had said, *"I'm concentrating."* He turned around and looked. Sure enough, there was Bayard, his back to the arresting spectacle of Lemminkainen's victory march, crouched on the ground over a little pile of grasses. He seemed to be muttering to himself; a tiny curl of smoke came from the pile.

"Walter, no!" shouted Shea, and dived for him.

Too late.

There was a little flash of fire, a sound of displaced air, and in an instant all the duplicate Sheas, Belphebes and Brodskys had vanished. As Shea and Bayard rolled over together, they heard Lemminkainen's shout, "Fool! Bungler! Traitor! Your spell has cancelled mine. The agreement is ended!"

Shea pulled himself to his knees in time to see the hero walking, not running, toward the sled with his sword out. Nobody seemed anxious to be the first to stop him.

Down toward the edge of what had been the Pohjolan cheering section around the combatants, there was a half-muffled cry, and out of a struggling group projected a leg, dainty even in the shapeless garment.

"Belphebe!" shouted Shea, getting to his feet and

tugging at his sword with the same motion. Before he could get the epee out of its scabbard, he too went down under a swarm of bodies. He had just time to notice that they didn't bathe often enough and that Brodsky had laid out one of the assailants with a neat crack of his blackjack, and then he was hopelessly pinioned, being marched along beside Bayard.

"Put them in the strong-house!" said the Mistress of Pohjola. Her face did not look as though she intended it to be a place of entertainment.

As the captives were frog-marched along, Shea saw the Elk of Hiisi retreating into the distance, with the sled bouncing along behind him.

EIGHT

The four were tumbled unceremoniously over each other onto a stone floor. Shea heard a massive door slam, and the clash as several large bolts were driven home behind them. He got up and pulled Belphebe to her feet.

"Are you hurt, kid?" he asked.

"Nay, not I." She rubbed one wrist where someone's grip had come down hard. "But there are places I would rather be."

"It's a real jook-joint, all right," said Brodsky. "You got me on how we're going to push a can from this one."

He was looking around the place in the dim illumination furnished by the single, eight-inch window, which was heavily barred. The strong-house itself was composed of massive tree-trunks, and its roof seemed abnormally thick.

"Alackaday," said Belphebe. "What happened to those shapings of ourselves that so confounded these gentry but lately?"

"Walter took care of that," said Shea. "I admit I'm just as glad to have only one wife, but he was a little precipitate. What in hell were you up to, Walter?"

Bayard said, "I was merely trying in a small way to carry out the plan I mentioned of divining the future. It worked, too."

"What do you mean, it worked?" said Shea.

"I was trying to find out who would win the duel. There were little fiery letters on the ground that said 'Lem' as clearly as could be."

"A big help," said Shea, "especially as he took off the other guy's head about that time, anyway."

Bayard said, "The principle is established. And how was I to know it would counteract Lemminkainen's spell? Nobody warned me of any such outcome. What is the logical nexus between the two, by the way?"

Shea shrugged. "I haven't the least idea. Maybe we can work it out sometime when we have the leisure. But in the meanwhile, we need to figure out some plan for getting out of here. These people don't fool around at any time, and that old witch has just lost her husband."

He went to the little window and looked out. Or tried to, for he found his vision blocked by a familiar-looking bewhiskered countenance: Vuohinen, who spat through the bars at him.

Shea dodged, wiped his shoulder with the cuff of the other hand, and turned to Brodsky. "Pete, he's your serf. Maybe you can order him . . ."

"Ha!" roared Vuohinen. "This one to order me? I am free of all serfdom now, and have been charged to see that you outlandish tricksters do not escape before the Mistress of Pohjola undertakes your punishment."

"What do you mean?"

"All details I do not know, but be assured it will

be a memorable occasion. She is like to have you flayed and rolled in salt, to be followed by slow burning."

Shea fell back and looked around. Whoever had planned this box had built for keeps. The massive simplicity of the structure would defy any amount of tinkering. For instance, there was no opening whatever on the inside of the door through which one could get at the outside.

"I know your names!" shouted Vuohinen from the window. "Your wizardries will have no power on me."

He was probably right, at that. But an idea occurred to Shea. He returned to the window. "Look here," he said. "I'm a champion and I challenge you."

Vuohinen shook his head. "I am no longer a champion myself since losing the wrestle to this Piit, and cannot take your challenge until he has been beheaded."

"Wait a minute," said Bayard, "if . . ."

"Ya!" said Vuohinen. "I see your plot. Be known that I shall take care that your head comes off first, and his the last of all." He turned his back and walked away from the window.

Shea turned to Brodsky. "Pete, you should know a lot about busting out of places like this. What do the chances look like to you?"

Brodsky, who had been moving slowly around the cell, poking and testing, shook his head. "This is a real tough can. It would be a soup job, and even then there'd be the strong-arm squad out there to play."

Bayard said: "Couldn't we lure Vuohinen up to the bars and then grab him and choke him?"

"No good," said Brodsky. "What do you get except a good feeling in your biscuit? He ain't got no keys."

Belphebe said, "Yet while you are an approved

sorcerer, Harold, it seems to me that we are not utterly without resource." She took her turn at stepping to the window. "Ohe, Vuohinen," she called.

"What now, female toad?"

"I understand how you are angry with us. We were lacking in sympathy, in not thinking of the damage to your hand. But we will make amends. If you will tell us somewhat of yourself, my lord, who knows no little magic, will make it good for you."

Shea squeezed her hand. "Nice try, kid," he said under his breath. But Vuohinen saw the point, too.

"And put myself in his power? Ya, the hand will heal itself quickly enough when I see your heads on stakes."

Shea took over with, "You're a pretty tough guy, aren't you?"

"That I am."

"Yes, sir," said Shea. "Some of them are good where I come from, but for plain toughness, I'm afraid we're not in your class. Must be the diet or something. How did you get that way, anyway?"

"Ya," said Vuohinen, "you seek by flattery to disarm me, so that you may persuade me to let you go. I am not so simple."

Bayard said, "He seems to be up on psychology, too, doesn't he?"

Shea sighed. "Psychology worked in the world of Norse myth when I got thrown in the jug."

"The trouble seems to be," said Bayard, "that this animal is a Finn. In our own world the Finns are about the stubbornest race on earth, like the Dutch and maybe the Basques. There's something in the culture-pattern. I don't think you're going to get anywhere with him. . . . I wonder how much time we have left?"

Belphebe said, "Harold, my love, I think the answer stares us in the face, but we have so looked

at small details as to miss the great. Why cannot we leave this whole world of Kalevala by the same door we entered in: item, your symbolic magic?"

Shea slapped his thigh. "Just the thing! Wait a minute, though. . . . Any kind of magic in this continuum takes a lot of music, and I guess my voice just isn't equal to it. That's why I've had trouble so far."

"Alas, I fear I can do but little more for you," said Belphebe. "Not that I croak like you, my love, but my voice is so slender. I could attune a harp if we had such a thing. Timias, my fiancé in Faerie, taught me the art."

Bayard shook his head. Brodsky said, "Not that I want to noise off, but if my schnozz was on the up-and-up . . ."

Shea said, "Wait a minute here. I think I see a way. Have you ever had that polyp taken out, Pete?"

"Naw."

"Why not?"

"I been busy. . . . And besides, I don't want no croaker putting me through the mill." His voice was defensive, but Shea rushed on. "Well, why don't we begin by curing your polyp by magic? That ought not to take much of a spell, and if your voice were working right, we could tackle something harder."

"Say, maybe you got a right steer there. But how are you going to wrap it up without music?"

"I think that Belphebe's voice with the help of a harp ought to be enough for the smaller spell. Then she could accompany you, and I'll work out the big one. Wait, I'll try."

He stepped to the window again. "Oh, Vuohinen!"

"Well, what now?"

"Do you know what a kantele is?"

"What child does not?"

"Good. Could you get us one to lighten our last hours?"

"Why should I lighten your last hours, filth?" He turned away again.

Shea sighed again. "No cooperation—that's the trouble with this damned continuum," he said.

Bayard asked, "What's a kantele?"

"The primitive harp. Vainamoinen invented it at some point in the runes, by making it out of a fish's jawbone, but I wasn't sure he'd done it yet, so I asked this guy if he knew what it was."

"If we had a fish's jawbone . . ."

"We could make one ourselves. Yes, I know. But our chances of getting a fish's jawbone out of that big lump of insensitivity are about as good as those of biting our way through those logs."

"I can fix that," said Brodsky, suddenly.

"Oh, yeah?" said Shea, and "Can you, indeed?" said Bayard, both together.

"Oh, yeäh," said Brodsky firmly, and strode to the window again. "Hey, lug!" he called. "So you're going to clip our pumpkins tomorrow. Okay. But where's the kiss-off banquet?"

"What use is food to you, who will so soon be beyond the need of it?"

"That's right, play it dumb, lug. Listen, we're from Ohio, see? In our country, when a ghee doesn't get what he wants for his last meal, his ghost comes back on the roach that turned him down, and pretty soon the muzzler is playing with the squirrels."

"It is a lie," said Vuohinen, but he turned his head from side to side to look at the others, and Shea felt his heart leap. He nodded solemnly in support of the detective. "That's right," said Bayard.

"Boy!" said Brodsky gleefully. "Am I going to get a bang out of watching you cut off your own toes?"

"Maybe we could make him take off his nose and ears, too, while we're about it," said Shea.

"That's the dope," Brodsky continued. "None of them fried pigs' ears, either. It's gotta be fish, or else."

The head disappeared. Shea turned to Brodsky. "You're a better psychologist than I am. How did you know that would fetch him?"

"Ah, I never saw the gorilla yet that didn't fall for the yudd racket," said Brodsky, modestly. "They're so afraid of going wack, they'd rather turn themselves in."

He seemed to have struck oil. Outside there was the sound of feet and a murmur of voices. Then there was a wait, the bolts were drawn back, and the door opened to show Vuohinen, surrounded by a phalanx of the black-bearded Pohjolan warriors. He bore a big wooden platter.

"I told the Mistress of your outlandish custom," he said, "and though she says her magic is strong enough for any protection, she will grant you so much."

He slammed down the platter and stamped out. Shea bent to examine the platter. There was no doubt that it was fish, and more than a little on the high side, some large member of the salmon tribe. He said, "Well, here's our harp. Walter, help me get the jawbones out of this critter's head."

"What with? They took all our knives and things."

"With your fingernails. We can't be squeamish. Ssh, let me think. I'll have to work out the verse for Belphebe."

"Now," said Shea, "can you break off a few hairs, sweetheart?"

Belphebe complied. Shea undertook to tie the strands of hair, one at a time, to the jawbone, so that

they spanned its gap like the strings of a harp. In the dim light, it took some doing.

She touched the strings and bent her head close. "It's awfully small and weak," she said. "I don't know."

"I thought of that," said Shea. "Listen carefully, kid, and memorize after me, because you'll have to do it all yourself. Keep your voice way down, as though you were crooning, to match the harp. I'll make the passes, just to be on the safe side, though they may not be necessary."

Belphebe seated herself on the floor, with the harp on her uplifted knees, cocked her ear down toward it, and began:

"Oh, you harp of fish's jawbone,
Hail, you kantele of magic . . ."

while Shea ran rapidly through some of the passes he had used in Faerie. She was from there, and it would probably help. Belphebe ended:

". . . be you forthwith ten times greater."

And fell over on her back as a five-foot harp of fish's jawbone pushed her off balance. Shea helped her up, and she began testing the strings. "It needs tuning."

"All right, you tune it, while I work out a verse for that polyp. Pete, what's the name of your wife, and what church do you go to?"

In a few moments they were ready. Pete placed himself before the couple, Belphebe twanged the strings of her harp, and in her light, clear soprano sang the spell for the removal of the polyp.

Brodsky cried, "Ouch! Damn near took my sconce off." He felt his nose and a smile spread across his

face in the semi-darkness. (Outside the summer day was just ending.) "Say, Shea . . ."

Whatever he was going to say was never said. The window turned dark, and all four looked up to see Vuohinen's face peering in, bearded and furious.

"Where did you get that?" he shouted. "Magic! Magic! I know your names! I will . . ." The face abruptly disappeared.

"Sing!" cried Shea to Brodsky. "Sing anything you can think of! Quick! I'll take care of the sorites. Belphebe, you accompany him, and Walter hold one of his hands. Now if the class A . . ."

Pete Brodsky tilted his head back, and in a tenor that would have done credit to John McCormack, burst into:

> "My wi-ild I-rish rose,
> The swe-etest flower that grows . . ."

Outside, beneath the piercing tenor and the twanging of the harp, there was a sound of distant shouting and running feet.

> "You may look everywhere . . ."

The walls of the cabin seemed to turn round and round as though they were on a pivot and only the four in the center fixed in position. And as Pete's voice rose higher and higher, the solid walls turned gray and dissolved, and with them the whole world of the Kalevala.

II.

THE KINGDOM OF THE DWARFS

Anatole France

(1911)

Editor's Note

Few people read Anatole France for pleasure these days, for he has become an awesome literary giant in the popular view, and that means most "ordinary" readers will automatically shun him like the plague.

Literary giant or not, France is a writer of great wit and charm: subtle, polished, ironic. He reads much like James Branch Cabell, or so I have always thought. But the following novella is quite unCabellian: It is even rather unFrancian, if I may be permitted the neologism.

Born in Paris in 1844 as Jacques Anatole François Thibault, Anatole France soon became the dominant figure in modern French prose fiction. He was influenced very strongly by Voltaire and, like him, delighted in the play of ideas and observed without pity or cynicism the stupidity and silliness of men. He won the Nobel Prize and became, not just a famous writer, but a sage and philosopher, and his old age saw him revered as a genius and a literary patriarch in the eyes of the world. He died in Tours in 1924.

Quite a sizable share of France's work is splendid fantasy: In my anthology, *Golden Cities, Far* (1970), I included his droll and impish pastiche on the Carolingian romance, "Olivier's Brag." And during this year Ballantine will revive his sparkling romance

of classical antiquity, *Thaïs,* with the illustrations of Frank C. Papé.

The Kingdom of the Dwarfs is quite another matter, and an odd little tale. It bears the stamp and shape of the traditional fairy-tale, but the prose is so exquisite and lyrical, the artistry so mature and Parnassian, that I doubt the author intended it only for children. Like much of France's shorter work, it has long been out of print, neglected, and is by now virtually forgotten.

But earlier in the century it was quite popular with English readers. There are several different translations of it, and some confuse the collector by bearing alternate titles, such as *Honey-Bee.* The edition from which I have drawn my text calls it *The Kingdom of the Dwarfs,* and that seems far and away the best of the several titles under which I have seen it printed.

—L/C

THE KINGDOM OF THE DWARFS

I

WHICH TREATS OF THE APPEARANCE OF THE COUNTRY AND SERVES AS INTRODUCTION

The sea covers to-day what was once the Duchy of Clarides. No trace of the town or the castle remains. But when it is calm there can be seen, it is said, within the circumference of a mile, huge trunks of trees standing on the bottom of the sea. A spot on the banks, which now serves as a station for the custom-house officers, is still called "The Tailor's Booth," and it is quite probable that this name is in memory of a certain Master Jean who is mentioned in this story. The sea, which encroaches year by year, will soon cover this spot so curiously named.

Such changes are in the nature of things. The mountains sink in the course of ages, and the depths of the seas, on the contrary, rise until their shells and corals are carried to the regions of clouds and ice.

Nothing endures. The face of land and sea is for ever changing. Tradition alone preserves the memory of men and places across the ages and renders real to us what has long ceased to exist. In telling you of Clarides I wish to take you back to times that have long since vanished. Thus I begin:

The Countess of Blanchelande having placed on her golden hair a little black hood embroidered with pearls. . . .

II

IN WHICH WE LEARN WHAT THE WHITE ROSE MEANT TO THE COUNTESS OF BLANCHELANDE

Having placed on her golden hair a little black hood embroidered with pearls and bound about her waist a widow's girdle, the Countess of Blanchelande entered the chapel where it was her daily custom to pray for the soul of her husband who had been killed in single-handed combat with a giant from Ireland.

That day she saw a white rose lying on the cushion of her *prie-Dieu;* at sight of this she turned pale; her eyes grew dim; she bowed her head and wrung her hand. For she knew that when a Countess of Blanchelande is about to die she always finds a white rose on her *prie-Dieu.* .

Warned by this that her time had come to leave a world in which in so short a time she had been wife, mother and widow, she entered the chamber where her son George slept in the care of the nurses. He was three years old. His long eyelashes threw a lovely shadow on his cheeks, and his mouth looked like a flower. At sight of him, so helpless and so beautiful, she began to weep.

"My little child," she cried in anguish, "my dear little child, you will never have known me and my image will fade for ever from your dear eyes. And yet, to be truly your mother, I nourished you with my own milk, and for love of you I refused the hand of the noblest cavaliers."

So speaking she kissed a medallion in which was her own portrait and a lock of her hair, and this she hung about the neck of her son. A mother's tear fell on the little one's cheek as he stirred in his cradle and rubbed his eyes with his little hands. But the Count-

ess turned her head away and fled out of the room. How could eyes about to be extinguished for ever bear the light of two dear eyes in which the soul was only beginning to dawn?

She ordered a steed to be saddled and followed by her squire, Francœur, she rode to the castle of Clarides.

The Duchess of Clarides embraced the Countess of Blanchelande.

"Loveliest! what good fortune brings you here?"

"The fortune that brings me here is not good. Listen, my friend. We were married within a few years of each other, and similar fates have made us widows. For in these times of chivalry the best perish first, and in order to live long one must be a monk. When you became a mother I had already been one for two years. Your daughter Honey-Bee is lovely as the day, and my little George is good. I love you and you love me. Know then that I have found a white rose on the cushion of my *prie-Dieu.* I am about to die; I leave you my son."

The Duchess knew what the white rose meant to the ladies of Blanchelande. She began to weep and in the midst of her tears she promised to bring up Honey-Bee and George as brother and sister, and to give nothing to one which the other did not share.

Still in each other's arms the two women approached the cradle where little Honey-Bee slept under light curtains, blue as the sky, and without opening her eyes, she moved her little arms. And as she spread her fingers five little rosy rays came out of each sleeve.

"He will defend her," said the mother of George.

"And she will love him," the mother of Honey-Bee replied.

"She will love him," a clear little voice repeated, which the Duchess recognised as that of a spirit

which for a long time had lived under the hearthstone.

On her return to her manor the lady of Blanchelande divided her jewels among her women and having had herself anointed with perfumed ointments and robed in her richest raiment in order to honour the body destined to rise again at the Day of Judgment, she lay down on her bed and fell asleep never again to awaken.

III

WHEREIN BEGINS THE LOVE OF GEORGE OF BLANCHELANDE AND HONEY-BEE OF CLARIDES

Contrary to the common destiny which is to have more goodness than beauty, or more beauty than goodness, the Duchess of Clarides was as good as she was beautiful, and she was so beautiful that many princes, though they had only seen her portrait, demanded her hand in marriage. But to all their pleading she replied:

"I shall have but one husband as I have but one soul."

However, after five years of mourning she left off her long veil and her black robes so as not to spoil the happiness of those about her, and in order that all should smile and be free to enjoy themselves in her presence. Her duchy comprised a great extent of country; moorlands, overgrown by heather, covered the desolate expanse, lakes in which fishermen sometimes caught magic fish, and mountains which rose in fearful solitudes over subterraneous regions inhabited by dwarfs.

She governed Clarides with the help of an old monk who, having escaped from Constantinople and

seen much violence and treachery, had but little faith in human goodness. He lived in a tower in the company of birds and books, and from this place he filled his position as counsellor by the aid of a number of little maxims. His rules were these: "Never revive a law once fallen into disuse; always accede to the demands of a people for fear of revolt, but accede as slowly as possible, because no sooner is one reform granted than the public demands another, and you can be turned out for acceding too quickly as well as for resisting too long."

The Duchess let him have his own way, for she understood nothing about politics. She was compassionate and, as she was unable to respect all men, she pitied those who were unfortunate enough to be wicked. She helped the suffering in every possible way, visited the sick, comforted the widows, and took the poor orphans under her protection.

She educated her daughter Honey-Bee with a charming wisdom. Having brought the child up only to do good, she never denied her any pleasure.

This good woman kept the promise she had made to the poor Countess of Blanchelande. She was like a mother to George, and she made no difference between him and Honey-Bee. They grew up together, and George approved of Honey-Bee, though he thought her rather small. Once, when they were very little, he went up to her and asked:

"Will you play with me?"

"I should like to," said Honey-Bee.

"We will make mud pies," said George, which they proceeded to do. But as Honey-Bee made hers very badly, George struck her fingers with his spade. Whereupon Honey-Bee set up a most awful roar and the squire, Francœur, who was strolling about in the garden, said to his young master:

"It is not worthy of a Count of Blanchelande to strike young ladies, your lordship."

Whereupon George was seized with an ardent desire to hit Francœur also with his spade. But as this presented insurmountable difficulties, he resigned himself to do what was easier, and that was to stand with his nose against the trunk of a big tree and weep torrents.

In the meantime Honey-Bee took care to encourage her own tears by digging her fists into her eyes; and in her despair she rubbed her nose against the trunk of a neighbouring tree. When night came and softly covered the earth, Honey-Bee and George were still weeping, each in front of a tree. The Duchess of Clarides was obliged to come and take her daughter by one hand and George by the other, and lead them back to the castle. Their eyes were red and their noses were red and their cheeks shone. They sighed and sobbed enough to break one's heart. But they ate a good supper, after which they were both put to bed. But as soon as the candle was blown out they reappeared like two little ghosts in two little nightgowns, and they hugged each other and laughed at the top of their voices.

And thus began the love of Honey-Bee of Clarides and George of Blanchelande.

IV

WHICH TREATS OF EDUCATION IN GENERAL, AND GEORGE OF BLANCHELANDE'S IN PARTICULAR

So George grew up in the Castle side by side with Honey-Bee, whom he affectionately called his sister though he knew she was not.

He had masters in fencing, riding, swimming, gymnastics, dancing, hunting, falconry, tennis, and, indeed, in all the arts. He even had a writing-master. This was an old cleric, humble of manner but very proud within, who taught him all manner of penmanship, and the more beautiful this was the less decipherable it became. Very little pleasure or profit did George get out of the old cleric's lessons, as little as out of those of an old monk who taught him grammar in barbarous terms. George could not understand the sense of learning a language which one knows as a matter of course and which is called one's mother tongue.

He only enjoyed himself with Francœur the squire, who, having knocked about the world, understood the ways of men and beasts, could describe all sorts of countries and compose songs which he could not write. Francœur was the only one of his masters who taught George anything, for he was the only one who really loved him, and the only good lessons are those which are given with love. The two old goggle-eyes, the writing-master and the grammar-master, who hated each other with all their hearts, were, however, united in a common hatred of the old squire, whom they accused of being a drunkard.

It is true that Francœur frequented the tavern "The Pewter Pot" somewhat too zealously. It was here that he forgot his sorrows and composed his songs. But of course it was very wrong of him.

Homer made better verses than Francœur, and Homer only drank the water of the springs. As for sorrows the whole world has sorrows, and the thing to make one forget them is not the wine one drinks, but the good one does. But Francœur was an old man grown grey in harness, faithful and trustworthy, and the two masters of writing and grammar should

have hidden his failings from the duchess instead of giving her an exaggerated account of them.

"Francœur is a drunkard," said the writing-master, "and when he comes back from 'The Pewter Pot' he makes a letter S as he walks. Moreover, it is the only letter he has ever made; because if it please your Grace, this drunkard is an ass."

The grammar-master added, "And the songs Francœur sings as he staggers about err against all rules and are constructed on no model at all. He ignores all the rules of rhetoric, please your Grace."

The Duchess had a natural distaste for pedants and tale-bearers. She did what we all would have done in her place; at first she did not listen to them but as they again began to repeat their tittle-tattle, she ended by believing them and decided to send Francœur away. However, to give him an honourable exile, she sent him to Rome to obtain the blessing of the Pope. This journey was all the longer for Francœur the squire because a great many taverns much frequented by musicians separated the Duchy of Clarides from the holy apostolic seat. In the course of this story we shall see how soon the Duchess regretted having deprived the two children of their most faithful guardian.

V

WHICH TELLS HOW THE DUCHESS TOOK HONEY-BEE AND GEORGE TO THE HERMITAGE, AND OF THEIR ENCOUNTER WITH A HIDEOUS OLD WOMAN

That morning, it was the first Sunday after Easter, the Duchess rode out of the castle on her great sorrel horse, while on her left George of Blanchelande was mounted on a dark horse with a white star on his

black forehead, and on her right Honey-Bee guided her milk-white steed with rose-coloured reins. They were on their way to the Hermitage to hear mass. Soldiers armed with lances formed their escort and, as they passed, the people crowded forward to admire them, and, indeed, all three were very fair to see. Under a veil of silver flowers and with flowing mantle the Duchess had an air of lovely majesty; while the pearls with which her coif was embroidered shone with a soft radiance that well-suited the face and soul of this beautiful lady. George by her side with flowing hair and sparkling eyes was very good to see. And on the other side rode Honey-Bee, the tender and pure colour of her face like a caress for the eyes; but most glorious of all her fair tresses, flowing over her shoulders, held by a circlet of gold surmounted by three gold flowers, seemed the shining mantle of her youth and beauty. The good people said, on seeing her:

"What a lovely young damsel."

The master tailor, old Jean, took his grandson Peter in his arms to point out Honey-Bee to him, and Peter asked was she alive or was she an image of wax, for he could not understand how any one could be so white and so lovely, and yet belong to the same race as himself, little Peter with his good big weatherbeaten cheeks, and his little home-spun shirt laced behind in country fashion.

While the Duchess accepted the people's homage with gracious kindness, the two children showed how it gratified their pride, George by his blushes, Honey-Bee by her smiles, and for this reason the Duchess said to them:

"How kindly these good people greet us. For what reason, George? And what is the reason, Honey-Bee?"

"So they should," said Honey-Bee.

"It's their duty," George added.

"But why should it be their duty?" asked the Duchess.

And as neither replied, she continued:

"I will tell you. For more than three hundred years the dukes of Clarides, from father to son, have lance in hand protected these poor people so that they could gather the harvests of the fields they had sown. For more than three hundred years all the duchesses of Clarides have spun the cloth for the poor, have visited the sick, and have held the new-born at the baptismal font. That is the reason they greet you, my children."

George was lost in deep thought: "We must protect those who toil on the land," and Honey-Bee said: "One should spin for the poor."

And thus chatting and meditating they went on their way through meadows starred with flowers. A fringe of blue mountains lay against the distant horizon. George pointed towards the east.

"Is that a great steel shield I see over there?"

"Oh no," said Honey-Bee, "it's a round silver clasp, as big as the moon."

"It is neither a steel shield nor a silver clasp, my children," replied the Duchess, "but a lake glittering in the sunshine. The surface of this lake, which seen from here is as smooth as a mirror, is stirred by innumerable ripples. Its borders, which appear as distinct as if cut in metal, are really covered by reeds with feathery plumes and irises whose flower is like a human glance between the blades of swords. Every morning a white mist rises over the lake which shines like armour under the midday sun. But none must approach it for in it dwell the nixies who lure passers-by into their crystal abodes."

At this moment the bell of the Hermitage was heard.

"Let us dismount," said the Duchess, "and walk to the chapel. It was neither on elephants nor camels that the wise men of the East approached the manger."

They heard the hermit's mass. A hideous old crone covered with rags knelt beside the Duchess, who on leaving the church offered her holy water.

"Accept it, good mother," she said.

George was amazed.

"Do you not know," said the Duchess, "that in the poor you honour the chosen of our Lord Jesus Christ? A beggar such as this as well as the good Duke of Rochesnoires held you at the font when you were baptized; and your little sister, Honey-Bee, also had one of these poor creatures as godmother."

The old crone who seemed to have guessed the boy's thoughts leaned towards him.

"Fair prince," she cried mockingly, "may you conquer as many kingdoms as I have lost. I was the queen of the Island of Pearls and the Mountains of Gold; each day my table was served with fourteen different kinds of fish, and a negro page bore my train."

"And by what misfortune have you lost your islands and your mountains, good woman?" asked the Duchess.

"I vexed the dwarfs, and they carried me far away from my dominions."

"Are the dwarfs so powerful?" George asked.

"As they live in the earth," the old woman answered, "they know the virtue of precious stones, they work in metals, and they unseal the hidden sources of the springs."

"And what did you do to vex them?" asked the Duchess.

"On a December night," said the old woman, "one of them came to ask permission to prepare a great

midnight banquet in the kitchen of the castle, which, vaster than a chapter-house, was furnished with casseroles, frying-pans, earthen saucepans, kettles, pans, portable-ovens, gridirons, boilers, dripping-pans, dutch-ovens, fish-kettles, copper-pans, pastry-moulds, copper-jugs, goblets of gold and silver, and mottled wood, not to mention iron roasting-jacks, artistically forged, and the huge black cauldron which hung from the pot-hook. He promised neither to disturb nor to damage anything. I refused his request, and he disappeared muttering vague threats. The third night, it being Christmas, this same dwarf returned to the chamber where I slept. He was accompanied by innumerable others, who pulled me out of bed and carried me to an unknown land in my nightgown. 'Such,' they said as they left me, 'such is the punishment of the rich who refuse even a part of their treasure to the industrious and kindly dwarf folk who work in gold and cause the springs to flow.' "

Thus said the toothless old woman, and the Duchess having comforted her with words and money, she and the two children retraced their way to the castle.

VI

WHICH TELLS OF WHAT CAN BE SEEN FROM THE KEEP OF CLARIDES

It was one day shortly after this that Honey-Bee and George, without being observed, climbed the steps of the watch-tower which stands in the middle of the Castle of Clarides. Having reached the platform they shouted at the top of their voices and clapped their hands.

Their view extended down the hillside divided into brown and green squares of cultivated fields. Woods

and mountains lay dimly blue against the distant horizon.

"Little sister," cried George, "little sister, look at the whole wide world!"

"The world is very big," said Honey-Bee.

"My teachers," said George, "have taught me that it is very big; but, as Gertrude our housekeeper says, one must see to believe."

They went the round of the platform.

"Here is something wonderful, little brother," cried Honey-Bee. "The castle stands in the middle of the earth and we are on the watch-tower in the middle of the castle, and so we are standing in the middle of the earth. Ha! ha! ha!"

And, indeed, the horizon formed a circle about the children of which the watch-tower was the centre.

"We are in the middle of the earth! Ha! ha! ha!" George repeated.

Whereupon they both started a-thinking.

"What a pity that the world is so big!" said Honey-Bee, "one might get lost and be separated from one's friends."

George shrugged his shoulders.

"How lucky that the world is so big! One can go in search of adventures. When I am grown up I mean to conquer the mountains that stand at the ends of the earth. That is where the moon rises; I shall seize her as she passes, and I will give her to you, Honey-Bee."

"Yes," said Honey-Bee, "give her to me and I will put her in my hair."

Then they busied themselves searching for the places they knew as on a map.

"I recognise everything," said Honey-Bee, who recognised nothing, "but what are those little square stones scattered over the hillside?"

"Houses," George replied. "Those are houses.

Don't you recognise the capital of the Duchy of Clarides, little sister? After all, it is a great city; it has three streets, and one can drive through one of them. Don't you remember that we passed through it last week when we went to the Hermitage?"

"And what is that winding brook?"

"That is the river. See the old stone bridge down there?"

"The bridge under which we fished for crayfish?"

"That's the one; and in one of the niches stands the statue of the 'Woman without a Head.' One cannot see her from here because she is too small."

"I remember. But why hasn't she got a head?"

"Probably because she has lost it."

Without saying if this explanation was satisfactory, Honey-Bee gazed at the horizon.

"Little brother, little brother, just see what sparkles by the side of the blue mountains? It is the lake."

"It is the lake."

They then remembered what the Duchess had told them of these beautiful and dangerous waters where the nixies dwell.

"We will go there," said Honey-Bee.

George was aghast. He stared at her with his mouth wide open.

"But the Duchess has forbidden us to go out alone, so how can we go to this lake which is at the end of the earth?"

"How can we go? I don't know. It's you who ought to know, for you are a man and you have a grammar-master."

This piqued George, who replied that one might be a man, and even a very brave man, and yet not know all the roads on earth. Whereupon Honey-Bee said drily with a little air of scorn which made him blush to his ears:

"*I* never said *I* would conquer the blue mountains

or take down the moon. I don't know the way to the lake, but I mean to find it!"

George pretended to laugh.

"You laugh like a cucumber."

"Cucumbers neither laugh nor cry."

"If they did laugh they would laugh like you. I shall go along to the lake. And while I search for the beautiful waters in which the nixies live you shall stay alone at home like a good girl. I will leave you my needle-work and my doll. Take care of them, George, take good care of them."

George was proud, and he was conscious of the humiliation with which Honey-Bee covered him.

Gloomily and with head bowed he cried in a hollow voice:

"Very well, then, we will go to the lake."

VII

IN WHICH IS DESCRIBED HOW GEORGE AND HONEY-BEE WENT TO THE LAKE

The next day after the midday meal, the Duchess having gone to her own room, George took Honey-Bee by the hand.

"Now come!" he said.

"Where?"

"Hush!"

They crept down stairs and crossed the courtyard. After they had passed the postern, Honey-Bee again asked where they were going.

"To the lake," George said resolutely.

Honey-Bee opened her mouth wide but remained speechless. To go so far without permission and in satin shoes! For her shoes were of satin. There was no sense in it.

"We must go and there is no need to be sensible."

Such was George's proud reply. She had once humiliated him and now she pretended to be astonished.

This time it was he who disdainfully sent her back to her dolls. Girls always tempt one on to adventures and then run away. So mean! She could remain. He'd go alone.

She clung to his arm; he pushed her away.

She hung about his neck.

"Little brother," she sobbed, "I will follow you."

He allowed himself to be moved by such touching repentance.

"Come then, but not through the town; we may be seen. We will follow the ramparts and then we can reach the highway by a cross road."

And so they went hand in hand while George explained his plans.

"We will follow the road we took to the Hermitage and then we shall be sure to see the lake, just as we did the other day, and then we can cross the fields in a bee line."

"A bee line" is the pretty rustic way of saying a straight line; and they both laughed because of the young girl's name which fitted in so oddly.

Honey-Bee picked flowers along the ditches; she made a posy of marshmallows, white mullein, asters and chrysanthemums; the flowers faded in her little hands and it was pitiful to see them when Honey-Bee crossed the old stone bridge. As she did not know what to do with them she decided to throw them into the water to refresh them, but finally she preferred to give them to the "Woman without a Head."

She begged George to lift her in his arms so as to make her tall enough, and she placed her armful of wild flowers between the foldeds hands of the old stone figure.

After she was far away she looked back and saw a pigeon resting on the shoulder of the statue.

When they had been walking some time, said Honey-Bee, "I am thirsty."

"So am I," George replied, "but the river is far behind us, and I see neither brook nor fountain."

"The sun is so hot that he has drunk them all up. What shall we do?"

So they talked and lamented when they saw a peasant woman approach who carried a basket of fruit.

"Cherries!" cried George. "How unlucky: I have no money to buy any."

"I have money," said Honey-Bee.

She pulled out of her pocket a little purse in which were five pieces of gold.

"Good woman," she said to the peasant, "will you give me as many cherries as my frock will hold?"

And she raised her little skirt with her two hands. The woman threw in two or three handfuls of cherries. With one hand Honey-Bee held the uplifted skirt and with the other she offered the woman a gold piece.

"Is that enough?"

The woman clutched the gold piece, which would amply have paid not only for the cherries in the basket but for the tree on which they grew and the plot of land on which the tree stood.

The artful one replied:

"I'm satisfied, if only to oblige you, little princess."

"Well then, put some more cherries in my brother's cap," said Honey-Bee, "and you shall have another gold piece."

This was done. The peasant woman went on her way meditating in what old stocking or under what mattress she should hide her two gold pieces.

And the two children followed the road eating the

cherries and throwing the stones to the right and the left. George chose the cherries that hung two by two on one stem and made earrings for his little sister, and he laughed to see the lovely twin fruit dangle its vermilion beauty against her cheeks.

A pebble stopped their joyous progress. It had got into Honey-Bee's little shoe and she began to limp. At every step she took, her golden curls bobbed against her cheek, and so limping she sat down on a bank by the roadside. Her brother knelt down and took off the satin shoe. He shook it and out dropped a little white pebble.

"Little brother," she said as she looked at her feet, "the next time we go to the lake we'll put on boots."

The sun was already sinking against the radiant sky; a soft breeze caressed their cheeks and necks, and so, cheered and refreshed, the two little travelers proceeded on their way. To make walking easier they went hand in hand, and they laughed to see their moving shadows melt together before them. They sang:

> Maid Marian, setting forth to find
> The mill, with sacks of corn to grind,
> Her donkey, Jan, bestrode.
> My dainty maiden, Marian,
> She mounted on her donkey, Jan,
> And took the mill-ward road.

But Honey-Bee stopped:

"I have lost my shoe, my satin shoe," she cried. And so it was. The little shoe, whose silken laces had become loose in walking, lay in the road covered with dust. Then as she looked back and saw the towers of the castle of Clarides fade into the distant twilight her heart sank and the tears came into her eyes.

"The wolves will eat us," she cried, "and our

mother will never see us again and she will die of grief."

But George comforted her as he put on her shoe.

"When the castle bell rings for supper we shall have returned to Clarides. Come!"

The miller saw her coming nigh
And could not well forbear to cry,
Your donkey you must tether.
My dainty maiden, Marian,
Tether you here your donkey, Jan,
Who brought us twain together.

"The lake, Honey-Bee! See the lake, the lake, the lake!"

"Yes, George, the lake!"

George shouted, "hurrah" and flung his hat in the air. Honey-Bee was too proper to fling hers up also, so taking off the shoe that wouldn't stay on she threw it joyfully over her head.

There lay the lake in the depths of the valley and its curved and sloping banks made a framework of foliage and flowers about its silver waves. It lay there clear and tranquil, and one could see the swaying of the indistinct green of its banks.

But the children could find no path through the underbrush that would lead to its beautiful waters.

While they were searching for one their legs were nipped by some geese driven by a little girl dressed in a sheepskin and carrying a switch. George asked her name.

"Gilberte."

"Well, then, Gilberte, how can one go to the lake?"

"Folks doesn't go."

"Why?"

"Because . . ."

"But supposing folks did?"

"If folks did there'd be a path, and one would take that path."

George could think of no adequate reply to this guardian of the geese.

"Let's go," he said, "farther on we shall be sure to find a way through the woods."

"And we will pick nuts and eat them," said Honey-Bee, "for I am hungry. The next time we go to the lake we must bring a satchel full of good things to eat."

"That we will, little sister," said George. "And I quite agree with Francœur, our squire, who when he went to Rome, took a ham with him, in case he should hunger, and a flask lest he should be thirsty. But hurry, for it is growing late, though I don't know the time."

"The shepherdesses know by looking at the sun," said Honey-Bee; "but I am not a shepherdess. Yet it seems to me that when we left the sun was over our head, and now it is down there, far behind the town and castle of Clarides. I wonder if this happens every day and what it means?"

While they looked at the sun a cloud of dust rose up from the high road, and they saw some cavaliers with glittering weapons ride past at full speed. The children hid in the underbrush in great terror. "They are thieves or probably ogres," they thought. They were really guards sent by the Duchess of Clarides in search of the little truants.

The two little adventurers found a footpath in the underbrush, not a lovers' lane, for it was impossible to walk side by side holding hands as is the fashion of lovers. Nor could the print of human footsteps be seen, but only indentations left by innumerable tiny cloven feet.

"Those are the feet of little devils," said Honey-Bee.

"Or deer," suggested George.

The matter was never explained. But what is certain is that the footpath descended in a gentle slope towards the edge of the lake which lay before the two children in all its languorous and silent beauty. The willows surrounded its banks with their tender foliage. The slender blades of the reeds with their delicate plumes swayed lightly over the water. They formed tremulous islands about which the water-lilies spread their great heart-shaped leaves and snow-white flowers. Over these blossoming islands dragon-flies, all emerald or azure, with wings of flame, sped their shrill flight in suddenly altered curves.

The children plunged their burning feet with joy in the damp sand overgrown with tufted horse-tails and the reed-mace with its slender lance. The sweet flag wafted towards them its humble fragrance and the water plantain unrolled about them its filaments of lace on the margin of the sleeping waters which the willow-herb starred with its purple flowers.

VIII

WHEREIN WE SHALL SEE WHAT HAPPENED TO GEORGE OF BLANCHELANDE BECAUSE HE APPROACHED THE LAKE IN WHICH THE NIXIES DWELL

Honey-Bee crossed the sand between two clumps of willows, and the little spirit of the place leaped into the water in front of her, leaving circles that grew greater and greater and finally vanished. This spirit was a little green frog with a white belly. All was silent; a fresh breeze swept over the clear lake whose every ripple had the gracious curve of a smile.

"This lake is pretty," said Honey-Bee, "but my

feet are bleeding in my little torn shoes, and I am very hungry. I wish I were back in the castle."

"Little sister," said George, "sit down on the grass. I will wrap your feet in leaves to cool them; then I will go in search of supper for you. High up along the road I saw some ripe blackberries. I will fetch you the sweetest and best in my hat. Give me your handkerchief; I will fill it with strawberries, for there are strawberries near here along the footpath under the shade of the trees. And I will fill my pockets with nuts."

He made a bed of moss for Honey-Bee under a willow on the edge of the lake, and then he left her.

Honey-Bee lay with folded hands on her little mossy bed and watched the light of the first stars tremble in the pale sky; then her eyes half closed, and yet it seemed to her as if overhead she saw a little dwarf mounted on a raven. It was not fancy. For having reined in the black bird who was gnawing at the bridle, the dwarf stopped just above the young girl and stared down at her with his round eyes. Whereupon he disappeared at full gallop. All this Honey-Bee saw vaguely and then she fell asleep.

She was still asleep when George returned with the fruit he had gathered, which he placed at her side. Then he climbed down to the lake while he waited for her to awaken. The lake slept under its delicate crown of verdure. A light mist swept softly over the waters. Suddenly the moon appeared between the branches, and then the waves were strewn as if with countless stars.

But George could see that the lights which irradiated the waters were not all the broken reflections of the moon, for blue flames advanced in circles, swaying and undulating as if in a dance. Soon he saw that the blue flames flickered over the white

faces of women, beautiful faces rising on the crests of the waves and crowned with sea-weeds and sea-shells, with sea-green tresses floating over their shoulders and veils flowing from under their breasts that shimmered with pearls. The child recognised the nixies and tried to flee. But already their cold white arms had seized him, and in spite of his struggles and cries he was borne across the waters along the galleries of porphyry and crystal.

IX

WHEREIN WE SHALL SEE HOW HONEY-BEE WAS TAKEN TO THE DWARFS

The moon had risen over the lake and the water now only showed broken reflections of its disc. Honey-Bee still slept. The dwarf who had watched her came back again on his raven followed this time by a crowd of little men. They were very little men. Their white beards hung down to their knees. They looked like old men with the figures of children. By their leathern aprons and the hammers which hung from their belts one could see that they were workers in metals. They had a curious gait, for they leaped to amazing heights and turned the most extraordinary somersaults, and showed the most inconceivable agility that made them seem more like spirits than human beings.

Yet while cutting their most foodhardy capers they preserved an unalterable gravity of demeanour, to such a degree that it was quite impossible to make out their real characters.

They placed themselves in a circle about the sleeping child.

"Now then," said the smallest of the dwarfs from

the heights of his plumed charger; "now then, did I deceive you when I said that the loveliest of princesses was lying asleep on the borders of the lake, and do you not thank me for bringing you here?"

"We thank you, Bob," replied one of the dwarfs who looked like an elderly poet, "indeed there is nothing lovelier in the world than this young damsel. She is more rosy than the dawn which rises on the mountains, and the gold we forge is not so bright as the gold of her tresses."

"Very good, Pic, nothing can be truer," cried the dwarfs, "but what shall we do with this lovely little lady?"

Pic, who looked like a very elderly poet, did not reply to this question, probably because he knew no better than they what to do with this pretty lady.

"Let us build a large cage and put her in," a dwarf by the name of Rug suggested.

Against this another dwarf called Dig vehemently protested. It was Dig's opinion that only wild beasts were ever put into cages, and there was nothing yet to prove that the pretty lady was one of these.

But Rug clung to his idea for the reason possibly that he had no other. He defended it with much subtlety. Said he:

"If this person is not savage she will certainly become so as a result of the cage, which will be therefore not only useful but indispensable."

This reasoning displeased the dwarfs, and one of them named Tad denounced it with much indignation. He was such a good dwarf. He proposed to take the beautiful child back to her kindred who must be great nobles.

But this advice was rejected as being contrary to the custom of the dwarfs.

"We ought to follow the ways of justice, not custom," said Tad.

But no one paid any further attention to him and the assembly broke into a tumult as a dwarf named Pau, a simple soul but just, gave his advice in these terms:

"We must begin by awakening this young lady, seeing she declines to awake of herself; if she spends the night here her eyelids will be swollen to-morrow and her beauty will be much impaired, for it is very unhealthy to sleep in a wood on the borders of a lake."

This opinion met with general approval as it did not clash with any other.

Pic, who looked like an elderly poet burdened with care, approached the young girl and looked at her very intently, under the impression that a single one of his glances would be quite sufficient to rouse the dreamer out of the deepest sleep. But Pic was quite mistaken as to the power of his glance, for Honey-Bee continued to sleep with folded hands.

Seeing this the good Tad pulled her gently by her sleeve. Thereupon she partly opened her eyes and raised herself on her elbow. When she found herself lying on a bed of moss surrounded by dwarfs she thought what she saw was nothing but a dream, and she rubbed her eyes to open them, so that instead of this fantastic vision she should see the pure light of morning as it entered her little blue room in which she thought she was. For her mind, heavy with sleep, did not recall to her the adventure of the lake. But indeed, it was useless to rub her eyes, the dwarfs did not vanish, and so she was obliged to believe that they were real. Then she looked about with frightened eyes and saw the forest and remembered.

"George! my brother George!" she cried in anguish. The dwarfs crowded about her, and for fear of seeing them she hid her face in her hands.

"George! George! Where is my brother George?" she sobbed.

The dwarfs could not tell her, for the good reason that they did not know. And she wept hot tears and cried aloud for her mother and brother.

Pau longed to weep with her, and in his efforts to console, he addressed her with rather vague remarks.

"Do not distress yourself so much," he urged, "it would be a pity for so lovely a young damsel to spoil her eyes with weeping. Rather tell us your story, which cannot fail to be very amusing. We should be so pleased."

She did not listen. She rose and tried to escape. But her bare and swollen feet caused her such pain that she fell on her knees, sobbing most pitifully. Tad held her in his arms, and Pau tenderly kissed her hand. It was this that gave her the courage to look at them, and she saw that they seemed full of compassion.

Pic looked to her like one inspired, and yet very innocent, and perceiving that all these little men were full of compassion for her, she said:

"Little men, it is a pity you are so ugly, but I will love you all the same if you will only give me something to eat, for I am so hungry."

"Bob," all the dwarfs cried at once, "go and fetch some supper."

And Bob flew off on his raven. All the same, the dwarfs resented this small girl's injustice in finding them ugly. Rug was very angry. Pic said to himself, "She is only a child, and she does not see the light of genius which shines in my eyes, and which gives them the power which crushes as well as the grace which charms."

As for Pau, he thought to himself: "Perhaps it would have been better if I had not awakened this

young lady who finds us ugly." But Tad said smiling:

"You will find us less ugly, dear young lady, when you love us more."

As he spoke Bob re-appeared on his raven. He held a dish of gold on which were a roast pheasant, an oatmeal cake, and a bottle of claret. He cut innumerable capers as he laid this supper at the feet of Honey-Bee.

"Little men," Honey-Bee said as she ate, "your supper is very good. My name is Honey-Bee; let us go in search of my brother, and then we will all go together to Clarides where mama is waiting for us in great anxiety."

But Dig, who was a kind dwarf, represented to Honey-Bee that she was not able to walk; that her brother was big enough to find his own way; that no misfortune could come to him in a country in which all the wild beasts had been destroyed.

"We will make a litter," he added, "and cover it with leaves and moss, and we will put you on it, and in this way we will carry you to the mountain and present you to the King of the Dwarfs, according to the custom of our people."

All the dwarfs applauded. Honey-Bee looked at her aching feet and remained silent. She was glad to learn that there were no wild beasts in the country. And on the whole she was willing to trust herself to the kindness of the dwarfs.

They were already busy constructing the litter. Those with hatchets were felling two young fir trees with resounding blows. This brought back to Rug his original suggestion.

"If instead of a litter we made a cage," he urged.

But he aroused a unanimous protest. Tad looked at him scornfully.

"You are more like a human being than a dwarf,

Rug," he said. "But at least it is to the honour of our race that the most wicked dwarf is also the most stupid."

In the meantime the task had been accomplished. The dwarfs leaped into the air and in a bound seized and cut the branches, out of which they deftly wove a basket chair. Having covered it with moss and leaves, they placed Honey-Bee upon it; then they seized the two poles, placed them on their shoulders and, then off they went to the mountain.

X

IN WHICH WE ARE FAITHFULLY TOLD HOW KING LOC RECEIVED HONEY-BEE OF CLARIDES

They climbed a winding path along the wooded slope of the hill. Here and there granite boulders, bare and blasted, broke through the grey verdure of the dwarf oaks, and the sombre purple mountain with its bluish ravines formed an impassable barrier about the desolate landscape.

The procession, preceded by Bob on his feathered steed, passed through a chasm overgrown with brambles. Honey-Bee, with her golden hair flowing over her shoulders, looked like the dawn breaking on the mountains, supposing, of course, that the dawn was ever frightened and called her mother and tried to escape, for all these things she did as she caught a confused glimpse of dwarfs, armed to the teeth, lying in ambush along the windings of the rocks.

With bows bent or lance at rest they stood immovable. Their tunics of wild beast skins and their long knives that hung from their belts gave them a most terrible appearance. Game, furred and feathered, lay

beside them. And yet these huntsmen, to judge only by their faces, did not seem very grim; on the contrary, they appeared gentle and grave like the dwarfs of the forest, whom they greatly resembled.

In their midst stood a dwarf full of majesty. He wore a cock feather over his ear, and on his head a diadem set with enormous gems. His mantle raised at the shoulder disclosed a muscular arm covered with circlets of gold. A horn of ivory and chased silver hung from his belt. His left hand rested on his lance in an attitude of quiet strength, and his right he held over his eyes so as to look towards Honey-Bee and the light.

"King Loc," said the forest dwarfs, "we have brought you the beautiful child we have found; her name is Honey-Bee."

"You have done well," said King Loc. "She shall live amongst us according to the custom of the dwarfs."

"Honey-Bee," he said, approaching her, "you are welcome." He spoke very gently, for he already felt very kindly towards her. He lifted himself on the tips of his toes to kiss her hand that hung at her side, and he assured her not only that he would do her no harm, but that he would try to gratify all her wishes, even should she long for necklaces, mirrors, stuffs from Cashmere and silks from China.

"I wish I had some shoes," replied Honey-Bee. Upon which King Loc struck his lance against a bronze disc that hung on the surface of the rock, and instantly something bounded like a ball out of the depths of the cavern. Increasing in size it disclosed the face of a dwarf with features such as painters give to the illustrious Belisarius, but his leather apron proclaimed that he was a shoemaker. He was indeed the chief of the shoemakers.

"Truc," said the king, "choose the softest leather

out of our store-houses, take cloth-of-gold and silver, ask the guardian of my treasures for a thousand pearls of the finest water, and with this leather, these fabrics, and these pearls create a pair of shoes for the lady Honey-Bee."

At these words Truc threw himself at the feet of Honey-Bee and measured them with great care.

"Little King Loc," said Honey-Bee, "I want the pretty shoes you promised at once, because as soon as I have them I must return to Clarides to my mother."

"You shall have the shoes," King Loc replied; "you shall have them to walk about the mountain, but not to return to Clarides, for never again shall you leave this kingdom, where we will teach you wonderful secrets still unknown on earth. The dwarfs are superior to men, and it is your good fortune that you are made welcome amongst them."

"It is my misfortune," replied Honey-Bee. "Little King Loc, give me a pair of wooden shoes, such as the peasants wear, and let me return to Clarides."

But King Loc made a sign with his head to signify that this was impossible. Then Honey-Bee clasped her hands and said, coaxingly:

"Little King Loc, let me go and I will love you very much."

"You will forget me in your shining world."

"Little King Loc, I will never forget you, and I will love you as much as I love Flying Wind."

"And who is Flying Wind?"

"It is my milk-white steed, and he has rose-coloured reins and he eats out of my hand. When he was very little Francœur the squire used to bring him to my room every morning and I kissed him. But now Francœur is in Rome, and Flying Wind is too big to mount the stairs."

King Loc smiled.

"Will you love me more than Flying Wind?"

"Indeed I would," said Honey-Bee.

"Well said," cried the King.

"Indeed I would, but I cannot, I hate you, little King Loc, because you will not let me see my mother and George again."

"Who is George?"

"George is George and I love him."

The friendship of King Loc for Honey-Bee had increased prodigiously in a few minutes, and as he had already made up his mind to marry her as soon as she was of age, and hoped through her to reconcile men and dwarfs, he feared that later on George might become his rival and wreck his plans. It was because of this that he turned away frowning, his head bowed as if with care.

Honey-Bee, seeing that she had offended him, pulled him gently by his mantle.

"Little King Loc," she said, in a voice both tender and sad, "why should we make each other unhappy, you and I?"

"It is in the nature of things," replied King Loc. "I cannot take you back to your mother, but I will send her a dream which will tell her your fate, dear Honey-Bee, and that will comfort her."

"Little King Loc," and Honey-Bee smiled through her tears, "what a good idea, but I will tell you just what you ought to do. You must send my mother a dream every night in which she will see me, and every night you must send me a dream in which I shall see her."

And King Loc promised, and so said, so done. Every night Honey-Bee saw her mother, and every night the Duchess saw her daughter, and that satisfied their love just a little.

XI

IN WHICH THE MARVELS OF THE KINGDOM OF THE DWARFS ARE ACCURATELY DESCRIBED, AS WELL AS THE DOLLS THAT WERE GIVEN TO HONEY-BEE

The kingdom of the dwarfs was very deep and extended under the greater part of the earth. Though one only caught a glimpse of the sky here and there through the clefts in the rocks, the roads, the avenues, the palaces and the galleries of this subterraneous region were not plunged in absolute darkness. Only a few spaces and caverns were lost in obscurity. The rest was illumined not by lamps or torches but by stars or meteors which diffused a strange and fantastic light, and this light revealed the most astonishing marvels. One saw stupendous edifices hewn out of the solid rocks, and in some places, palaces cut out of granite, of such height that their tracery of stone was lost under the arches of this gigantic cavern in a haze across which fell the orange glimmer of little stars less lustrous than the moon.

There were fortresses in this kingdom, of the most crushing and formidable dimensions; an amphitheatre in which the stone seats formed a half-circle whose extent it was impossible to measure at a single glance, and vast wells with sculptured sides, in which one could descend forever and yet never reach the bottom. All these structures, so out of proportion it would seem to the size of the inhabitants, were quite in keeping with their curious and fantastic genius.

Dwarfs in pointed hoods pricked with fern leaves whirled about these edifices in the airiest fashion. It

was common to see them leap up to the height of two or three storeys from the lava pavement and rebound like balls, their faces meanwhile preserving that impressive dignity with which sculptors endow the great men of antiquity.

No one was idle and all worked zealously. Entire districts echoed to the sound of hammers. The shrill discord of machinery broke against the arches of the cavern, and it was a curious sight to see the crowds of miners, blacksmiths, gold-beaters, jewellers, diamond polishers handle pickaxes, hammers, pincers and files with the dexterity of monkeys. However there was a more peaceful region.

Here coarse and powerful figures and shapeless columns loomed in chaotic confusion, hewn out of the virgin rock, and seemed to date back to an immemorial antiquity. Here a palace with low portals extended its ponderous expanse; it was the palace of King Loc.

Directly opposite was the house of Honey-Bee, a house or rather a cottage of one room all hung with white muslin. The furniture of pine-wood perfumed the room. A glimpse of daylight penetrated through a crevice in the rock, and on fine nights one could see the stars.

Honey-Bee had no special attendants, for all the dwarf people were eager to serve her and to anticipate all her wishes except the single one to return to earth.

The most erudite dwarfs, familiar with the profoundest secrets, were glad to teach her, not from books, for dwarfs do not write, but by showing her all the plants of mountains and plains, all the diverse species of animals, and all the varied gems that are extracted from the bosom of the earth. And it was by means of such sights and marvels that they taught

her, with an innocent gaiety, the wonders of nature and the processes of the arts.

They made her playthings such as the richest children on earth never have; for these dwarfs were always industrious and invented wonderful machinery. In this way they produced for her dolls that could move with exquisite grace, and express themselves according to the strictest rules of poetry. Placed on the stage of a little theatre, the scenery of which represented the shores of the sea, the blue sky, palaces and temples, they would portray the most interesting events. Though no taller than a man's arm, some of them represented respectable old men, others men in the prime of life, and others still, beautiful young girls dressed in white.

Among them also were mothers pressing their innocent children to their hearts. And these eloquent dolls acted as if they were really moved by hate, love and ambition. They passed with the greatest skill from joy to sorrow and they imitated nature so well that they could move one to laughter or to tears. Honey-Bee clapped her hands at the sight. She had a horror of the dolls who tried to be tyrants. On the other hand she felt a boundless compassion for a doll who had once been a princess, and who, now a captive widow, had no other resource, alas, by which to save her child, than to marry the barbarian who had made her a widow.

Honey-Bee never tired of this game which the dolls could vary indefinitely. The dwarfs also gave concerts and taught her to play the lute, the viola, the theorbo, the lyre, and various other instruments.

In short she became an excellent musician, and the dramas acted in the theatre by the dolls taught her a knowledge of men and life. King Loc was always present at the plays and the concerts, but he neither saw nor heard anything but Honey-Bee; little by little

he had set his whole heart upon her. In the meantime months passed and even years sped by and Honey-Bee was still among the dwarfs, always amused and yet always longing for earth. She grew to be a beautiful girl. Her singular destiny had imparted something strange to her appearance, which gave her, however, only an added charm.

XII

IN WHICH THE TREASURES OF KING LOC ARE DESCRIBED AS WELL AS THE WRITER IS ABLE

Six years to a day had passed since Honey-Bee had come to live with the dwarfs. King Loc called her into his palace and commanded his treasurer to displace a huge stone which seemed cemented into the wall, but which in reality was only lightly placed there. All three passed through the opening left by the great stone and found themselves in a fissure of rock too narrow for two persons to stand abreast. King Loc preceded the others along the dim path and Honey-Bee followed him holding to a tip of the royal mantle. They walked on for a long time, and at intervals the sides of the rocks came so close together that the young girl was seized with terror lest she should be unable to advance or recede, and so would die there. Before her, along the dark and narrow road floated the mantle of King Loc. At last King Loc came to a bronze door which he opened and out of which poured a blaze of light.

"Little King Loc," said Honey-Bee, "I had no idea that light could be so beautiful!"

And King Loc taking her by the hand led her into the hall out of which the light shone.

"See!" he cried.

Honey-Bee, dazzled, could see nothing, for this immense hall, supported by high marble columns, was a glitter of gold from floor to roof.

At the end on a dais made of glittering gems set in gold and silver, the steps of which were covered by a carpet of marvellous embroidery, stood a throne of ivory and gold under a canopy of translucent enamel, and on each side two palm-trees three thousand years old, in gigantic vases carved in some bygone time by the greatest artists among the dwarfs. King Loc mounted his throne and commanded the young girl to stand at his right hand.

"Honey-Bee," said King Loc, "these are my treasures. Choose all that will give you pleasure."

Immense gold shields hung from the columns and reflected the sunlight, and sent it back in glittering rays; swords and lances crossed had each a flame at their point.

Tables along the walls were laden with tankards, flagons, ewers, chalices, pyxes, patens, goblets, gold cups, drinking-horns of ivory with silver rings, enormous bottles of rock crystal, chased gold and silver dishes, coffers, reliquaries in the form of churches, scent-boxes, mirrors, candelabra and torch-holders, equally beautiful in material and workmanship, and incense-burners in the shape of monsters. And on one table stood a chessboard with chessmen carved out of moonstones.

"Choose," King Loc repeated.

But lifting her eyes above these treasures, Honey-Bee saw the blue sky through an opening in the roof, and as if she had comprehended that the light of day could alone give all these things their splendour, she said simply:

"Little King Loc, I want to return to earth."

Whereupon King Loc made a sign to his treasurer who, raising heavy tapestries, disclosed an enormous

iron-bound coffer covered with plates of open iron-work. This coffer being opened out poured thousands of rays of different and lovely tints, and each ray seemed to leap out of a precious stone most artistically cut. King Loc dipped in his hands and there flowed in glittering confusion violet amethysts and virgins' stones, emeralds of three kinds, one dark green, another called the honey emerald because of its colour, and the third a bluish-green, also called beryl, which gives happy dreams; oriental topazes, rubies beautiful as the blood of heroes, dark blue sapphires, called the male sapphire, and the pale blue ones, called the female sapphire, the cymophanes, hyacinths, euclases, turquoises, opals whose light is softer than the dawn, the aquamarine and the Syrian garnet. All these gems were of the purest and most luminous water. And in the midst of these coloured fires great diamonds flashed their rays of dazzling white.

"Choose, Honey-Bee," said King Loc. But Honey-Bee shook her head.

"Little King Loc," she said, "I would rather have a single beam of sunlight that falls on the roof of Clarides than all these gems."

Then King Loc ordered another coffer to be opened, in which were only pearls. But these pearls were round and pure; their changing light reflected all the colours of sea and sky, and their radiance was so tender that they seemed to express a thought of love.

"Accept these," said King Loc.

"Little King Loc," Honey-Bee replied, "these pearls are like the glance of George of Blanchelande; I love these pearls, but I love his eyes even more."

Hearing these words King Loc turned his head away. However he opened a third coffer and showed the young girl a crystal in which a drop of water had

been imprisoned since the beginning of time; and when the crystal was moved the drop of water could be seen to stir. He also showed her pieces of yellow amber in which insects more brilliant than jewels had been imprisoned for thousands of years. One could distinguish their delicate feet and their fine antennæ, and they would have resumed their flight had some power but shattered like glass their perfumed prison.

"These are the great marvels of nature; I give them to you, Honey-Bee."

"Little King Loc," Honey-Bee replied, "keep your amber and your crystal, for I should not know how to give their freedom either to the fly or the drop of water."

King Loc watched her in silence for some time. Then he said, "Honey-Bee, the most beautiful treasures will be safe in your keeping. You will possess them and they will not possess you. The miser is the prey of his gold; only those who despise wealth can be rich without danger; their souls will always be greater than their riches."

Having uttered these words he made a sign to his treasurer, who presented on a cushion a crown of gold to the young girl.

"Accept this jewel as a sign of our regard for you," said King Loc. "Henceforth you shall be called the Princess of the Dwarfs."

And he himself placed the crown on the head of Honey-Bee.

XIII

IN WHICH KING LOC DECLARES HIMSELF

The dwarfs celebrated the crowning of their first princess by joyous revels. Harmless and innocent games succeeded each other in the huge amphi-

theatre; and the little men, with cockades of fern or two oak leaves fastened coquettishly to their hoods, bounded gaily across the subterranean streets. The rejoicings lasted thirty days. During the universal excitement Pic looked like a mortal inspired; Tad the kind-hearted was intoxicated by the universal joy; Dig the tender gave expression to his delight in tears; Rug, in his ecstasy, again demanded that Honey-Bee should be put in a cage, but this time so that the dwarfs need not be afraid to lose so charming a princess; Bob, mounted on his raven, filled the air with such cries of rapture that the sable bird, infected by the gaiety, gave vent to innumerable playful little croaks.

Only King Loc was sad.

On the thirtieth day, having given the princess and the dwarf people a festival of unparalleled magnificence, he mounted his throne, and so stood that his kind face just reached her ear.

"My Princess Honey-Bee," he said, "I am about to make a request which you are at liberty either to accept or to refuse. Honey-Bee of Clarides, Princess of the Dwarfs, will you be my wife?"

As he spoke, King Loc, grave and tender, had something of the gentle beauty of a majestic poodle.

"Little King Loc," Honey-Bee replied, as she pulled his beard, "I am willing to become your wife for fun, but never your wife for good. The moment you asked me to marry you I was reminded of Francœur, who when I was on earth used to amuse me by telling me the most ridiculous stories."

At these words King Loc turned his head away, but not so soon but that Honey-Bee saw the tears in his eyes. Then Honey-Bee was grieved because she had pained him.

"Little King Loc," she said to him, "I love you for the little King Loc you are; and if you make

me laugh as Francœur did, there is nothing in that to vex you, for Francœur sang well and he would have been very handsome if it had not been for his grey hair and his red nose."

"Honey-Bee of Clarides, Princess of the Dwarfs," the king replied, "I love you in the hope that some day you will love me. And yet without that hope I should love you just the same. The only return I ask for my friendship is that you will always be honest with me."

"Little King Loc, I promise."

"Well then, tell me truly, Honey-Bee, do you love someone else enough to marry him?"

"Little King Loc, I love no one enough for that."

Whereupon King Loc smiled, and seizing his golden cup he proposed, with a resounding voice, the health of the Princess of the Dwarfs. An immense uproar rose from the depths of the earth, for the banquet table reached from one end to the other of the Empire of the Dwarfs.

XIV

IN WHICH WE ARE TOLD HOW HONEY-BEE SAW HER MOTHER AGAIN, BUT COULD NOT EMBRACE HER

Honey-Bee, a crown on her head, was now more often sad and lost in thought than when her hair flowed loose over her shoulders, and when she went laughing to the forge and pulled the beards of her good friends Pic, Tad and Dig, whose faces, red from the reflected flames, gave her a gay welcome. But now these good dwarfs, who had once danced her on their knees and called her Honey-Bee, bowed as she passed and maintained a respectful silence. She grieved

because she was no longer a child, and she suffered because she was the Princess of the Dwarfs.

It was no longer a pleasure for her to see King Loc, since she had seen him weep because of her. But she loved him, for he was good and unhappy. One day, if one may say that there are days in the empire of the dwarfs, she took King Loc by the hand and drew him under the cleft in the rock, through which a sunbeam shone, along whose rays there danced a haze of golden dust.

"Little King Loc," she said, "I suffer. You are a king and you love me and I suffer."

Hearing these words from the pretty damsel, King Loc replied:

"I love you, Honey-Bee of Clarides, Princess of the Dwarfs; and that is why I have held you captive in our world, in order to teach you our secrets, which are greater and more wonderful than all those you could learn on earth amongst men, for men are less skilful and less learned than the dwarfs."

"Yes," said Honey-Bee, "but they are more like me than the dwarfs, and for that reason I love them better. Little King Loc, let me see my mother again if you do not wish me to die."

Without replying King Loc went away. Honey-Bee, desolate and alone, watched the ray of light which bathes the whole face of nature and which enfolds all the living, even to the beggars by the wayside, in its resplendent waves. Slowly this ray paled, and its golden radiance faded to a pale blue light. Night had come upon earth. A star twinkled over the cleft in the rock.

Then some one gently touched her on the shoulder, and she saw King Loc wrapped in a black cloak. He had another cloak on his arm with which he covered the young girl.

"Come," said he.

And he led her out of the under-world. When she saw again the trees stirred by the wind, the clouds that floated across the moon, the splendour of the night so fresh and blue, when she breathed again the fragrance of the herbage, and when the air she had breathed in childhood again entered her breast in floods, she gave a great sigh and thought to die of joy.

King Loc had taken her in his arms; small though he was, he carried her as lightly as a feather, and they glided over the ground like the shadows of two birds.

"You shall see your mother again, Honey-Bee. But listen! You know that every night I send her your image. Every night she sees your dear phantom; she smiles upon it, she talks to it and she caresses it. To-night she shall, instead, see you yourself. You will see her, but you must not touch her, you must not speak to her, or the charm will be broken and she will never again see you nor your image, which she does not distinguish from you."

"Then I will be prudent, alas! little King Loc! . . . See! See! . . ."

Sure enough the watch-tower of Clarides rose black on the hill. Honey-Bee had hardly time to throw a kiss to the beloved old stone walls when the ramparts of the town of Clarides, overgrown with gillyflowers, already flew past; already she was ascending the terrace, where the glow-worms glimmer in the grass, to the postern, which King Loc easily opened, for the dwarfs are masters of metals, nor can locks, padlocks, bolts, chains or bars ever stop them.

She climbed the winding stairs that led to her mother's room, and she paused to clasp her beating heart with both her hands. Softly the door opened, and by the light of a night lamp that hung from the

ceiling she saw her mother in the holy silence that reigned, her mother frailer and paler, with hair grey at the temples, but in the eyes of her daughter more beautiful even than in past days as she remembered her riding fearlessly in magnificent attire. As usual the mother beheld her daughter as in a dream, and she opened her arms as if to caress her. And the child, laughing and sobbing, was about to throw herself into those open arms; but King Loc tore her away, and like a wisp of straw he bore her through the blue landscape to the Kingdom of the Dwarfs.

XV

IN WHICH WE SHALL SEE HOW KING LOC SUFFERED

Seated on the granite step of the underground palace, Honey-Bee watched the blue sky through the cleft in the rock, and saw the elder-trees turn their spreading white parasols to the light. She began to weep.

"Honey-Bee," said King Loc as he took her hand in his, "why do you weep, and what is it you desire?"

And as she had been grieving these many days, the dwarfs at her feet tried to cheer her with simple airs on the flute, the flageolet, the rebeck, and the cymbals. And other dwarfs, to amuse her, turned such somersaults one after the other that they pricked the grass with the points of their hoods with their cockades of leaves, and nothing could be more charming than to watch the capers of these tiny men with their venerable beards. Tad so kind and Dig so wise, who had loved her since the day they had found her asleep on the shore of the lake, and Pic, the elderly poet, gently took her arm and implored her to tell them

the cause of her grief. Pau, a simple just soul, offered her a basket of grapes, and all of them gently pulled the edge of her skirt and said with King Loc:

"Honey-Bee, Princess of the Dwarfs, why do you weep?"

"Little King Loc," Honey-Bee replied, "and you, little men, my grief only increases your love, because you are good; you weep with me. Know that I weep when I think of George of Blanchelande, who should now be a cavalier, but whom I shall never see again. I love him and I wish to be his wife."

King Loc took his hand away from the hand he had pressed.

"Honey-Bee," he said, "why did you deceive me when you told me at the banquet that you loved no one else?"

"Little King Loc," Honey-Bee replied, "I did not deceive you at the banquet. At that time I had no desire to marry George of Blanchelande, but to-day it is my dearest wish that he should ask to marry me. But he will never ask me, as I do not know where he is, nor does he know where I am. And this is the reason I weep."

At these words the musicians ceased playing; the acrobats interrupted their tumbling and stood immovable, some on their heads and some on their haunches; Tad and Dig shed silent tears on the sleeve of Honey-Bee; Pau, simple soul, dropped his basket of grapes, and all the little men gave vent to the most fearful groans.

But King Loc, more unhappy than all under his splendid jewelled crown, silently withdrew, his mantle trailing behind him like a purple torrent.

XVI

IN WHICH AN ACCOUNT IS GIVEN OF THE LEARNED NUR WHO WAS THE CAUSE OF SUCH EXTRAORDINARY JOY TO KING LOC

King Loc did not permit the young girl to observe his weakness; but when he was alone he sat on the ground and with his feet in his hands gave way to grief. He was jealous.

"She loves him," he said to himself, "and she does not love me! And yet I am a king and very wise; great treasures are mine and I know the most marvellous secrets. I am superior to all other dwarfs, who are in turn superior to all men. She does not love me but she loves a young man who not only has not the learning of the dwarfs, but no other learning either.

"It must be acknowledged that she does not appreciate merit—nor has she much sense. I ought to laugh at her want of judgment; but I love her and I care for nothing in the world because she does not love me."

For many long days King Loc roamed alone through the most desolate mountain passes, turning over in his mind thoughts both sad and, sometimes, wicked. He even thought of trying by imprisonment and starvation to force Honey-Bee to become his wife. But rejecting this plan as soon as formed he decided to go in search of her and throw himself at her feet. But he could come to no decision, and at last he was quite at a loss what to do. The truth being that whether Honey-Bee would love him did not depend on him.

Suddenly his anger turned against George of Blanchelande; and he hoped that the young man had been carried far away by some enchanter, and that at

any rate, should he ever hear of Honey-Bee's love, he would disdain it.

"Without being old," the king meditated, "I have already lived too long not to have suffered sometimes. And yet my sufferings, intense though they were, were less painful than those of which I am conscious to-day. With the tenderness and pity which caused them was mingled something of their own divine sweetness. Now, on the contrary, my grief has the baseness and bitterness of an evil desire. My soul is desolate and the tears in my eyes are like an acid that burns them."

So thought King Loc. And fearing that jealousy might make him unjust and wicked he avoided meeting the young girl, for fear that in spite of himself, he might use towards her the language of a man either weak or brutal.

One day when he was more than ever tormented by the thought that Honey-Bee loved George, he decided to consult Nur, the most learned of all the dwarfs, who lived at the bottom of a well deep down in the bowels of the earth.

This well had the advantage of an even and soft temperature. It was not dark, for two little stars, a pale sun and a red moon, alternately illumined all parts. King Loc descended into the well and found Nur in his laboratory. Nur looked like a kind little old man, and he wore a sprig of wild thyme in his hood. In spite of his learning he had the innocence and candour characteristic of his race.

"Nur," said the king as he embraced him, "I have come to consult you because you know many things."

"King Loc," replied Nur, "I might know a good deal and yet be an idiot. But I possess the knowledge of how to learn some of the innumerable things I do not know, and that is the reason I am so justly famous for my learning."

"Well, then," said King Loc, "can you tell me the whereabouts at present of a young man by the name of George of Blanchelande?"

"I do not know and I never cared to know," replied Nur. "Knowing as I do the ignorance, stupidity and wickedness of mankind, I don't trouble myself as to what they say or do. Humanity, King Loc, would be entirely deplorable and ridiculous if it were not that something of value is given to this proud and miserable race, inasmuch as the men are endowed with courage, the women with beauty, and the little children with innocence. Obliged by necessity, as are also the dwarfs, to toil, mankind has rebelled against this divine law, and instead of being, like ourselves, willing and cheerful toilers, they prefer war to work, and they would rather kill each other than help each other. But to be just one must admit that their shortness of life is the principal cause of their ignorance and cruelty. Their life is too short for them to learn how to live. The race of the dwarfs who dwell under the earth is happier and better. If we are not immortal, we shall at least last as long as the earth which bears us in her bosom, and which permeates us with her intimate and fruitful warmth, while for the races born on her rugged surface she has only the turbulent winds which sometimes scorch and sometimes freeze, and whose breath is at once the bearer of death and of life. And yet men owe to their overwhelming miseries and wickedness a virtue which makes the souls of some amongst them more beautiful than the souls of dwarfs. And this virtue, O King Loc, which for the mind is what the soft radiance of pearls is for the eyes, is pity. It is taught by suffering, and the dwarfs know it but little, because being wiser than men they escape much anguish. Yet sometimes the dwarfs leave their deep grottoes and seek the pitiless surface of the earth to mingle with

men so as to love them, to suffer with them and through them, and thus to feel this pity which refreshes the soul like a heavenly dew. This is the truth concerning men, King Loc. But did you not ask me as to the exact fate of some one amongst them?"

King Loc having repeated his question, Nur looked into one of the many telescopes which filled the room. For the dwarfs have no books; those which are found amongst them have come from men, and are only used as playthings. They do not learn as we do by consulting marks on paper, but they look through telescopes and see the subject itself of their inquiry. The only difficulty is to choose the right telescope and get the right focus.

There are telescopes of crystal, of topaz and of opal; but those whose lens is a great polished diamond are more powerful, and permit them to see the most distant objects.

The dwarfs also have lenses of a translucent substance unknown to men. These enable the sight to pass through rocks and walls as if they were glass. Others, more remarkable still, reconstruct as accurately as a mirror all that has vanished with the flight of time. For the dwarfs, in the depths of their caverns, have the power to recall from the infinite surface of the ether the light of immemorial days and the forms and colours of vanished times. They can create for themselves a phantasm of the past by rearranging the splinters of light which were once shattered against the forms of men, animals, plants and rocks, so that they again flash across the centuries through the unfathomable ether.

The venerable Nur excelled in discovering figures of antiquity and even such, inconceivable though it may seem, as lived before the earth had assumed the shape with which we are familiar. So it was really no trouble at all for him to find George of Blanchelande.

Having looked for a moment through a very ordinary telescope indeed, he said to King Loc:

"King Loc, he for whom you search is with the nixies in their palace of crystal, from which none ever return, and whose iridescent walls adjoin your kingdom."

"Is he there?" cried the king. "Let him stay!" and he rubbed his hands. "I wish him joy."

And having embraced the venerable dwarf, he emerged out of the well roaring with laughter.

The whole length of the road he held his sides so as to laugh at his ease; his head shook, and his beard swung backwards and forwards on his stomach. How he laughed! The little men who met him laughed out of sheer sympathy. Seeing them laugh made others laugh. A contagion of laughter spread from place to place until the whole interior of the earth was shaken as if with a mighty and jovial hiccough. Ha! ha! ha!

XVII

WHICH TELLS OF THE WONDERFUL ADVENTURE OF GEORGE OF BLANCHELANDE

King Loc did not laugh long; indeed he hid the face of a very unhappy little man under the bedclothes.

He lay awake all night long thinking of George of Blanchelande, the prisoner of the nixies.

So about the hour when such of the dwarfs as have a dairymaid for sweetheart go in her stead to milk the cows while she sleeps in her white bed with folded hands, little King Loc again sought the astute Nur in the depths of his well.

"You did not tell me, Nur, what he is doing down there with the nixies?"

The venerable Nur was quite convinced that the king was mad, though that did not alarm him because he knew if King Loc should lose his reason he would be a most gracious, charming, amiable and kindly lunatic. The madness of the dwarfs is gentle like their reason, and full of the most delicious fancies. But King Loc was not mad; at least not more so than lovers usually are.

"I wish to speak of George of Blanchelande," he said to the venerable Nur, who had forgotten all about this young man as soon as possible.

Thereupon Nur the wise placed a series of lenses and mirrors before the king in an order so exact that it looked like disorder, but which enabled him to show the king in a mirror the form of George of Blanchelande as he was when the nixies carried him away. By a lucky choice and a skilful adjustment of instruments the dwarf was able to reproduce for the love-sick king all the adventures of the son of that Countess to whom a white rose announced her end. And the following, expressed in words, is what the little man saw in all the reality of form and colour.

When George was borne away in the icy arms of the daughters of the lake the water pressed upon his eyes and his breast and he felt that he was about to die. And yet he heard songs that sounded like a caress and his whole being was permeated by a sense of delicious freshness. When he opened his eyes he found himself in a grotto whose crystal columns reflected the delicate tints of the rainbow. At the end of the grotto was a great sea shell of mother-of-pearl iridescent with the tenderest colours, and this served as a dais to the throne of coral and seaweed of the Queen of the Nixies. But the face of the Sovereign of the waters shone with a light more tender than either the mother-of-pearl or the crystal. She smiled

at the child which her women brought her, and her green eyes lingered long upon him.

"Friend," she said at last, "be welcome into our world, in which you shall be spared all sorrow. For you neither dry lessons nor rough sports; nothing coarse shall remind you of earth and its toil, for you only the songs and the dances and the love of the nixies."

And indeed the women of the green hair taught the child music and dancing and a thousand graces. They loved to bind his forehead with the cockle shells that decked their own tresses. But he, remembering his country, gnawed his clenched hands with impatience.

Years passed and George longed with a passion unceasing to see the earth again, the rude earth where the sun burns and where the snow hardens, the mother earth where one suffers, where one loves, the earth where he had seen Honey-Bee, and where he longed to see her again. He had in the meantime grown to be a tall lad with a fine golden down on his upper lip. Courage came with the beard, and so one day he presented himself before the Queen of the Nixies and bowing low, said:

"Madam, I have come, with your gracious permission, to take leave of you; I am about to return to Clarides."

"Fair youth," the queen replied smiling, "I cannot grant you the leave you ask, for I guard you in my crystal palace, to make of you my lover."

"Madam," he replied, "I am not worthy of so great an honour."

"That is but your courtesy. What gallant cavalier ever believes that he has sufficiently deserved his lady's favour. Besides you are still too young to know your own worth. Let me tell you, fair youth, that we

do but desire your welfare; obey your lady and her alone."

"Madam, I love Honey-Bee of Clarides. I will have no other lady but her."

"A mortal maid!" the queen cried, turning pale, but more beautiful still, "a course daughter of men, this Honey-Bee! How can you love such a thing?"

"I do not know, but I know that I love her."

"Never mind. It will pass."

And she still held the young man captive by means of the allurements of her crystal abode.

He did not comprehend the devious thing called a woman; he was more like Achilles among the daughters of Lycomedes than Tannhaüser in the enchanted castle. And that is why he wandered sadly along the walls of the mighty palace searching for an outlet through which to escape; but he only saw the splendid and silent empire of the waves sealing his shining prison. Through the transparent walls he watched the blooming sea anemones and the spreading coral, while over the delicate streams of the madrepores and the sparkling shells, purple, blue, and gold fishes made a glitter of stars with a stroke of their tails. These marvels he left unheeded, for, lulled by the delicious songs of the nixies, he felt little by little his will broken and his soul grow weak. He was all indolence and indifference when one day he found by chance in a gallery of the palace, an ancient well-worn book bound in pigskin and studded with great copper nail-heads. The book, saved from some wreck in mid-ocean, treated of chivalry and fair ladies, and related at great length the adventures of heroes who went about the world redressing wrongs, protecting widows and succouring orphans for the love of justice and in honour of beauty. George flushed and paled with wonder, shame, and anger as he read these tales of splendid adventures. He could not contain himself.

"I also," he cried, "will be a gallant knight. I also will go about the world punishing the wicked and succouring the unfortunate for the good of mankind and in the name of my lady Honey-Bee."

With sword drawn and his heart big with valour he dashed across the crystal dwellings. The white ladies fled and swooned before him like the silver ripples of a lake. Their queen alone beheld his approach without a tremor; she turned on him the icy glance of her green eyes.

"Break the enchantment which binds me," he cried, running towards her. "Open to me the road to earth. I wish to fight in the light of the sun like a cavalier. I wish to return to where one loves, to where one suffers, to where one struggles! Give back to me the life that is real and the light that is real. Give me back my prowess! If not, I will kill you, you wicked woman!"

With a smile she shook her head as if to refuse. Beautiful she was and serene. With all the strength that was in him George struck her; but his sword broke against her glittering breast.

"Child!" she said, and she commanded that he be cast into a dungeon which formed a kind of crystal tunnel under her palace, and about which sharks roamed with wide-stretched monstrous jaws armed with triple rows of pointed teeth. At every touch it seemed as if they must crush the frail glass wall, which made it impossible to sleep in this strange prison.

The extremity of this under-sea tunnel rested on a bed of rock which formed the vaulting of the most distant and unexplored cavern in the empire of the dwarfs.

And this is what the two little men saw in a single hour and quite as accurately as if they had followed George all the days of his life. The venerable Nur,

having described the dungeon scene in all its tragic gloom, addressed the King in much the same way as the Savoyards speak to the little children when they show their magic lanterns.

"King Loc," he said, "I have shown you all you wished to see, and now that you know all I can add nothing more. It's nothing to me whether you liked what you saw; it is enough to know that what you saw was the truth. Science neither cares to please nor to displease. She is inhuman. It is not science but poetry that charms and consoles. And that is why poetry is more necessary than science. Go, King Loc, and get them to sing you a song."

And without uttering a word King Loc left the well.

XVIII

IN WHICH KING LOC UNDERTAKES A TERRIBLE JOURNEY

Having left the well of wisdom, King Loc went to his treasure house and out of a casket, of which he alone had the key, he took a ring which he placed on his finger. The stone set in the ring emitted a brilliant light, for it was a magic stone of whose power we shall learn more further on. Thereupon King Loc went to his palace, put on a travelling cloak and thick boots and took a stick; then he started on a journey across crowded streets, great highways, villages, galleries of porphyry, torrents of rock-oil, and crystal grottoes, all of which communicated with each other through narrow openings.

He seemed lost in deep meditation and he uttered words that had no meaning. But he trudged on doggedly. Mountains obstructed his path and he climbed the mountains. Precipices opened under his feet and

he descended into the precipices; he forded streams, he crossed horrible regions black with the fumes of sulphur. He trudged across burning lava on which his feet left their imprint; he had the appearance of a desperately dogged traveller. He penetrated into gloomy caverns into which the water of the ocean oozed drop by drop, and flowed like tears along the sea wrack, forming pools on the uneven ground where countless crustaceans increased and multiplied into hideous shapes. Enormous crabs, crayfish, giant lobsters and sea spiders crackled under the dwarf's feet, then crawled away leaving some of their claws behind, and in their flight rousing horrible molluscs and octopuses centuries old that suddenly writhed their hundred arms and spat fetid poison out of their bird-beaks. And yet King Loc went on undaunted. He made his way to the ends of these caverns, through the midst of a heaped-up chaos of shelled monsters armed with spikes, with double saw-edged nippers, with claws that crept stealthily up to his neck and bleared eyes on swaying tentacles. He crept up the sides of the cavern by clinging to the rough surface of the rocks and the mailed monsters crept with him, but he never faltered until he recognised by touch a stone that projected from the centre of the natural arch. He touched the stone with his magic ring and suddenly it rolled away with a horrible crash, and at once a glory of light flooded the cavern with its beautiful waves and put to flight the swarming monsters bred in its gloom.

As King Loc thrust his head into the opening through which daylight poured, he saw George of Blanchelande in his glass dungeon where he was lamenting grievously as he thought of Honey-Bee and of earth. For King Loc had undertaken this subterranean journey only to deliver the captive of the nixies.

But seeing this huge dishevelled head, frowning and bearded, watching him from under his tunnel, George believed himself to be menaced by a mighty danger and he felt for the sword at his side, forgetting that he had broken it against the breast of the woman with the green eyes. In the meantime King Loc examined him curiously.

"Bah," said he to himself, "it is only a child!"

And indeed he was only an ignorant child, and it was because of his great ignorance that he had escaped from the deadly and delicious kisses of the Queen of the Nixies. Aristotle with all his wisdom might not have done so well.

"What do you want, fathead?" George cried, seeing himself defenceless, "why harm me if I have never harmed you?"

"Little one," King Loc replied in a voice at once jovial and testy, "you do not know whether or not you have harmed me, for you are ignorant of effects and causes and reflections, and all philosophy in general. But we'll not talk of that. If you don't mind leaving your tunnel, come this way."

George at once crept into the cavern, slipped down the length of the wall, and as soon as he had reached the bottom he said to his deliverer:

"You are a good little man; I shall love you for ever; but do you know where Honey-Bee of Clarides is?"

"I know a great many things," retorted the dwarf, "and especially that I don't like people who ask questions."

Hearing this George paused in great confusion and followed his guide in silence through the dense black air where the octopuses and crustaceans writhed. King Loc said mockingly:

"This is not a carriage road, young prince."

"Sir," George replied, "the road to liberty is

always beautiful, and I fear not to be led astray when I follow my benefactor."

Little King Loc bit his lips. On reaching the gallery of porphyry he pointed out to the youth a flight of steps cut in the rock by the dwarfs, by which they ascend to earth.

"This is your way," he said, "farewell."

"Do not bid me farewell," George replied, "say I shall see you again. After what you have done my life is yours."

"What I have done," King Loc replied, "I have not done for your sake, but for another's. It will be better for us never to meet again, for we can never be friends."

"I would not have believed that my deliverance could have caused me such pain," George said simply and gravely, "and yet it does. Farewell."

"A pleasant journey," cried King Loc, in a gruff voice.

Now it happened that these steps of the dwarfs adjoined a deserted stone quarry less than a mile from the castle of Clarides.

"This young lad," King Loc murmured as he went on his way, "has neither the wisdom nor the wealth of the dwarfs. Truly I cannot imagine why Honey-Bee loves him, unless it is because he is young, handsome, faithful and brave."

As he went back to the town he laughed to himself as a man does who has done some one a good turn. As he passed Honey-Bee's cottage he thrust his big head into the open window just as he had thrust it into the crystal tunnel, and he saw the young girl, who was embroidering a veil with silver flowers.

"I wish you joy, Honey-Bee," he cried.

"And you also, little King Loc, seeing you have nothing to wish for and nothing to regret."

He had much to wish for, but, indeed, he had

nothing to regret. And it was probably this which gave him such a good appetite for supper. Having eaten a huge number of truffled pheasants he called Bob.

"Bob," said he, "mount your raven; go to the Princess of the Dwarfs and tell her that George of Blanchelande, long a captive of the nixies, has this day returned to Clarides."

Thus he spoke and Bob flew off on his raven.

XIX

WHICH TELLS OF THE EXTRAORDINARY ENCOUNTER OF JEAN THE MASTER TAILOR, AND OF THE BLESSED SONG THE BIRDS IN THE GROVE SANG TO THE DUCHESS

When George again found himself on the earth on which he was born, the very first person he met was Jean, the master tailor, with a red suit of clothes on his arm for the steward of the castle. The good man shrieked at sight of his young master.

"Holy St. James," he cried, "if you are not his lordship George of Blanchelande who was drowned in the lake seven years ago, you are either his ghost or the devil in person."

"I am neither ghost nor devil, good Jean, but I am truly that same George of Blanchelande who used to creep to your shop and beg bits of stuff out of which to makes dresses for the dolls of my sister Honey-Bee."

"Then you were not drowned, your lordship," the good man exclaimed. "I am so glad! And how well you look. My little Peter who climbed into my arms to see you pass on horseback by the side of the Duchess that Sunday morning has become a good

workman and a fine fellow. He is all of that, God be praised, your lordship. He will be glad to hear that you are not at the bottom of the sea, and that the fish have not eaten you as he always declared. He was in the habit of saying many pleasant things about it, your lordship, for he is very amusing. And it is a fact that you are much mourned in Clarides. You were such a promising child. I shall remember to my dying day how you once asked me for a needle to sew with, and as I refused, for you were not of an age to use it without danger, you replied you would go to the woods and pick beautiful green pine needles. That is what you said, and it still makes me laugh. Upon my soul you said that. Our little Peter, also, used to say clever things. Now he is a cooper and at your service, your lordship."

"I shall employ no one else. But give me news of Honey-Bee and the Duchess, Master Jean."

"Alack, where do you come from, your lordship, seeing that you do not know that it is now seven years since the Princess Honey-Bee was stolen by the dwarfs of the mountain? She disappeared the very day you were drowned; and one can truly say that on that day Clarides lost its sweetest flowers. The Duchess is in deep mourning. And it's that which makes me say that the great of the earth have their sorrows just as well as the humblest artisans, if only to prove that we are all the sons of Adam. And because of this a cat may well look at a king, as the saying is. And by the same token the good Duchess has seen her hair grow white and her gaiety vanish. And when in the springtime she walks in her black robes along the hedgerow where the birds sing, the smallest of these is more to be envied than the sovereign lady of Clarides. And yet her grief is not quite without hope, your lordship; for though she had no

tidings of you, she at least knows by dreams that her daughter Honey-Bee is alive."

This and much else said good man Jean, but George listened no longer after he heard that Honey-Bee was a captive among the dwarfs.

"The dwarfs hold Honey-Bee captive under the earth," he pondered; "a dwarf rescued me from my crystal dungeon; these little men have not all the same customs; my deliverer cannot be of the same race as those who stole my sister."

He knew not what to think except that he must rescue Honey-Bee.

In the meantime they crossed the town, and on their way the gossips standing on the thresholds of their houses asked each other who was this young stranger, but they all agreed that he was very handsome. The better informed amongst them, having recognised the young lord of Blanchelande, decided that it must be his ghost, wherefore they fled, making great signs of the cross.

"He must be sprinkled with holy water," said one old crone, "and he will vanish leaving a disgusting smell of sulphur. He will carry away Master Jean, and he will of course plunge him alive into the fire of hell."

"Softly! old woman," a citizen replied, "his lordship is alive and much more alive than you or I. He is as fresh as a rose, and he looks as if he had come from some noble court rather than from the other world. One does return from afar, good dame. As witness Francœur the squire who came back from Rome last midsummer day."

And Margaret the helmet-maker, having greatly admired George, mounted to her maiden chamber and kneeling before the image of the Holy Virgin prayed, "Holy Virgin, grant me a husband who shall look precisely like this young lord."

So each in his way talked of George's return until the news spread from mouth to mouth and finally reached the ears of the Duchess who was walking in the orchard. Her heart beat violently and she heard all the birds in the hedge-row sing:

"Cui, cui, cui,
Oui, oui, oui,
Georges de Blanchelande,
Cui, cui, cui.
Dont vous avez nourri l'enfance
Cui, cui, cui,
Est ici, est ici, est ici!
Oui, oui, oui."

Francœur approached her respectfully and said:

"Your Grace, George de Blanchelande whom you thought dead has returned. I shall make it into a song."

In the meantime the birds sang:

"Cucui, cui, i, cui, cui, cui,
Oui, oui, oui, oui, oui, oui,
Il est ici, ici, ici, ici, ici, ici."

And when she saw the child who had been to her as a son, she opened her arms and fell senseless at his feet.

XX

WHICH TREATS OF A LITTLE SATIN SHOE

Everybody in Clarides was quite convinced that Honey-Bee had been stolen by the dwarfs. Even the Duchess believed it, though her dreams did not tell her precisely.

"We will find her again," said George.

"We will find her again," replied Francœur.

"And we will bring her back to her mother," said George.

"And we will bring her back," replied Francœur.

"And we will marry her," said George.

"And we will marry her," replied Francœur.

And they inquired among the inhabitants as to the habits of the dwarfs and the mysterious circumstances of Honey-Bee's disappearance.

And it so happened that they questioned Nurse Maurille, who had once been the nurse of the Duchess of Clarides; but now as she had no more milk for babies, Maurille instead nursed the chickens in the poultry yard. It was there that the master and squire found her. She cried: "Psit! Psit! psit! psit! lil—lil—lil—lil—psit, psit, psit, psit!" as she threw grain to the chicks.

"Psit, psit, psit, psit! Is it you, your lordship? Psit, psit, psit! Is it possible that you have grown so tall—psit! and so handsome? Psit, psit! Shoo! shoo, shoo! Just look at that fat one there eating the little one's portion! Shoo, shoo, shoo! The way of the world, your lordship. Riches go to the rich, lean ones grow leaner, while the fat ones grow fatter. There's no justice on earth! What can I do for you, my lord? May I offer you each a glass of beer?"

"We will accept it gladly, Maurille, and I must embrace you because you nursed the mother of her whom I love best on earth."

"That's true, my lord, my foster child cut her first tooth at the age of six months and fourteen days. On which occasion the deceased duchess made me a present. She did indeed."

"Now, Maurille, tell us all you know about the dwarfs who carried away Honey-Bee."

"Alas, my lord, I know nothing of the dwarfs who carried her away. And how can you expect an old

woman like me to know anything? It's ages ago since I forgot the little I ever knew, and I haven't even enough memory left to remember where I put my spectacles. Sometimes I look for them when they're on my nose. Try this drink; it's fresh."

"Here's to your health, Maurille; but I was told that your husband knew something about the disappearance of Honey-Bee."

"That's true, your lordship. Though he never was taught anything he learnt a great deal in the pot-houses and the taverns. And he never forgot anything. Why if he were alive now and sitting at this table he could tell you stories until to-morrow. He used to tell me so many that they quite muddled my head and even now I can't tell the tail of one from the head of the other. That's true, your lordship."

Indeed, it was true, for the head of the old nurse could only be compared to a cracked soup-pot. It was with the greatest difficulty that George and Francœur got anything good out of it. Finally, however, by means of much repetition they did extract a tale which began somewhat as follows:

"It's seven years ago, your lordship, the very day you and Honey-Bee went on that frolic from which neither of you ever returned. My deceased husband went up the mountain to sell a horse. That's the truth. He fed the beast with a good peck of oats soaked in cider to give him a firm leg and a brilliant eye; he took him to market near the mountain. He had no cause to regret his oats or his cider, for he sold his horse for a much better price. Beasts are like human beings; one judges them by their appearance. My deceased husband was so rejoiced at his good stroke of business that he invited his friends to drink with him, and glass in hand he drank to their health.

"You must know, your lordship, that there wasn't a man in all Clarides could equal my husband when

glass in hand he drank to the health of his friends. So much so that on that day, after a number of such compliments, when he returned alone at twilight he took the wrong road for the reason that he could not recognise the right one. Finding himself near a cavern he saw as distinctly as possible, considering his condition and the hour, a crowd of little men carrying a girl or a boy on a litter. He ran away for fear of ill-luck; for the wine had not robbed him of prudence. But at some distance from the cavern he dropped his pipe, and on stooping to pick it up he picked up instead a little satin shoe. When he was in a good humour he used to amuse himself by saying, 'It's the first time a pipe has changed into a shoe.' And as it was the shoe of a little girl he decided that she who had lost it in the forest was the one who had been carried away by the dwarfs and that it was this he had seen. He was about to put the shoe into his pocket when a crowd of little men in hoods pounced down on him and gave him such a thrashing that he lay there quite stunned."

"Maurille! Maurille!" cried George, "it's Honey-Bee's shoe. Give it to me and I will kiss it a thousand times. It shall rest for ever on my heart, and when I die it shall be buried with me."

"As you please, your lordship; but where will you find it? The dwarfs took it away from my poor husband and he always thought that they only gave him such a sound thrashing because he wanted to put it in his pocket to show to the magistrates. He used to say when he was in a good humour——"

"Enough—enough! Only tell me the name of the cavern!"

"It is called the cavern of the dwarfs, your lordship, and very well named too. My deceased husband——"

"Not another word, Maurille! But you. Francœur, do you know where this cavern is?"

"Your lordship," replied Francœur as he emptied the pot of beer, "you would certainly know it if you knew my songs better. I have written at least a dozen about this cavern, and I've described it without even forgetting a single sprig of moss. I venture to say, your lordship, that of these dozen songs, six are of great merit. And even the other six are not to be despised. I will sing you one or two. . . ."

"Francœur," cried George, "we will take possession of this cavern of the dwarfs and rescue Honey-Bee."

"Of course we will!" replied Francœur.

XXI

IN WHICH A PERILOUS ADVENTURE IS DESCRIBED

That night when all were asleep, George and Francœur crept into the lower hall in search of weapons. Lances, swords, dirks, broadswords, hunting-knives and daggers glittered under the time-stained rafters—everything necessary to kill both man and brute. A complete suit of armour stood upright under each beam in an attitude as resolute and proud as if it were still filled with the soul of the brave man it had once decked for mighty adventures. The gauntlet grasped the lance in its ten iron fingers, while the shield rested against the plates of the greaves as if to prove that prudence is necessary to courage, and that the best fighter is armed as well for defence as for attack.

From among all these suits of armour George chose the one that Honey-Bee's father had worn as

far away as the isles of Avalon and Thule. He donned it with the aid of Francœur, nor did he forget the shield on which was emblazoned the golden sun of Clarides. As for Francœur, he put on a good old steel coat of mail of his grandfather's and on his head a casque of a bygone time, to which he attached a ragged and moth-eaten tuft or plume. This he chose merely as a matter of fancy and to give himself an air of rejoicing, for, as he justly reasoned, gaiety, which is good under every circumstance, is especially so in the face of great dangers.

Having thus armed themselves they passed under the light of the moon into the dark open country. Francœur had fastened the horses on the edge of a little grove near the postern, and there he found them nibbling at the bark of the bushes; they were swift steeds, and it took them less than an hour to reach the mountain of the dwarfs, through a crowd of goblins and phantoms

"Here is the cave," said Francœur.

Master and man dismounted and, sword in hand, penetrated into the cavern. It required great courage to attempt such an adventure; but George was in love and Francœur was faithful, and this was a case in which one could say with the most delightful of poets:

"What may not friendship do with Love for guide!"

Master and man had trudged through the gloom for nearly an hour when they were astonished to see a brilliant light. It was one of the meteors which we know illumines the kingdom of the dwarfs. By the light of this subterranean luminary they discovered that they were standing at the foot of an ancient castle.

"This," said George, "is the castle we must capture."

"To be sure," said Francœur; "but first permit me to drink a few drops of this wine which I brought with me as a precaution, because the better the wine the better the man, and the better the man the better the lance, the better the lance the less dangerous the enemy."

George, seeing no living soul, struck the hilt of his sword sharply against the door of the castle. He looked up at the sound of a little tremulous voice, and he saw at one of the windows a little old man with a long beard, who asked:

"Who are you!"

"George of Blanchelande."

"And who do you want?"

"I have come to deliver Honey-Bee of Clarides whom you unjustly hold captive in your mole-hill, hideous little moles that you are!"

The dwarf disappeared and again George was left alone with Francœur who said to him:

"Your lordship, possibly I may exaggerate if I remark that in your answer to the dwarf you have not quite exhausted all the persuasive powers of eloquence."

Francœur was afraid of nothing, but he was old; his heart like his head was polished by age, and he disliked to offend people.

As for George, he stormed and clamoured at the top of his voice.

"Vile dwellers in the earth, moles, badgers, dormice, ferrets, and water-rats, open the door and I'll cut off all your ears."

But hardly had he uttered these words when the bronze door of the castle slowly opened of itself, for no one could be seen pushing back its enormous wings.

George was seized with terror and yet he sprang through the mysterious door because his courage was

even greater than his terror. Entering the courtyard he saw that all the windows, the galleries, the roofs, the gables, the skylights, and even the chimney-pots, were crowded with dwarfs armed with bows and cross-bows.

He heard the bronze door close behind him and suddenly a shower of arrows fell thick and fast on his head and shoulders, and for the second time he was filled with a great fear, and for the second time he conquered his fear.

Sword in hand and his shield on his arm he mounted the steps until suddenly he perceived on the very highest, a majestic dwarf who stood there in serene dignity, gold sceptre in hand and wearing the royal crown and the purple mantle. And in this dwarf he recognised the little man who had delivered him out of his crystal dungeon.

Thereupon he threw himself at his feet and cried weeping:

"O my benefactor, who are you? Are you one of those who have robbed me of Honey-Bee, whom I love?"

"I am King Loc," replied the dwarf. "I have kept Honey-Bee with me to teach her the wisdom of the dwarfs. Child, you have fallen into my kingdom like a hail-storm in a garden of flowers. But the dwarfs, less weak than men, are never angered as are they. My intelligence raises me too high above you for me to resent your actions whatever they are. And of all the attributes that render me superior to you, that which I guard most jealously is justice. Honey-Bee shall be brought before me and I will ask her if she wishes to follow you. This I do, not because you desire it, but because I must."

A great silence ensued, and Honey-Bee appeared attired all in white and with flowing golden hair. No sooner did she see George than she ran and threw

herself in his arms and clasped his iron breast with all her strength.

Then King Loc said to her:

"Honey-Bee, is it true that this is the man you wish to marry?"

"It is true, very true that this is he, little King Loc," replied Honey-Bee. "See, all you little men, how I laugh and how happy I am."

And she began to weep. Her tears fell on her lover's face, but they were tears of joy; and with them were mingled tiny bursts of laughter and a thousand endearing words without sense, like the lisp of a little child. She quite forgot that the sight of her joy might sadden the heart of King Loc.

"My beloved," said George, "I find you again such as I had longed for: the fairest and dearest of beings. You love me! Thank heaven, you love me! But, Honey-Bee, do you not also love King Loc a little, who delivered me out of the glass dungeon in which the nixies held me captive far away from you?"

Honey-Bee turned to King Loc.

"Little King Loc, and did you do this?" she cried. "You loved me, and yet you rescued the one I love and who loves me——"

Words failed her and she fell on her knees, her head in her hands.

All the little men who witnessed this scene deluged their cross-bows with tears. Only King Loc remained serene. And Honey-Bee, overcome by his magnanimity and his goodness, felt for him the love of a daughter for a father.

She took her lover's hand.

"George," she said, "I love you. God knows how much I love you. But how can I leave little King Loc?"

"Hallo, there?" King Loc cried in a terrible voice, "now you are my prisoners!"

But this terrible voice he only used for fun and just as a joke, for he really was not at all angry. Here Francœur approached and knelt before him.

"Sire," he cried, "may it please your Majesty to let me share the captivity of the masters I serve?"

Said Honey-Bee, recognising him:

"It is you, my good Francœur? How glad I am to see you again. What a horrid cap you've got on! Tell me, have you composed any new songs?"

And King Loc took them all three to dinner.

XXII

IN WHICH ALL ENDS WELL

The next morning Honey-Bee, George and Francœur again arrayed themselves in the splendid garments prepared for them by the dwarfs, and proceeded to the banquet-hall where, as he had promised, King Loc, in the robes of an Emperor, soon joined them. He was followed by his officers fully armed, and covered with furs of barbarous magnificence, and in their helmets the wings of swans. Crowds of hurrying dwarfs came in through the windows, the air-holes and the chimneys, and rolled under the benches.

King Loc mounted a stone table one end of which was laden with flagons, candelabra, tankards, and cups of gold of marvellous workmanship. He signed to Honey-Bee and to George to approach.

"Honey-Bee," he said, "by a law of the nation of the dwarfs it is decreed that a stranger received in our midst shall be free after seven years. You have been with us seven years, Honey-Bee, and I should be a disloyal citizen and a blameworthy king should I keep you longer. But before permitting you to go I wish,

not having been able to wed you myself, to betroth you to the one you have chosen. I do so with joy for I love you more than I love myself, and my pain, if such remains, is like a little cloud which your happiness will dispel. Honey-Bee of Clarides, Princess of the Dwarfs, give me your hand, and you, George of Blanchelande, give me yours."

Placing the hand of George in the hand of Honey-Bee he turned to his people and said with a ringing voice:

"Little men, my children, you bear witness that these two pledge themselves to marry one another on earth. They shall go back together and together help courage, modesty, and fidelity to blossom, as roses, pinks, and peonies bloom for good gardeners."

At these words the dwarfs burst into a mighty shout, but not knowing if they ought to grieve or to rejoice, they were torn by conflicting emotions.

King Loc, again turning to the lovers, said as he pointed to the flagons, the tankards, all the beautiful art of the goldsmith:

"Behold the gifts of the dwarfs. Take them, Honey-Bee, they will remind you of your little friends. It is their gift to you, not mine. What I am about to give you, you shall know before long."

A lengthy silence ensued.

With an expression sublime in its tenderness, King Loc gazed at Honey-Bee, whose beautiful and radiant head, crowned by roses, rested on her lover's shoulder.

Then he continued:

"My children, it is not enough to love passionately; you must also love well. A passionate love is good, doubtless, but a beautiful love is better. May you have as much strength as gentleness; may it lack nothing, not even forbearance, and let even a little compassion be mingled with it. You are young, fair

and good; but you are human, and because of this capable of much suffering. If then something of compassion does not enter into the feelings you have one for the other, these feelings will not always befit all the circumstances of your life together; they will be like festive robes that will not shield you from wind and rain. We love truly only those we love even in their weakness and their poverty. To forbear, to forgive, to console, that alone is the science of love."

King Loc paused, seized by a gentle but strong emotion.

"My children," he then continued; "may you be happy; guard your happiness well, guard it well."

While he addressed them Pic, Tad, Dig, Bob, Truc, and Pau clung to Honey-Bee's white mantle and covered her hands and arms with kisses, and they implored her not to leave them. Thereupon King Loc took from his girdle a ring set with a glittering gem. It was the magic ring which had unclosed the dungeon of the nixies. He placed it on Honey-Bee's finger.

"Honey-Bee," he said, "receive from my hand this ring which will permit you, you and your husband, to enter at any hour the kingdom of the dwarfs. You will be welcomed with joy and succoured at need. In return teach the children that will be yours not to despise the little men, so innocent and industrious, who dwell under the earth."

III.

THE MAKER OF MOONS

Robert W. Chambers

(1895)

Editor's Note

They *called him* "the shop-girls' Scheherazade," and he was the most sensationally popular romantic novelist in this country during the turn of the century and the early 1900's. Today he is totally forgotten, and his scores of novels and short-story collections are out of print—with one exception.

That exception is *The King in Yellow,* a strangely haunting cycle of weird fantasies sharing a common background mythology. A brilliant masterpiece in the pantheon of fantastic literature, it has been reprinted many times while the remainder of his work has lapsed from availability.

Unfortunately, this includes *The Maker of Moons,* a novella which I think equal to almost any of the tales in *The King in Yellow.* The novella first saw print in 1895. It has not aged an hour, and its singular enchantment and thrilling spell to this day excite readers lucky enough to find a rare copy of the book version.

Robert W. (for William) Chambers was born on May 6, 1865, in Brooklyn, New York. His father was a famous lawyer, his brother an architect of international repute, and his mother a society matron descended from Roger Williams, the founder of Rhode Island. Young Chambers ran away to Paris to study art, exhibited in the Paris Salon at 24, and returned to these shores to become a novelist who changed the reading habits of a country.

A few of his early books displayed an astounding

artistry in the fantastic and the weird; alas, he deserted these superb accomplishments to pen innumerable (and interminable) society novels and historical romances. In so doing he deprived us of a writer who had much of the skill and the brilliance of imaginative creation of a Lovecraft or a Machen. But no matter; he left us three splendid, and very different, books: that weird and haunting cycle of tales, *The King in Yellow* (1894); an oddly mismatched hodgepodge, combining examples of extraordinary inventive power with others of insipid and inept story-telling, *The Maker of Moons* (1895); and a superb thriller of Oriental mystery which anticipated the genre of Sax Rohmer, *The Slayer of Souls* (1920).

It is the opening novella in *The Maker of Moons* —the title story—that is universally considered the prime achievement in that book. I present it to you here with pride; it is extremely rare, the book itself having been out of print for a half century or so, and the novella virtually unknown and long unavailable (even considering a brochure edition from a small, obscure publisher in Buffalo, New York, which appeared in 1954 in a very limited printing, itself a rare collector's item by now).

I must add one note about the text of *The Maker of Moons*. Not one sentence, not one single word, has been altered: The text is here reproduced precisely as in the first edition. But in that edition Chambers rather clumsily attempted to make a bridge of sorts between each of the stories in the book. This bridge, a mere seventy-six words, has been eliminated here, thus making the tale an organic and self-contained whole. No one but the strictest purist should object; I doubt if Chambers himself would have minded.

—L/C

THE MAKER OF MOONS

"I have heard what the Talkers were talking,—
the talk
Of the beginning and the end;
But I do not talk of the beginning or the end."

I

Concerning Yue-Laou and the Xin I know nothing more than you shall know. I am miserably anxious to clear the matter up. Perhaps what I write may save the United States Government money and lives, perhaps it may arouse the scientific world to action; at any rate it will put an end to the terrible suspense of two people. Certainty is better than suspense.

If the Government dares to disregard this warning and refuses to send a thoroughly equipped expedition at once, the people of the State may take swift vengeance on the whole region and leave a blackened devastated waste where to-day forest and flowering meadow land border the lake in the Cardinal Woods.

You already know part of the story; the New York papers have been full of alleged details. This much is true: Barris caught the "Shiner," red handed, or rather yellow handed, for his pockets and boots and dirty fists were stuffed with lumps of gold. I say gold, advisedly. You may call it what you please. You also know how Barris was—but unless

I begin at the beginning of my own experiences you will be none the wiser after all.

On the third of August of this present year I was standing in Tiffany's, chatting with George Godfrey of the designing department. On the glass counter between us lay a coiled serpent, an exquisite specimen of chiselled gold.

"No," replied Godfrey to my question, "it isn't my work; I wish it was. Why, man, it's a masterpiece!"

"Whose?" I asked.

"Now I should be very glad to know also," said Godfrey. "We bought it from an old jay who says he lives in the country somewhere about the Cardinal Woods. That's near Starlit Lake, I believe——"

"Lake of the Stars?" I suggested.

"Some call it Starlit Lake,—it's all the same. Well, my rustic Reuben says that he represents the sculptor of this snake for all practical and business purposes. He got his price too. We hope he'll bring us something more. We have sold this already to the Metropolitan Museum."

I was leaning idly on the glass case, watching the keen eyes of the artist in precious metals as he stooped over the gold serpent.

"A masterpiece!" he muttered to himself, fondling the glittering coil; "look at the texture! whew!" But I was not looking at the serpent. Something was moving,—crawling out of Godfrey's coat pocket,—the pocket nearest to me,—something soft and yellow with crab-like legs all covered with coarse yellow hair.

"What in Heaven's name," said I, "have you got in your pocket? It's crawling out—it's trying to creep up your coat, Godfrey!"

He turned quickly and dragged the creature out with his left hand.

I shrank back as he held the repulsive object dangling before me, and he laughed and placed it on the counter.

"Did you ever see anything like that?" he demanded.

"No," said I truthfully, "and I hope I never shall again. What is it?"

"I don't know. Ask them at the Natural History Museum—they can't tell you. The Smithsonian is all at sea too. It is, I believe the connecting link between a sea-urchin, a spider, and the devil. It looks venomous but I can't find either fangs or mouth. Is it blind? These things may be eyes but they look as if they were painted. A Japanese sculptor might have produced such an impossible beast, but it is hard to believe that God did. It looks unfinished too. I have a mad idea that this creature is only one of the parts of some larger and more grotesque organism,—it looks so lonely, so hoplessly dependent, so cursedly unfinished. I'm going to use it as a model. If I don't out-Japanese the Japs my name isn't Godfrey."

The creature was moving slowly across the glass case towards me. I drew back.

"Godfrey," I said, "I would execute a man who executed any such work as you propose. What do you want to perpetuate such a reptile for? I can stand the Japanese grotesque but I can't stand that—spider—"

"It's a crab."

"Crab or spider or blind-worm—ugh! What do you want to do it for? It's a nightmare—it's unclean!"

I hated the thing. It was the first living creature that I had ever hated.

For some time I had noticed a damp acrid odour in the air, and Godfrey said it came from the reptile.

"Then kill it and bury it," I said; "and by the way, where did it come from?"

"I don't know that either," laughed Godfrey; "I found it clinging to the box that this gold serpent was brought in. I suppose my old Reuben is responsible."

"If the Cardinal Woods are the lurking places for things like this," said I, "I am sorry that I am going to the Cardinal Woods."

"Are you?" asked Godfrey; "for the shooting?"

"Yes, with Barris and Pierpont. Why don't you kill that creature?"

"Go off on your shooting trip, and let me alone," laughed Godfrey.

I shuddered at the "crab," and bade Godfrey good-bye until December.

That night, Pierpont, Barris, and I sat chatting in the smoking-car of the Quebec Express when the long train pulled out of the Grand Central Depot. Old David had gone forward with the dogs; poor things, they hated to ride in the baggage car, but the Quebec and Northern road provides no sportsman's cars, and David and the three Gordon setters were in for an uncomfortable night.

Except for Pierpont, Barris, and myself, the car was empty. Barris, trim, stout, ruddy, and bronzed, sat drumming on the window ledge, puffing a short fragrant pipe. His gun-case lay beside him on the floor.

"When *I* have white hair and years of discretion," said Pierpont languidly, "I'll not flirt with pretty serving-maids; will you, Roy?"

"No," said I, looking at Barris.

"You mean the maid with the cap in the Pullman car?" asked Barris.

"Yes," said Pierpont.

I smiled, for I had seen it also.

Barris twisted his crisp grey moustache, and yawned.

"You children had better be toddling off to bed," he said. "That lady's-maid is a member of the Secret Service."

"Oh," said Pierpont, "one of your colleagues?"

"You might present us, you know," I said; "the journey is monotonous."

Barris had drawn a telegram from his pocket, and as he sat turning it over and over between his fingers he smiled. After a moment or two he handed it to Pierpont who read it with slightly raised eyebrows.

"It's rot,—I suppose it's cipher," he said; "I see it's signed by General Drummond——"

"Drummond, Chief of the Government Secret Service," said Barris.

"Something interesting?" I enquired, lighting a cigarette.

"Something so interesting," replied Barris, "that I'm going to look into it myself——"

"And break up our shooting trio——"

"No. Do you want to hear about it? Do you, Billy Pierpont?"

"Yes," replied that immaculate young man.

Barris rubbed the amber mouth-piece of his pipe on his handkerchief, cleared the stem with a bit of wire, puffed once or twice, and leaned back in his chair.

"Pierpont," he said, "do you remember that evening at the United States Club when General Miles, General Drummond, and I were examining that gold nugget that Captain Mahan had? You examined it also, I believe."

"I did," said Pierpont.

"Was it gold?" asked Barris, drumming on the window.

"It was," replied Pierpont.

"I saw it too," said I; "of course it was gold."

"Professor La Grange saw it also," said Barris; "he said it was gold."

"Well?" said Pierpont.

"Well," said Barris, "it was not gold."

After a silence Pierpont asked what tests had been made.

"The usual tests," replied Barris. "The United States Mint is satisfied that it is gold, so is every jeweller who has seen it. But it is not gold,—and yet—it is gold."

Pierpont and I exchanged glances.

"Now," said I, "for Barris' usual coup-de-théâtre: what was the nugget?"

"Practically it was pure gold; but," said Barris, enjoying the situation intensely, "really it was not gold. Pierpont, what is gold?"

"Gold's an element, a metal——"

"Wrong! Billy Pierpont," said Barris coolly.

"Gold was an element when I went to school," said I.

"It has not been an element for two weeks," said Barris; "and, except General Drummond, Professor La Grange, and myself, you two youngsters are the only people, except one, in the world who know it, —or have known it."

"Do you mean to say that gold is a composite metal?" said Pierpont slowly.

"I do. La Grange has made it. He produced a scale of pure gold day before yesterday. That nugget was manufactured gold."

Could Barris be joking? Was this a colossal hoax? I looked at Pierpont. He muttered something about that settling the silver question, and turned his head to Barris, but there was that in Barris' face which forbade jesting, and Pierpont and I sat silently pondering.

"Don't ask me how it's made," said Barris, quietly; "I don't know. But I do know that somewhere in the region of the Cardinal Woods there is a gang of people who do know how gold is made, and who make it. You understand the danger this is to every civilized nation. It's got to be stopped of course. Drummond and I have decided that I am the man to stop it. Wherever and whoever these people are—these gold makers,—they must be caught, every one of them,—caught or shot."

"Or shot," repeated Pierpont, who was owner of the Cross-Cut Gold Mine and found his income too small; "Professor La Grange will of course be prudent;—science need not know things that would upset the world!"

"Little Willy," said Barris laughing, "your income is safe."

"I suppose," said I, "some flaw in the nugget gave Professor La Grange the tip."

"Exactly. He cut the flaw out before sending the nugget to be tested. He worked on the flaw and separated gold into its three elements."

"He is a great man," said Pierpont, "but he will be the greatest man in the world if he can keep his discovery to himself."

"Who?" said Barris.

"Professor La Grange."

"Professor La Grange was shot through the heart two hours ago," replied Barris slowly.

II

We had been at the shooting box in the Cardinal Woods five days when a telegram was brought to Barris by a mounted messenger from the nearest telegraph station, Cardinal Springs, a hamlet on the

lumber railroad which joins the Quebec and Northern at Three Rivers Junction, thirty miles below.

Pierpont and I were sitting out under the trees, loading some special shells as experiments; Barris stood beside us, bronzed, erect, holding his pipe carefully so that no sparks should drift into our powder box. The beat of hoofs over the grass aroused us, and when the lank messenger drew bridle before the door, Barris stepped forward and took the sealed telegram. When he had torn it open he went into the house and presently reappeared, reading something that he had written.

"This should go at once," he said, looking the messenger full in the face.

"At once, Colonel Barris," replied the shabby countryman.

Pierpont glanced up and I smiled at the messenger who was gathering his bridle and settling himself in his stirrups. Barris handed him the written reply and nodded good-bye: there was a thud of hoofs on the greensward, a jingle of bit and spur across the gravel, and the messenger was gone. Barris' pipe went out and he stepped to windward to relight it.

"It is queer," said I, "that your messenger—a battered native,—should speak like a Harvard man."

"He is a Harvard man," said Barris.

"And the plot thickens," said Pierpont; "are the Cardinal Woods full of your Secret Service men, Barris?"

"No," replied Barris, "but the telegraph stations are. How many ounces of shot are you using, Roy?"

I told him, holding up the adjustable steel measuring cup. He nodded. After a moment or two he sat down on a camp-stool beside us and picked up a crimper.

"That telegram was from Drummond," he said;

"the messenger was one of my men as you two bright little boys divined. Pooh! If he had spoken the Cardinal County dialect you wouldn't have known."

"His make-up was good," said Pierpont.

Barris twirled the crimper and looked at the pile of loaded shells. Then he picked up one and crimped it.

"Let 'em alone," said Pierpont, "you crimp too tight."

"Does his little gun kick when the shells are crimped too tight?" enquired Barris tenderly; "well, he shall crimp his own shells then,—where's his little man?"

"His little man," was a weird English importation, stiff, very carefully scrubbed, tangled in his aspirates, named Howlett. As valet, gilly, gun-bearer, and crimper, he aided Pierpont to endure the ennui of existence, by doing for him everything except breathing. Lately, however, Barris' taunts had driven Pierpont to do a few things for himself. To his astonishment he found that cleaning his own gun was not a bore, so he timidly loaded a shell or two, was much pleased with himself, loaded some more, crimped them, and went to breakfast with an appetite. So when Barris asked where "his little man" was, Pierpont did not reply but dug a cupful of shot from the bag and poured it solemnly into the half-filled shell.

Old David came out with the dogs and of course there was a pow-wow when "Voyou," my Gordon, wagged his splendid tail across the loading table and sent a dozen unstopped cartridges rolling over the grass, vomiting powder and shot.

"Give the dogs a mile or two," said I; "we will shoot over the Sweet Fern Covert about four o'clock, David."

"Two guns, David," added Barris.

"Are you not going?" asked Pierpont, looking up, as David disappeared with the dogs.

"Bigger game," said Barris shortly. He picked up a mug of ale from the tray which Howlett had just set down beside us and took a long pull. We did the same, silently. Pierpont set his mug on the turf beside him and returned to his loading.

We spoke of the murder of Professor La Grange, of how it had been concealed by the authorities in New York at Drummond's request, of the certainty that it was one of the gang of gold-makers who had done it, and of the possible alertness of the gang.

"Oh, they know that Drummond will be after them sooner or later," said Barris, "but they don't know that the mills of the gods have already begun to grind. Those smart New York papers builded better than they knew when their ferret-eyed reporter poked his red nose into the house on 58th Street and sneaked off with a column on his cuffs about the 'suicide' of Professor La Grange. Billy Pierpont, my revolver is hanging in your room; I'll take yours too——"

"Help yourself," said Pierpont.

"I shall be gone overnight," continued Barris; "my poncho and some bread and meat are all I shall take except the 'barkers.'"

"Will they bark to-night?" I asked.

"No, I trust not for several weeks yet. I shall nose about a bit. Roy, did it ever strike you how queer it is that this wonderfully beautiful country should contain no inhabitants?"

"It's like those splendid stretches of pools and rapids which one finds on every trout river and in which one never finds a fish," suggested Pierpont.

"Exactly,—and Heaven alone knows why," said Barris; "I suppose this country is shunned by human beings for the same mysterious reasons."

"The shooting is the better for it," I observed.

"The shooting is good," said Barris, "have you noticed the snipe on the meadow by the lake? Why it's brown with them! That's a wonderful meadow."

"It's a natural one," said Pierpont, "no human being ever cleared that land."

"Then it's supernatural," said Barris; "Pierpont, do you want to come with me?"

Pierpont's handsome face flushed as he answered slowly, "It's awfully good of you,—if I may."

"Bosh," said I, piqued because he had asked Pierpont, "what use is little Willy without his man?"

"True," said Barris gravely, "you can't take Howlett you know."

Pierpont muttered something which ended in "d—n."

"Then," said I, "there will be but one gun on the Sweet Fern Covert this afternoon. Very well, I wish you joy of your cold supper and colder bed. Take your night-gown, Willy, and don't sleep on the damp ground."

"Let Pierpont alone," retorted Barris, "you shall go next time, Roy."

"Oh, all right,—you mean when there's shooting going on?"

"And I?" demanded Pierpont, grieved.

"You too, my son; stop quarelling! Will you ask Howlett to pack our kits—lightly mind you,—no bottles,—they clink."

My flash doesn't," said Pierpont, and went off to get ready for a night's stalking of dangerous men.

"It is strange," said I, "that nobody ever settles in this region. How many people live in Cardinal Springs, Barris?"

"Twenty counting the telegraph operator and not counting the lumbermen; they are always changing and shifting. I have six men among them."

"Where have you no men? In the Four Hundred?"

"I have men there also,—chums of Billy's only he doesn't know it. David tells me that there was a strong flight of woodcock last night. You ought to pick up some this afternoon."

Then we chatted about alder-cover and swamp until Pierpont came out of the house and it was time to part.

"Au revoir," said Barris, buckling on his kit, "come along, Pierpont, and don't walk in the damp grass."

"If you are not back by to-morrow noon," said I, "I will take Howlett and David and hunt you up. You say your course is due north?"

"Due north," replied Barris, consulting his compass.

"There is a trail for two miles and a spotted lead for two more," said Pierpont.

"Which we won't use for various reasons," added Barris pleasantly; "don't worry, Roy, and keep your confounded expedition out of the way; there's no danger."

He knew, of course, what he was talking about and I held my peace.

When the tip end of Pierpont's shooting coat had disappeared in the Long Covert, I found myself standing alone with Howlett. He bore my gaze for a moment and then politely lowered his eyes.

"Howlett," said I, "take these shells and implements to the gun room, and drop nothing. Did Voyou come to any harm in the briers this morning?"

"No 'arm, Mr. Cardenhe, sir," said Howlett.

"Then be careful not to drop anything else," said I, and walked away leaving him decorously puzzled. For he had dropped no cartridges. Poor Howlett!

III

About four o'clock that afternoon I met David and the dogs at the spinney which leads into the Sweet Fern Covert. The three setters, Voyou, Gamin, and Mioche were in fine feather,—David had killed a woodcock and a brace of grouse over them that morning,—and they were thrashing about the spinney at short range when I came up, gun under arm and pipe lighted.

"What's the prospect, David," I asked, trying to keep my feet in the tangle of wagging, whining dogs; "hello, what's amiss with Mioche?"

"A brier in his foot sir; I drew it and stopped the wound but I guess the gravel's got in. If you have no objection, sir, I might take him back with me."

"It's safer," I said; "take Gamin too, I only want one dog this afternoon. What is the situation?"

"Fair sir; the grouse lie within a quarter of a mile of the oak second-growth. The woodcock are mostly on the alders. I saw any number of snipe on the meadows. There's something else in by the lake,—I can't just tell what, but the wood-duck set up a clatter when I was in the thicket and they come dashing through the wood as if a dozen foxes was snappin' at their tail feathers."

"Probably a fox," I said; "leash those dogs,—they must learn to stand it. I'll be back by dinner time."

"There is one more thing sir," said David, lingering with his gun under his arm.

"Well," said I.

"I saw a man in the woods by the Oak Covert,—at least I think I did."

"A lumberman?"

"I think not sir—at least,—do they have Chinamen among them?"

"Chinese? No. You didn't see a Chinaman in the woods here?"

"I—I think I did sir,—I can't say positively. He was gone when I ran into the covert."

"Did the dogs notice it?"

"I can't say—exactly. They acted queer like. Gamin here lay down an' whined—it may have been colic—and Mioche whimpered,—perhaps it was the brier."

"And Voyou?"

"Voyou, he was most remarkable sir, and the hair on his back stood up. I did see a ground-hog makin' for a tree near by."

"Then no wonder Voyou bristled. David, your Chinaman was a stump or tussock. Take the dogs now."

"I guess it was sir; good afternoon sir," said David, and walked away with the Gordons leaving me alone with Voyou in the spinney.

I looked at the dog and he looked at me.

"Voyou!"

The dog sat down and danced with his fore feet, his beautiful brown eyes sparkling.

"You're a fraud," I said; "which shall it be, the alders or the upland? Upland? Good!—now for the grouse,—heel, my friend, and show your miraculous self-restraint."

Voyou wheeled into my tracks and followed close, nobly refusing to notice the impudent chipmunks and the thousand and one alluring and important smells which an ordinary dog would have lost no time in investigating.

The brown and yellow autumn woods were crisp with drifting heaps of leaves and twigs that crackled under foot as we turned from the spinney into the

forest. Every silent little stream, hurrying toward the lake was gay with painted leaves afloat, scarlet maple or yellow oak. Spots of sunlight fell upon the pools, searching the brown depths, illuminating the gravel bottom where shoals of minnows swam to and fro, and to and fro again, busy with the purpose of their little lives. The crickets were chirping in the long brittle grass on the edge of the woods, but we left them far behind in the silence of the deeper forest.

"Now!" said I to Voyou.

The dog sprang to the front, circled once, zigzagged through the ferns around us and, all in a moment, stiffened stock still, rigid as sculptured bronze. I stepped forward, raising my gun, two paces, three paces, ten perhaps, before a great cock-grouse blundered up from the brake and burst through the thicket fringe toward the deeper growth. There was a flash and puff from my gun, a crash of echoes among the low wooded cliffs, and through the faint veil of smoke something dark dropped from mid-air amid a cloud of feathers, brown as the brown leaves under foot.

"Fetch!"

Up from the ground sprang Voyou, and in a moment he came galloping back, neck arched, tail stiff but waving, holding tenderly in his pink mouth a mass of mottled bronzed feathers. Very gravely he laid the bird at my feet and crouched close beside it, his silky ears across his paws, his muzzle on the ground.

I dropped the grouse into my pocket, held for a moment a silent caressing communion with Voyou, then swung my gun under my arm and motioned the dog on.

It must have been five o'clock when I walked into a little opening in the woods and sat down to breathe. Voyou came and sat down in front of me.

"Well?" I enquired.

Voyou gravely presented one paw which I took.

"We will never get back in time for dinner," said I, "so we might as well take it easy. It's all your fault, you know. Is there a brier in your foot?—let's see,—there! it's out my friend and you are free to nose about and lick it. If you loll your tongue out you'll get it all over twigs and moss. Can't you lie down and try to pant less? No, there is no use in sniffing and looking at that fern patch, for we are going to smoke a little, doze a little, and go home by moonlight. Think what a big dinner we will have! Think of Howlett's despair when we are not in time! Think of all the stories you will have to tell to Gamin and Mioche! Think what a good dog you have been! There—you are tired old chap; take forty winks with me."

Voyou was a little tired. He stretched out on the leaves at my feet but whether or not he really slept I could not be certain, until his hind legs twitched and I knew he was dreaming of mighty deeds.

Now I may have taken forty winks, but the sun seemed to be no lower when I sat up and unclosed my lids. Voyou raised his head, saw in my eyes that I was not going yet, thumped his tail half a dozen times on the dried leaves, and settled back with a sigh.

I looked lazily around, and for the first time noticed what a wonderfully beautiful spot I had chosen for a nap. It was an oval glade in the heart of the forest, level and carpeted with green grass. The trees that surrounded it were gigantic; they formed one towering circular wall of verdure, blotting out all except the turquoise blue of the sky-oval above. And now I noticed that in the centre of the greensward lay a pool of water, crystal clear, glimmering like a mirror in the meadow grass, beside a block of

granite. It scarcely seemed possible that the symmetry of tree and lawn and lucent pool could have been one of nature's accidents. I had never before seen this glade nor had I ever heard it spoken of by either Pierpont or Barris. It was a marvel, this diamond clear basin, regular and graceful as a Roman fountain, set in the gem of turf. And these great trees,—they also belonged, not in America but in some legend-haunted forest of France, where moss-grown marbles stand neglected in dim glades, and the twilight of the forest shelters fairies and slender shapes from shadow-land.

I lay and watched the sunlight showering the tangled thicket where masses of crimson Cardinal-flowers glowed, or where one long dusty sunbeam tipped the edge of the floating leaves in the pool, turning them to palest gilt. There were birds too, passing through the dim avenues of trees like jets of flame,—the gorgeous Cardinal-Bird in his deep stained crimson robe,—the bird that gave to the woods, to the village fifteen miles away, to the whole county, the name of Cardinal.

I rolled over on my back and looked up at the sky. How pale,—paler than a robin's egg,—it was. I seemed to be lying at the bottom of a well, walled with verdure, high towering on every side. And, as I lay, all about me the air became sweet scented. Sweeter and sweeter and more penetrating grew the perfume, and I wondered what stray breeze, blowing over acres of lilies, could have brought it. But there was no breeze; the air was still. A gilded fly alighted on my hand,—a honey-fly. It was as troubled as I by the scented silence.

Then, behind me, my dog growled.

I sat quite still at first, hardly breathing, but my eyes were fixed on a shape that moved along the edge of the pool among the meadow grasses. The dog had

ceased growling and was now staring, alert and trembling.

At last I rose and walked rapidly down to the pool, my dog following close to heel.

The figure, a woman's, turned slowly toward us.

IV

She was standing still when I approached the pool. The forest around us was so silent that when I spoke the sound of my own voice startled me.

"No," she said,—and her voice was smooth as flowing water, "I have not lost my way. Will he come to me, your beautiful dog?"

Before I could speak, Voyou crept to her and laid his silky head against her knees.

"But surely," said I, "you did not come here alone."

"Alone? I did come alone."

"But the nearest settlement is Cardinal, probably nineteen miles from where we are standing."

"I do not know Cardinal," she said.

"Ste. Croix in Canada is forty miles at least,—how did you come into the Cardinal Woods?" I asked amazed.

"Into the woods?" she repeated a little impatiently.

"Yes."

She did not answer at first but stood caressing Voyou with gentle phrase and gesture.

"Your beautiful dog I am fond of, but I am not fond of being questioned," she said quietly. "My name is Ysonde and I came to the fountain here to see your dog."

I was properly quenched. After a moment or two I did say that in another hour it would be growing dusky, but she neither replied nor looked at me.

"This," I ventured, "is a beautiful pool,—you call it a fountain,—a delicious fountain: I have never before seen it. It is hard to imagine that nature did all this."

"Is it?" she said.

"Don't you think so?" I asked.

"I haven't thought; I wish when you go you would leave me your dog."

"My—my dog?"

"If you don't mind," she said sweetly, and looked at me for the first time in the face.

For an instant our glances met, then she grew grave, and I saw that her eyes were fixed on my forehead. Suddenly she rose and drew nearer, looking intently at my forehead. There was a faint mark there, a tiny crescent, just over my eyebrow. It was a birthmark.

"Is that a scar?" she demanded drawing nearer.

"That crescent shaped mark? No."

"No? Are you sure?" she insisted.

"Perfectly," I replied, astonished.

"A—a birthmark?"

"Yes,—may I ask why?"

As she drew away from me, I saw that the color had fled from her cheeks. For a second she clasped both hands over her eyes as if to shut out my face, then slowly dropping her hands, she sat down on a long square block of stone which half encircled the basin, and on which to my amazement I saw carving. Voyou went to her again and laid his head in her lap.

"What is your name?" she asked at length.

"Roy Cardenhe."

"Mine is Ysonde. I carved these dragon-flies on the stone, these fishes and shells and butterflies you see."

"You! They are wonderfully delicate,—but those are not American dragon-flies—"

"No—they are more beautiful. See, I have my hammer and chisel with me."

She drew from a queer pouch at her side a small hammer and chisel and held them toward me.

"You are very talented," I said, "where did you study?"

"I? I never studied,—I knew how. I saw things and cut them out of stone. Do you like them? Some time I will show you other things that I have done. If I had a great lump of bronze I could make your dog, beautiful as he is."

Her hammer fell into the fountain and I leaned over and plunged my arm into the water to find it.

"It is there, shining on the sand," she said, leaning over the pool with me.

"Where," said I, looking at our reflected faces in the water. For it was only in the water that I had dared, as yet, to look her long in the face.

The pool mirrored the exquisite oval of her head, the heavy hair, the eyes. I heard the silken rustle of her girdle, I caught the flash of a white arm, and the hammer was drawn up dripping with spray.

The troubled surface of the pool grew calm and again I saw her eyes reflected.

"Listen," she said in a low voice, "do you think you will come again to my fountain?"

"I will come," I said. My voice was dull; the noise of water filled my ears.

Then a swift shadow sped across the pool; I rubbed my eyes. Where her reflected face had bent beside mine there was nothing mirrored but the rosy evening sky with one pale star glimmering. I drew myself up and turned. She was gone. I saw the faint star twinkling above me in the afterglow, I saw the tall trees motionless in the still evening air, I saw my dog slumbering at my feet.

The sweet scent in the air had faded, leaving in

my nostrils the heavy odor of fern and forest mould. A blind fear seized me, and I caught up my gun and sprang into the darkening woods. The dog followed me, crashing through the undergrowth at my side. Duller and duller grew the light, but I strode on, the sweat pouring from my face and hair, my mind a chaos. How I reached the spinney I can hardly tell. As I turned up the path I caught a glimpse of a human face peering at me from the darkening thicket,—a horrible human face, yellow and drawn with high-boned cheeks and narrow eyes.

Involuntarily I halted; the dog at my heels snarled. Then I sprang straight at it, floundering blindly through the thicket, but the night had fallen swiftly and I found myself panting and struggling in a maze of twisted shrubbery and twining vines, unable to see the very undergrowth that ensnared me.

It was a pale face, and a scratched one, that I carried to a late dinner that night. Howlett served me, dumb reproach in his eyes, for the soup had been standing and the grouse was juiceless.

David brought the dogs in after they had had their supper, and I drew my chair before the blaze and set my ale on a table beside me. The dogs curled up at my feet, blinking gravely at the sparks that snapped and flew in eddying showers from the heavy birch logs.

"David," said I, "did you say you saw a Chinaman today?"

"I did sir."

"What do you think about it now?"

"I may have been mistaken sir——"

"But you think not. What sort of whiskey did you put in my flask today?"

"The usual sir."

"Is there much gone?"

"About three swallows sir, as usual."

"You don't suppose there could have been any mistake about that whiskey,—no medicine could have gotten into it, for instance."

David smiled and said, "No sir."

"Well," said I, "I have had an extraordinary dream."

When I said "dream," I felt comforted and reassured. I had scarcely dared to say it before, even to myself.

"An extraordinary dream," I repeated; "I fell asleep in the woods about five o'clock, in that pretty glade where the fountain—I mean the pool is. You know the place?"

"I do not sir."

I described it minutely, twice, but David shook his head.

"Carved stone did you say sir? I never chanced on it. You don't mean the New Spring——"

"No, no! This glade is way beyond that. Is it possible that any people inhabit the forest between here and the Canada line?"

"Nobody short of Ste. Croix; at least I have no knowledge of any."

"Of course," said I, "when I thought I saw a Chinaman, it was imagination. Of course I had been more impressed than I was aware of by your adventure. Of course you saw no Chinaman, David."

"Probably not sir," replied David dubiously.

I sent him off to bed, saying I should keep the dogs with me all night; and when he was gone, I took a good long draught of ale, "just to shame the devil," as Pierpont said, and lighted a cigar. Then I thought of Barris and Pierpont, and their cold bed, for I knew they would not dare build a fire, and, in spite of the hot chimney corner and the crackling blaze, I shivered in sympathy.

"I'll tell Barris and Pierpont the whole story and

take them to see the carved stone and the fountain," I thought to myself; "what a marvellous dream it was —Ysonde,—if it was a dream."

Then I went to the mirror and examined the faint white mark above my eyebrow.

V

About eight o'clock next morning, as I sat listlessly eyeing my coffee cup which Howlett was filling, Gamin and Mioche set up a howl, and in a moment more I heard Barris' step on the porch.

"Hello, Roy," said Pierpont, stamping into the dining room, "I want my breakfast by jingo! Where's Howlett,—none of your *café au lait* for me,—I want a chop and some eggs. Look at that dog, he'll wag the hinge off his tail in a moment——"

"Pierpont," said I, "this loquacity is astonishing but welcome. Where's Barris? You are soaked from neck to ankle."

Pierpont sat down and tore off his stiff muddy leggings.

"Barris is telephoning to Cardinal Springs,—I believe he wants some of his men,—down! Gamin, you idiot! Howlett, three eggs poached and more toast,—what was I saying? Oh, about Barris; he's struck something or other which he hopes will locate these gold-making fellows. I had a jolly time,—he'll tell you about it."

"Billy! Billy!" I said in pleased amazement, "you are learning to talk! Dear me! You load your own shells and you carry your own gun and you fire it yourself—hello! here's Barris all over mud. You fellows really ought to change your rig—whew! what a frightful odor!"

"It's probably this," said Barris tossing something

onto the hearth where it shuddered for a moment and then began to writhe; "I found it in the woods by the lake. Do you know what it can be, Roy?"

To my disgust I saw it was another of those spidery wormy crablike creatures that Godfrey had in Tiffany's.

"I thought I recognized that acrid odor," I said; "for the love of the Saints take it away from the breakfast table, Barris!"

"But what is it?" he persisted, unslinging his field-glass and revolver.

"I'll tell you what I know after breakfast," I replied firmly. "Howlett, get a broom and sweep that thing into the road.—what are you laughing at, Pierpont?"

Howlett swept the repulsive creature out and Barris and Pierpont went to change their dew-soaked clothes for dryer raiment. David came to take the dogs for an airing and in a few minutes Barris re-appeared and sat down in his place at the head of the table.

"Well," said I, "is there a story to tell?"

"Yes; not much. They are near the lake on the other side of the woods,—I mean these gold-makers. I shall collar one of them this evening. I haven't located the main gang with any certainty,—shove the toast rack this way will you, Roy,—no, I am not at all certain, but I've nailed one anyway. Pierpont was a great help, really,—and, what do you think, Roy? He wants to join the Secret Service!"

"Little Willy!"

"Exactly. Oh I'll dissuade him. What sort of a reptile was that I brought in? Did Howlett sweep it away?"

"He can sweep it back again for all I care," I said indifferently, "I've finished my breakfast."

"No," said Barris, hastily swallowing his coffee,

"it's of no importance; you can tell me about the beast——"

"Serve you right if I had it brought in on toast," I returned.

Pierpont came in radiant, fresh from the bath.

"Go on with your story, Roy," he said; and I told them about Godfrey and his reptile pet.

"Now what in the name of common sense can Godfrey find interesting in that creature?" I ended, tossing my cigarette into the fireplace.

"It's Japanese, don't you think?" said Pierpont.

"No," said Barris, "it is not artistically grotesque, it's vulgar and horrible,—it looks cheap and unfinished——"

"Unfinished,—exactly," said I, "like an American humorist——"

"Yes," said Pierpont, "cheap. What about that gold serpent?"

"Oh, the Metropolitan Museum bought it; you must see it, it's marvellous."

Barris and Pierpont had lighted their cigarettes and, after a moment, we all rose and strolled out to the lawn, where chairs and hammocks were placed under the maple trees.

David passed, gun under arm, dogs heeling.

"Three guns on the meadows at four this afternoon," said Pierpont.

"Roy," said Barris as David bowed and started on, "what did you do yesterday?"

This was the question that I had been expecting. All night long I had dreamed of Ysonde and the glade in the woods, where, at the bottom of the crystal fountain, I saw the reflection of her eyes. All the morning while bathing and dressing I had been persuading myself that the dream was not worth recounting and that a search for the glade and the imaginary stone carving would be ridiculous. But

now, as Barris asked the question, I suddenly decided to tell him the whole story.

"See here, you fellows," I said abruptly, "I am going to tell you something queer. You can laugh as much as you please too, but first I want to ask Barris a question or two. You have been in China, Barris?"

"Yes," said Barris, looking straight into my eyes.

"Would a Chinaman be likely to turn lumberman?"

"Have you seen a Chinaman?" he asked in a quiet voice.

"I don't know; David and I both imagined we did."

Barris and Pierpont exchanged glances.

"Have you seen one also?" I demanded, turning to include Pierpont.

"No," said Barris slowly; "but I know that there is, or has been, a Chinaman in these woods."

"The devil!" said I.

"Yes," said Barris gravely; "the devil, if you like, —a devil,—a member of the Kuen-Yuin."

I drew my chair close to the hammock where Pierpont lay at full length, holding out to me a ball of pure gold.

"Well?" said I, examining the engraving on its surface, which represented a mass of twisted creatures,—dragons, I supposed.

"Well," repeated Barris, extending his hand to take the golden ball, "this globe of gold engraved with reptiles and Chinese hieroglyphics is the symbol of the Kuen-Yuin."

"Where did you get it?" I asked, feeling that something startling was impending.

"Pierpont found it by the lake at sunrise this morning. It is the symbol of the Kuen-Yuin," he repeated, "the terrible Kuen-Yuin, the sorcerers of

China, and the most murderously diabolical sect on earth."

We puffed our cigarettes in silence until Barris rose, and began to pace backward and forward among the trees, twisting his grey moustache.

"The Kuen-Yuin are sorcerers," he said, pausing before the hammock where Pierpont lay watching him; "I mean exactly what I say,—sorcerers. I've seen them,—I've seen them at their devilish business, and I repeat to you solemnly, that as there are angels above, there is a race of devils on earth, and they are sorcerers. Bah!" he cried, "talk to me of Indian magic and Yogis and all that clap-trap! Why, Roy, I tell you that the Kuen-Yuin have absolute control of a hundred millions of people, mind and body, body and soul. Do you know what goes on in the interior of China? Does Europe know,—could any human being conceive of the condition of that gigantic hell-pit? You read the papers, you hear diplomatic twaddle about Li Hung Chang and the Emperor, you see accounts of battles on sea and land, and you know that Japan has raised a toy tempest along the jagged edge of the great unknown. But you never before heard of the Kuen-Yuin; no, nor has any European except a stray missionary or two, and yet I tell you that when the fires from this pit of hell have eaten through the continent to the coast, the explosion will inundate half a world,—and God help the other half."

Pierpont's cigarette went out; he lighted another, and looked hard at Barris.

"But," resumed Barris quietly, " 'sufficient unto the day,' you know,—I didn't intend to say as much as I did,—it would do no good,—even you and Pierpont will forget it,—it seems so impossible and so far away,—like the burning out of the sun. What I want to discuss is the possibility or probability of

a Chinaman,—a member of the Kuen-Yuin, being here, at this moment, in the forest."

"If he is," said Pierpont, "possibly the gold-makers owe their discovery to him."

"I do not doubt it for a second," said Barris earnestly.

I took the little golden globe in my hand, and examined the characters engraved upon it.

"Barris," said Pierpont, "I can't believe in sorcery while I am wearing one of Sanford's shooting suits in the pocket of which rests an un-cut volume of the 'Duchess.' "

"Neither can I," I said, "for I read the *Evening Post,* and I know Mr. Godkin would not allow it. Hello! What's the matter with this gold ball?"

"What is the matter?" said Barris grimly.

"Why—why—it's changing color—purple, no, crimson—no, it's green I mean—good Heavens! these dragons are twisting under my fingers——"

"Impossible!" muttered Pierpont, leaning over me; "those are not dragons——"

"No!" I cried excitedly; "they are pictures of that reptile that Barris brought back—see—see how they crawl and turn——"

"Drop it!" commanded Barris; and I threw the ball on the turf. In an instant we had all knelt down on the grass beside it, but the globe was again golden, grotesquely wrought with dragons and strange signs.

Pierpont, a little red in the face, picked it up, and handed it to Barris. He placed it on a chair, and sat down beside me.

"Whew!" said I, wiping the perspiration from my face, "how did you play us that trick, Barris?"

"Trick?" said Barris contemptuously.

I looked at Pierpont, and my heart sank. If this was not a trick, what was it? Pierpont returned my glance and colored, but all he said was, "It's devilish

queer," and Barris answered, "Yes, devilish." Then Barris asked me again to tell my story, and I did, beginning from the time I met David in the spinney to the moment when I sprang into the darkening thicket where that yellow mask had grinned like a phantom skull.

"Shall we try to find the fountain?" I asked after a pause.

"Yes,—and—er—the lady," suggested Pierpont vaguely.

"Don't be an ass," I said a little impatiently, "you need not come, you know."

"Oh, I'll come," said Pierpont, "unless you think I am indiscreet——"

"Shut up, Pierpont," said Barris, "this thing is serious; I never heard of such a glade or such a fountain, but it's true that nobody knows this forest thoroughly. It's worthwhile trying for; Roy, can you find your way back to it?"

"Easily," I answered; "when shall we go?"

"It will knock our snipe shooting on the head," said Pierpont, "but then when one has the opportunity of finding a live dream-lady——"

I rose, deeply offended, but Pierpont was not very penitent and his laughter was irresistible.

"The lady's yours by right of discovery," he said. "I'll promise not to infringe on your dreams,—I'll dream about other ladies——"

"Come, come," said I, "I'll have Howlett put you to bed in a minute. Barris, if you are ready,—we can get back to dinner——"

Barris had risen and was gazing at me earnestly.

"What's the matter?" I asked nervously, for I saw that his eyes were fixed on my forehead, and I thought of Ysonde and the white crescent scar.

"Is that a birthmark?" said Barris.

"Yes—why, Barris?"

"Nothing,—an interesting coincidence——"

"What!—for Heaven's sake!"

"The scar,—or rather the birthmark. It is the print of the dragon's claw,—the crescent symbol of Yue-Laou——"

"And who the devil is Yue-Laou?" I said crossly.

"Yue-Laou,—the Moon Maker, Dzil-Nbu of the Kuen-Yuin;—it's Chinese Mythology, but it is believed that Yue-Laou has returned to rule the Kuen-Yuin——".

"The conversation," interrupted Pierpont, "smacks of peacocks feathers and yellow-jackets. The chicken-pox has left its card on Roy, and Barris is guying us. Come on, you fellows, and make your call on the dream-lady. Barris, I hear galloping; here come your men."

Two mud-splashed riders clattered up to the porch and dismounted at a motion from Barris. I noticed that both of them carried repeating rifles and heavy Colt's revolvers.

They followed Barris, deferentially, into the dining-room, and presently we heard the tinkle of plates and bottles and the low hum of Barris' musical voice.

Half an hour later they came out again, saluted Pierpont and me, and galloped away in the direction of the Canadian frontier. Ten minutes passed, and, as Barris did not appear, we rose and went into the house, to find him. He was sitting silently before the table, watching the small golden globe, now glowing with scarlet and orange fire, brilliant as a live coal. Howlett, mouth ajar, and eyes starting from the sockets, stood petrified behind him.

"Are you coming," asked Pierpont, a little startled. Barris did not answer. The globe slowly turned to pale gold again,—but the face that Barris raised to

ours was white as a sheet. Then he stood up, and smiled with an effort which was painful to us all.

"Give me a pencil and a bit of paper," he said.

Howlett brought it. Barris went to the window and wrote rapidly. He folded the paper, placed it in the top drawer of his desk, locked the drawer, handed me the key, and motioned us to precede him.

When again we stood under the maples, he turned to me with an impenetrable expression. "You will know when to use the key," he said: "Come, Pierpont, we must try to find Roy's fountain."

VI

At two o'clock that afternoon, at Barris' suggestion, we gave up the search for the fountain in the glade and cut across the forest to the spinney where David and Howlett were waiting with our guns and the three dogs.

Pierpont guyed me unmercifully about the "dream-lady," as he called her, and, but for the significant coincidence of Ysonde's and Barris' questions concerning the white scar on my forehead, I should long ago have been perfectly persuaded that I had dreamed the whole thing. As it was, I had no explanation to offer. We had not been able to find the glade, although fifty times I came to landmarks which convinced me that we were just about to enter it. Barris was quiet, scarcely uttering a word to either of us during the entire search. I had never before seen him depressed in spirits. However, when we came in sight of the spinney where a cold bit of grouse and a bottle of Burgundy awaited each, Barris seemed to recover his habitual good humor.

"Here's to the dream-lady!" said Pierpont, raising his glass and standing up.

I did not like it. Even if she was only a dream, it irritated me to hear Pierpont's mocking voice. Perhaps Barris understood,—I don't know, but he bade Pierpont drink his wine without further noise, and that young man obeyed with a child-like confidence which almost made Barris smile.

"What about the snipe, David," I asked; "the meadows should be in good condition."

"There is not a snipe on the meadows, sir," said David solemnly.

"Impossible," exclaimed Barris, "they can't have left."

"They have, sir," said David in a sepulchral voice which I hardly recognized.

We all three looked at the old man curiously, waiting for his explanation of this disappointing but sensational report.

David looked at Howlett and Howlett examined the sky.

"I was going," began the old man, with his eyes fastened on Howlett, "I was going along by the spinney with the dogs when I heard a noise in the covert and I seen Howlett come walkin' very fast toward me. In fact," continued David, "I may say he was runnin'. Was you runnin', Howlett?"

Howlett said "Yes," with a decorous cough.

"I beg pardon," said David, "but I'd rather Howlett told the rest. He saw things which I did not."

"Go on, Howlett," commanded Pierpont, much interested.

Howlett coughed again behind his large red hand.

"What David says is true sir," he began; "I h'observed the dogs at a distance 'ow they was a workin' sir, and David stood a lightin' of's pipe be'ind the spotted beech when I see a 'ead pop up in the covert 'oldin a stick like 'e was h'aimin' at the dogs sir"—

"A head holding a stick?" said Pierpont severely.

"The 'ead 'ad 'ands, sir," explained Howlett, "'ands that 'eld a painted stick,—like that, sir. 'Owlett, thinks I to meself, this 'ere's queer, so I jumps in an' runs, but the beggar 'e seen me an' w'en I comes alongside of David, 'e was gone. ' 'Ello 'Owlett,' sez David, 'what the 'ell'—I beg pardon, sir—' 'ow did you come 'ere,' sez 'e very loud. 'Run!' sez I, 'the Chinaman is harryin' the dawgs!" 'For Gawd's sake wot Chinaman?' sez David, h'aimin' 'is gun at every bush. Then I thinks I see 'im an' we run an' run, the dawgs a boundin' close to heel sir, but we don't see no Chinaman."

"I'll tell the rest," said David, as Howlett coughed and stepped in a modest corner behind the dogs.

"Go on," said Barris in a strange voice.

"Well sir, when Howlett and I stopped chasin', we was on the cliff overlooking the south meadow. I noticed that there was hundreds of birds there, mostly yellow-legs and plover, and Howlett seen them too. Then before I could say a word to Howlett, something out in the lake gave a splash—a splash as if the whole cliff had fallen into the water. I was that scared that I jumped straight into the bush, and Howlett he sat down quick, and all those snipe wheeled up—there was hundreds,—all a squeelin' with fright, and the wood-duck came bowlin' over the meadows as if the old Nick was behind."

David paused and glanced meditatively at the dogs.

"Go on," said Barris in the same strained voice.

"Nothing more sir. The snipe did not come back."

"But that splash in the lake?"

"I don't know what it was sir."

"A salmon? A salmon couldn't have frightened the duck and the snipe that way?"

"No—oh no, sir. If fifty salmon had jumped they

couldn't have made that splash. Couldn't they, Howlett?"

"No 'ow," said Howlett.

"Roy," said Barris at length, "what David tells us settles the snipe shooting for to-day. I am going to take Pierpont up to the house. Howlett and David will follow with the dogs,—I have something to say to them. If you care to come, come along; if not, go and shoot a brace of grouse for dinner and be back by eight if you want to see what Pierpont and I discovered last night."

David whistled Gamin and Mioche to heel and followed Howlett and his hamper toward the house. I called Voyou to my side, picked up my gun and turned to Barris.

"I will be back by eight," I said; "you are expecting to catch one of the gold-makers are you not?"

"Yes," said Barris listlessly.

Pierpont began to speak about the Chinaman but Barris motioned him to follow, and, nodding to me, took the path that Howlett and David had followed toward the house. When they disappeared I tucked my gun under my arm and turned sharply into the forest, Voyou trotting close to my heels.

In spite of myself the continued apparition of the Chinaman made me nervous. If he troubled me again I had fully decided to get the drop on him and find out what he was doing in the Cardinal Woods. If he could give no satisfactory account of himself I would march him in to Barris as a gold-making suspect,—I would march him in anyway, I thought, and rid the forest of his ugly face. I wondered what it was that David had heard in the lake. It must have been a big fish, a salmon, I thought; probably David's and Howlett's nerves were overwrought after their Celestial chase.

A whine from the dog broke the thread of my

meditation and I raised my head. Then I stopped short in my tracks.

The lost glade lay straight before me.

Already the dog had bounded into it, across the velvet turf to the carved stone where a slim figure sat. I saw my dog lay his silky head lovingly against her silken kirtle; I saw her face bend above him, and I caught my breath and slowly entered the sun-lit glade.

Half timidly she held out one white hand.

"Now that you have come," she said, "I can show you more of my work. I told you that I could do other things besides these dragon-flies and moths carved here in stone. Why do you stare at me so? Are you ill?"

"Ysonde," I stammered.

"Yes," she said, with a faint color under her eyes.

"I—I never expected to see you again," I blurted out, "—you—I—I—thought I had dreamed——"

"Dreamed, of me? Perhaps you did, is that strange?"

"Strange? N—no—but—where did you go when —when we were leaning over the fountain together? I saw your face,—your face reflected beside mine and then—then suddenly I saw the blue sky and only a star twinkling."

"It was because you fell asleep," she said, "was it not?"

"I—asleep?"

"You slept—I thought you were very tired and I went back——"

"Back?—where?"

"Back to my home where I carve my beautiful images; see, here is one I brought to show you to-day."

I took the sculptured creature that she held toward me, a massive golden lizard with frail claw-spread

wings of gold so thin that the sunlight burned through and fell on the ground in flaming gilded patches.

"Good Heavens!" I exclaimed, "this is astounding! Where did you learn to do such work? Ysonde, such a thing is beyond price!"

"Oh, I hope so," she said earnestly. "I can't bear to sell my work, but my step-father takes it and sends it away. This is the second thing I have done and yesterday he said I must give it to him. I suppose he is poor."

"I don't see how he can be poor if he gives you gold to model in," I said, astonished.

"Gold!" she exclaimed, "gold! He has a room full of gold! He makes it."

I sat down on the turf at her feet completely unnerved.

"Why do you look at me so?" she asked, a little troubled.

"Where does your step-father live?" I said at last.

"Here."

"Here!"

"In the woods near the lake. You could never find our house."

"A house!"

"Of course. Did you think I lived in a tree? How silly. I live with my step-father in a beautiful house, —a small house, but very beautiful. He makes his gold there but the men who carry it away never come to the house, for they don't know where it is and if they did they could not get in. My step-father carries the gold in lumps to a canvas satchel. When the satchel is full he takes it out into the woods where the men live and I don't know what they do with it. I wish he could sell the gold and become rich for then I could go back to Yian where all the gardens are sweet and the river flows under the thousand bridges."

"Where is this city?" I asked faintly.

"Yian? I don't know. It is sweet with perfume and the sound of silver bells all day long. Yesterday I carried a blossom of dried lotus buds from Yian, in my breast, and all the woods were fragrant. Did you smell it?"

"Yes."

"I wondered, last night, whether you did. How beautiful your dog is; I love him. Yesterday I thought most about your dog, but last night——"

"Last night," I repeated below my breath.

"I thought of you. Why do you wear the dragon-claw?"

I raised my hand impulsively to my forehead, covering the scar.

"What do you know of the dragon-claw?" I muttered.

"It is the symbol of Yue-Laou, and Yue-Laou rules the Kuen-Yuin, my step-father says. My step-father tells me everything that I know. We lived in Yian until I was sixteen years old. I am eighteen now; that is two years we have lived in the forest. Look!—see those scarlet birds! What are they? There are birds of the same color in Yian."

"Where is Yian, Ysonde?" I asked with deadly calmness.

"Yian? I don't know."

"But you have lived there?"

"Yes, a very long time."

"Is it across the ocean, Ysonde?"

"It is across seven oceans and the great river which is longer than from the earth to the moon."

"Who told you that?"

"Who? My step-father; he tells me everything."

"Will you tell me his name, Ysonde?"

"I don't know it; he is my step-father, that is all."

"And what is your name?"

"You know it; Ysonde."

"Yes, but what other name."

"That is all; Ysonde. Have you two names? Why do you look at me so impatiently?"

"Does your step-father make gold? Have you seen him make it?"

"Oh yes. He made it also in Yian and I loved to watch the sparks at night whirling like golden bees. Yian is lovely,—if it is all like our garden and the gardens around. I can see the thousand bridges from my garden and the white mountain beyond—"

"And the people—tell me of the people, Ysonde!" I urged gently.

"The people of Yian? I could see them in swarms like ants—oh! many, many millions crossing and re-crossing the thousand bridges."

"But how did they look? Did they dress as I do?"

"I don't know. They were very far away, moving specks on the thousand bridges. For sixteen years I saw them every day from my garden but I never went out of my garden into the streets of Yian, for my step-father forbade me."

"You never saw a living creature nearby in Yian?" I asked in despair.

"My birds, oh such tall, wise-looking birds, all over grey and rose color."

She leaned over the gleaming water and drew her polished hand across the surface.

"Why do you ask me these questions," she murmured; "are you displeased?"

"Tell me about your step-father," I insisted. "Does he look as I do? Does he dress, does he speak as I do? Is he American?"

"American? I don't know. He does not dress as you do and he does not look as you do. He is old, very, very old. He speaks sometimes as you do, sometimes as they do in Yian. I speak also in both manners."

"Then speak as they do in Yian," I urged impatiently, "speak as—why, Ysonde! why are you crying? Have I hurt you?—I did not intend,—I did not dream of your caring! There Ysonde, forgive me,—see, I beg you on my knees, here at your feet."

I stopped, my eyes fastened on a small golden ball which hung from her waist by a golden chain. I saw it trembling against her thigh, I saw it change color, now crimson, now purple, now flaming scarlet. It was the symbol of the Kuen-Yuin.

She bent over me and laid her fingers gently on my arm.

"Why do you ask me such things?" she said, while the tears glistened on her lashes. "It hurts me here,—" she pressed her hand to her breast,—"it pains.—I don't know why. Ah, now your eyes are hard and cold again; you are looking at the golden globe which hangs from my waist. Do you wish to know also what that is?"

"Yes," I muttered, my eyes fixed on the infernal color flames which subsided as I spoke, leaving the ball a pale gilt again.

"It is the symbol of the Kuen-Yuin," she said in a trembling voice; "why do you ask?"

"Is it yours?"

"Y—yes."

"Where did you get it?" I cried harshly.

"My—my step-fa——"

Then she pushed me away from her with all the strength of her slender wrists and covered her face.

If I slipped my arm about her and drew her to me,—if I kissed away the tears that fell slowly between her fingers,—if I told her how I loved her—how it cut me to the heart to see her unhappy,—after all that is my own business. When she smiled through her tears, the pure love and sweetness in her eyes lifted my soul higher than the high moon vaguely

glimmering through the sun-lit blue above. My happiness was so sudden, so fierce and overwhelming that I only knelt there, her fingers clasped in mine, my eyes raised to the blue vault and the glimmering moon. Then something in the long grass beside me moved close to my knees, and a damp acrid odor filled my nostrils.

"Ysonde!" I cried, but the touch of her hand was already gone and my two clenched fists were cold and damp with dew.

"Ysonde!" I called again, my tongue stiff with fright;—but I called as one awaking from a dream—a horrid dream, for my nostrils quivered with the damp acrid odor and I felt the crab-reptile clinging to my knee. Why had the night fallen so swiftly,—and where was I—where?—stiff, chilled, torn, and bleeding, lying flung like a corpse over my own threshold with Voyou licking my face and Barris stooping above me in the light of a lamp that flared and smoked in the night breeze like a torch. Faugh! the choking stench of the lamp aroused me and I cried out:

"Ysonde!"

"What the devil's the matter with him?" muttered Pierpont, lifting me in his arms like a child, "has he been stabbed, Barris?"

VII

In a few minutes I was able to stand and walk stiffly into my bedroom where Howlett had a hot bath ready and a hotter tumbler of Scotch. Pierpont sponged the blood from my throat where it had coagulated. The cut was slight, almost invisible, a mere puncture from a thorn. A shampoo cleared my

mind, and a cold plunge and alcohol friction did the rest.

"Now," said Pierpont, "swallow your hot Scotch and lie down. Do you want a broiled woodcock? Good, I fancy you are coming about."

Barris and Pierpont watched me as I sat on the edge of the bed, solemnly chewing on the woodcock's wishbone and sipping my Bordeaux, very much at my ease.

Pierpont sighed his relief.

"So," he said pleasantly, "it was a mere case of ten dollars or ten days. I thought you had been stabbed——"

"I was not intoxicated," I replied, serenely picking up a bit of celery.

"Only jagged?" enquired Pierpont, full of sympathy.

"Nonsense," said Barris, "let him alone. Want some more celery, Roy?—it will make you sleep."

"I don't want to sleep," I answered; "when are you and Pierpont going to catch your Gold-maker?"

Barris looked at his watch and closed it with a snap.

"In an hour; you don't propose to go with us?"

"But I do,—toss me a cup of coffee, Pierpont, will you,—that's just what I propose to do. Howlett, bring the new box of Panatella's,—the mild imported;—and leave the decanter. Now Barris, I'll be dressing, and you and Pierpont keep still and listen to what I have to say. Is that door shut tight?"

Barris locked it and sat down.

"Thanks," said I. "Barris, where is the city of Yian?"

An expression akin to terror flashed into Barris' eyes and I saw him stop breathing for a moment.

"There is no such city," he said at length; "have I been talking in my sleep?"

"It is a city," I continued, calmly, "where the river winds under the thousand bridges, where the gardens are sweet scented and the air is filled with the music of silver bells——"

"Stop!" gasped Barris, and rose trembling from his chair. He had grown ten years older.

"Roy," interposed Pierpont coolly, "what the deuce are you harrying Barris for?"

I looked at Barris and he looked at me. After a second or two he sat down again.

"Go on, Roy," he said.

"I must," I answered, "for now I am certain that I have not dreamed."

I told them everything; but, even as I told it, the whole thing seemed so vague, so unreal, that at times I stopped with the hot blood tingling in my ears, for it seemed impossible that sensible men, in the year of our Lord 1896, could seriously discuss such matters.

I feared Pierpont, but he did not even smile. As for Barris, he sat with his handsome head sunk on his breast, his unlighted pipe clasped tight in both hands.

When I had finished, Pierpont turned slowly and looked at Barris. Twice he moved his lips as if about to ask something and then remained mute.

"Yian is a city," said Barris, speaking dreamily; "was that what you wished to know, Pierpont?"

We nodded silently.

"Yian is a city," repeated Barris, "where the great river winds under the thousand bridges,—where the gardens are sweet scented, and the air is filled with the music of silver bells."

My lips formed the question, "Where is this city?"

"It lies," said Barris, almost querulously, "across the seven oceans and the river which is longer than from the earth to the moon."

"What do you mean?" said Pierpont.

"Ah," said Barris, rousing himself with an effort and raising his sunken eyes, "I am using the allegories of another land; let it pass. Have I not told you of the Kuen-Yuin? Yian is the centre of the Kuen-Yuin. It lies hidden in that gigantic shadow called China, vague and vast as the midnight Heavens,—a continent unknown, impenetrable."

"Impenetrable," repeated Pierpont below his breath.

"I have seen it," said Barris dreamily. "I have seen the dead plains of Black Cathay and I have crossed the mountains of Death, whose summits are above the atmosphere. I have seen the shadow of Xangi cast across Abaddon. Better to die a million miles from Yezd and Ater Quedah than to have seen the white water-lotus close in the shadow of Xangi! I have slept among the ruins of Xaindu where the winds never cease and the Wulwulleh is wailed by the dead."

"And Yian," I urged gently.

There was an unearthly look on his face as he turned slowly toward me.

"Yian,—I have lived there—and loved there. When the breath of my body shall cease, when the dragon's claw shall fade from my arm,"—he tore up his sleeve, and we saw a white crescent shining above his elbow,—"when the light of my eyes has faded forever, then, even then I shall not forget the city of Yian. Why, it is my home,—mine! The river and the thousand bridges, the white peak beyond, the sweet-scented gardens, the lilies, the pleasant noise of the summer wind laden with bee music and the music of bells,—all these are mine. Do you think because the Kuen-Yuin feared the dragon's claw on my arm that my work with them is ended? Do you think that because Yue-Laou could give, that I acknowledge his right to take away? Is he Xangi in whose shadow the

white water-lotus dares not raise its head? No! No!" he cried violently, "it was not from Yue-Laou, the sorcerer, the Maker of Moons, that my happiness came! It was real, it was not a shadow to vanish like a tinted bubble! Can a sorcerer create and give a man the woman he loves? Is Yue-Laou as great as Xangi then? Xangi is God. In His own time, in His infinite goodness and mercy He will bring me again to the woman I love. And I know she waits for me at God's feet."

In the strained silence that followed I could hear my heart's double beat and I saw Pierpont's face, blanched and pitiful. Barris shook himself and raised his head. The change in his ruddy face frightened me.

"Heed!" he said, with a terrible glance at me; "the print of the dragon's claw is on your forehead and Yue-Laou knows it. If you must love, then love like a man, for you will suffer like a soul in hell, in the end. What is her name again?"

"Ysonde," I answered simply.

VIII

At nine o'clock that night we caught one of the Goldmakers. I do not know how Barris had laid his trap; all I saw of the affair can be told in a minute or two.

We were posted on the Cardinal road about a mile below the house, Pierpont and I with drawn revolvers on one side, under a butternut tree, Barris on the other, a Winchester across his knees.

I had just asked Pierpont the hour, and he was feeling for his watch when far up the road we heard the sound of a galloping horse, nearer, nearer, clattering, thundering past. Then Barris' rifle spat flame and the dark mass, horse and rider, crashed

into the dust. Pierpont had the half-stunned horseman by the collar in a second,—the horse was stone dead,—and, as we lighted a pine knot to examine the fellow, Barris' two riders galloped up and drew bridle beside us.

"Hm!" said Barris with a scowl, "it's the 'Shiner,' or I'm a moonshiner."

We crowded curiously around to see the "Shiner." He was red-headed, fat and filthy, and his little red eyes burned in his head like the eyes of an angry pig.

Barris went through his pockets methodically while Pierpont held him and I held the torch. The Shiner was a gold mine; pockets, shirt, bootlegs, hat, even his dirty fists, clutched tight and bleeding, were bursting with lumps of soft yellow gold. Barris dropped this "moonshine gold," as we had come to call it, into the pockets of his shooting-coat, and withdrew to question the prisoner. He came back again in a few minutes and motioned his mounted men to take the Shiner in charge. We watched them, rifle on thigh, walking their horses slowly away into the darkness, the Shiner, tightly bound, shuffling sullenly between them.

"Who is the Shiner?" asked Pierpont, slipping the revolver into his pocket again.

"A moonshiner, counterfeiter, forger, and highwayman," said Barris, "and probably a murderer. Drummond will be glad to see him, and I think it likely he will be persuaded to confess to him what he refuses to confess to me."

"Wouldn't he talk?" I asked.

"Not a syllable. Pierpont, there is nothing more for you to do."

"For me to do? Are you not coming back with us, Barris?"

"No," said Barris.

We walked along the dark road in silence for a

while, I wondering what Barris intended to do, but he said nothing more until we reached our own verandah. Here he held out his hand, first to Pierpont, then to me, saying good-bye as though he were going on a long journey.

"How soon will you be back?" I called out to him as he turned away toward the gate. He came across the lawn again and again took our hands with a quiet affection that I had never imagined him capable of.

"I am going," he said, "to put an end to his gold-making to-night. I know that you fellows have never suspected what I was about on my little solitary evening strolls after dinner. I will tell you. Already I have unobtrusively killed four of these gold-makers,—my men put them under ground just below the new wash-out at the four-mile stone. There are three left alive,—the Shiner, whom we have, another criminal named 'Yellow,' or 'Yaller' in the vernacular, and the third——"

"The third," repeated Pierpont, excitedly.

"The third I have never yet seen. But I know who and what he is,—I know; and if he is of human flesh and blood, his blood will flow to-night."

As he spoke a slight noise across the turf attracted my attention. A mounted man was advancing silently in the starlight over the spongy meadowland. When he came nearer Barris struck a match, and we saw that he bore a corpse across his saddle bow.

"Yaller, Colonel Barris," said the man, touching his slouched hat in salute.

This grim introduction to the corpse made me shudder, and, after a moment's examination of the stiff, wide-eyed dead man, I drew back.

"Identified," said Barris, "take him to the four-mile post and carry his effects to Washington,—under seal, mind, Johnstone."

Away cantered the rider with his ghastly burden, and Barris took our hands once more for the last time. Then he went away, gaily, with a jest on his lips, and Pierpont and I turned back into the house.

For an hour we sat moodily smoking in the hall before the fire, saying little until Pierpont burst out with: "I wish Barris had taken one of us with him tonight!"

The same thought had been running in my mind, but I said: "Barris knows what he's about."

This observation neither comforted us nor opened the lane to further conversation, and after a few minutes Pierpont said good night and called for Howlett and hot water. When he had been warmly tucked away by Howlett, I turned out all but one lamp, sent the dogs away with David and dismissed Howlett for the night.

I was not inclined to retire for I knew I could not sleep. There was a book lying open on the table beside the fire and I opened it and read a page or two, but my mind was fixed on other things.

The window shades were raised and I looked out at the star-set firmament. There was no moon that night but the sky was dusted all over with sparkling stars, and a pale radiance, brighter even than moonlight, fell over meadow and wood. Far away in the forest I heard the voice of the wind, a soft warm wind that whispered a name, Ysonde.

"Listen," sighed the voice of the wind, and "listen" echoed the swaying trees with every little leaf a-quiver. I listened.

Where the long grasses trembled with the cricket's cadence I heard her name, Ysonde; I heard it in the rustling woodbine where grey moths hovered; I heard it in the drip, drip, drip of the dew from the porch. The silent meadow brook whispered her name, the rippling woodland streams repeated it,

Ysonde, Ysonde, until all earth and sky were filled with the soft thrill, Ysonde, Ysonde, Ysonde.

A night-thrush sang in a thicket by the porch and I stole to the verandah to listen. After a while it began again, a little further on. I ventured out into the road. Again I heard it far away in the forest and I followed it, for I knew it was singing of Ysonde.

When I came to the path that leaves the main road and enters the Sweet-Fern Covert below the spinney, I hesitated; but the beauty of the night lured me on and the night-thrushes called me from every thicket. In the starry radiance, shrubs, grasses, field flowers, stood out distinctly, for there was no moon to cast shadows. Meadow and brook, grove and stream, were illuminated by the pale glow. Like great lamps lighted, the planets hung from the high domed sky and through their mysterious rays the fixed stars, calm, serene, stared from the heavens like eyes.

I waded on waist deep through fields of dewy golden-rod, through late clover and wild-oat wastes, through crimson fruited sweetbrier, blueberry, and wild plum, until the low whisper of the Wier Brook warned me that the path had ended.

But I would not stop, for the night air was heavy with the perfume of water-lilies and far away, across the low wooded cliffs and the wet meadowland beyond, there was a distant gleam of silver, and I heard the murmur of sleepy waterfowl. I would go to the lake. The way was clear except for the dense young growth and the snares of the moose-bush.

The night-thrushes had ceased but I did not want for the company of living creatures. Slender, quick darting forms crossed my path at intervals, sleek mink, that fled like shadows at my step, wiry weasels and fat musk-rats, hurrying onward to some tryst or killing.

I never had seen so many little woodland creatures

on the move at night. I began to wonder where they all were going so fast, why they all hurried on in the same direction. Now I passed a hare hopping through the brushwood, now a rabbit scurrying by, flag hoisted. As I entered the beech second-growth two foxes glided by me; a little further on a doe crashed out of the underbrush, and close behind her stole a lynx, eyes shining like coals.

He neither paid attention to the doe nor to me, but loped away toward the north.

The lynx was in flight.

"From what?" I asked myself, wondering. There was no forest fire, no cyclone, no flood.

If Barris had passed that way, could he have stirred up this sudden exodus? Impossible; even a regiment in the forest could scarcely have put to rout these frightened creatures.

"What on earth," thought I, turning to watch the headlong flight of a fisher-cat, "what on earth has started the beasts out at this time of night."

I looked up into the sky. The placid glow of the fixed stars comforted me and I stepped on through the narrow spruce belt that leads down to the borders of the Lake of the Stars.

Wild cranberry and moose-bush entwined my feet, dewy branches spattered me with moisture, and the thick spruce needles scraped my face as I threaded my way over mossy logs and deep spongy tussocks down to the level gravel of the lake shore.

Although there was no wind the little waves were hurrying in from the lake and I heard them splashing among the pebbles. In the pale star glow thousands of water-lilies lifted their half-closed chalices toward the sky.

I threw myself full length upon the shore, and, chin on hand, looked out across the lake.

Splash, splash, came the waves along the shore,

higher, nearer, until a film of water, thin and glittering as a knife blade, crept up to my elbows. I could not understand it; the lake was rising, but there had been no rain. All along the shore the water was running up; I heard the waves among the sedge grass; the weeds at my side were awash in the ripples. The lilies rocked on the tiny waves, every wet pad rising on the swells, sinking, rising again until the whole lake was glimmering with undulating blossoms. How sweet and deep was the fragrance from the lilies. And now the water was ebbing, slowly, and the waves receded, shrinking from the shore rim until the white pebbles appeared again, shining like froth on a brimming glass.

No animal swimming out in the darkness along the shore, no heavy salmon surging, could have set the whole shore aflood as though the wash from a great boat were rolling in. Could it have been the overflow, through the Weir Brook, of some cloudburst far back in the forest? This was the only way I could account for it, and yet when I had crossed the Weir Brook I had not noticed that it was swollen.

And as I lay there thinking, a faint breeze sprang up and I saw the surface of the lake whiten with lifted lily pads.

All around me the alders were sighing; I heard the forest behind me stir; the crossed branches rubbing softly, bark against bark. Something—it may have been an owl—sailed out of the night, dipped, soared, and was again engulfed, and far across the water I heard its faint cry, Ysonde.

Then first, for my heart was full, I cast myself down upon my face calling on her name. My eyes were wet when I raised my head,—for the spray from the shore was drifting in again,—and my heart beat heavily; "No more, no more." But my heart lied, for even as I raised my face to the calm stars,

I saw her standing still, close beside me; and very gently I spoke her name, Ysonde. She held out both hands.

"I was lonely," she said, "and I went to the glade, but the forest is full of frightened creatures and they frightened me. Has anything happened in the woods? The deer are running toward the heights."

Her hand still lay in mine as we moved along the shore, and the lapping of the water on rock and shallow was no lower than our voices.

"Why did you leave me without a word, there at the fountain in the glade?" she said.

"I leave you!——"

"Indeed you did, running swiftly with your dog, plunging through thickets and brush,—oh—you frightened me."

"Did I leave you so?"

"Yes—after——"

"After?"

"You had kissed me——"

Then we leaned down together and looked into the black water set with stars, just as we had bent together over the fountain in the glade.

"Do you remember?" I asked.

"Yes. See, the water is inlaid with silver stars,—everywhere white lilies floating and the stars below, deep, deep down."

"What is the flower you hold in your hand?"

"White water-lotus."

"Tell me about Yue-Laou, Dzil Nbu of the Kuen-Yuin," I whispered, lifting her head so I could see her eyes.

"Would it please you to hear?"

"Yes, Ysonde."

"All that I know is yours, now, as I am yours, all that I am. Bend closer. Is it of Yue-Laou you would know? Yue-Laou is Dzil-Nbu of the Kuen-

Yuin. He lived in the Moon. He is old—very, very old, and once, before he came to rule the Kuen-Yuin, he was the old man who unites with a silken cord all predestined couples, after which nothing can prevent their union. But all that is changed since he came to rule the Kuen-Yuin. Now he has perverted the Xin,—the good genii of China,—and has fashioned from their warped bodies a monster which he calls the Xin. This monster is horrible, for it not only lives in its own body, but it has thousands of loathsome satellites,—living creatures without mouths, blind, that move when the Xin moves, like a mandarin and his escort. They are part of the Xin although they are not attached. Yet if one of these satellites is injured the Xin writhes with agony. It is fearful—this huge living bulk and these creatures spread out like severed fingers that wriggle around a hideous hand."

"Who told you this?"

"My step-father."

"Do you believe it?"

"Yes. I have seen one of the Xin's creatures."

"Where, Ysonde?"

"Here in these woods."

"Then you believe there is a Xin here?"

"There must be,—perhaps in the lake——"

"Oh, Xins inhabit lakes?"

"Yes, and the seven seas. I am not afraid here."

"Why?"

"Because I wear the symbol of the Kuen-Yuin."

"Then I am not safe," I smiled.

"Yes you are, for I hold you in my arms. Shall I tell you more about the Xin? When the Xin is about to do to death a man, the Yeth-hounds gallop through the night——"

"What are the Yeth-hounds, Ysonde?"

"The Yeth-hounds are dogs without heads. They

are the spirits of murdered children, which pass through the woods at night, making a wailing noise."

"Do you believe this?"

"Yes, for I have worn the yellow lotus——"

"The yellow lotus——"

"Yellow is the symbol of faith——"

"Where?"

"In Yian," she said faintly.

After a while I said, "Ysonde, you know there is a God?"

"God and Xangi are one."

"Have you ever heard of Christ?"

"No," she answered softly.

The wind began again among the tree tops. I felt her hands closing in mine.

"Ysonde," I asked again, "do you believe in sorcerers?"

"Yes, the Kuen-Yuin are sorcerers; Yue-Laou is a sorcerer."

"Have you seen sorcery?"

"Yes, the reptile satellite of the Xin——"

"Anything else?"

"My charm,—the golden ball, the symbol of the Kuen-Yuin. Have you seen it change,—have you seen the reptiles writhe——?"

"Yes," said I shortly, and then remained silent, for a sudden shiver of apprehension had seized me. Barris also had spoken gravely, ominously of the sorcerers, the Kuen-Yuin, and I had seen with my own eyes the graven reptiles turning and twisting on the glowing globe.

"Still," said I aloud, "God lives and sorcery is but a name."

"Ah," murmured Ysonde, drawing closer to me, "they say, in Yian, the Kuen-Yuin live; God is but a name."

"They lie," I whispered fiercely.

"Be careful," she pleaded, "they may hear you. Remember that you have the mark of the dragon's claw on your brow."

"What of it?" I asked, thinking also of the white mark on Barris' arm.

"Ah, don't you know that those who are marked with the dragon's claw are followed by Yue-Laou, for good or for evil,—and the evil means death if you offend him?"

"Do you believe that!" I asked impatiently.

"I know it," she sighed.

"Who told you all this? Your step-father? What in Heaven's name is he then,—a Chinaman!"

"I don't know; he is not like you."

"Have—have you told him anything about me?"

"He knows about you—no, I have told him nothing,—ah, what is this—see—it is a cord, a cord of silk about your neck—and about mine!"

"Where did that come from?" I asked astonished.

"It must be—it must be Yue-Laou who binds me to you,—it is as my step-father said—he said Yue-Laou would bind us——"

"Nonsense," I said almost roughly, and seized the silken cord, but to my amazement it melted in my hand like smoke.

"What is all this damnable jugglery!" I whispered angrily, but my anger vanished as the words were spoken, and a convulsive shudder shook me to the feet. Standing on the shore of the lake, a stone's throw away, was a figure, twisted and bent,—a little old man, blowing sparks from a live coal which he held in his naked hand. The coal glowed with increasing radiance, lighting up the skull-like face above it, and threw a red glow over the sands at his feet. But the face!—the ghastly Chinese face on which the light flickered,—and the snaky slitted eyes, sparkling as the coal glowed hotter. Coal! It was

not a coal but a golden globe staining the night with crimson flames,—it was the symbol of the Kuen-Yuin.

"See! See!" gasped Ysonde, trembling violently, "see the moon rising from between his fingers! Oh I thought it was my step-father and it is Yue-Laou the Maker of Moons—no! no! it is my step-father—ah God! they are the same!"

Frozen with terror I stumbled to my knees, groping for my revolver which bulged in my coat pocket; but something held me—something which bound me like a web in a thousand strong silky meshes. I struggled and turned but the web grew tighter; it was over us—all around us, drawing, pressing us into each other's arms until we lay side by side, bound hand and body and foot, palpitating, panting like a pair of netted pigeons.

And the creature on the shore below! What was my horror to see a moon, huge, silvery, rise like a bubble from between his fingers, mount higher, higher into the still air and hang aloft in the midnight sky, while another moon rose from his fingers, and another and yet another until the vast span of Heaven was set with moons and the earth sparkled like a diamond in the white glare.

A great wind began to blow from the east and it bore to our ears a long mournful howl,—a cry so unearthly that for a moment our hearts stopped.

"The Yeth-hounds!" sobbed Ysonde, "do you hear!—they are passing through the forest! The Xin is near!"

Then all around us in the dry sedge grasses came a rustle as if some small animals were creeping, and a damp acrid odor filled the air. I knew the smell, I saw the spidery crab-like creatures swarm out around me and drag their soft yellow hairy bodies across the shrinking grasses. They passed, hundreds of them,

poisoning the air, tumbling, writhing, crawling with their blind mouthless heads raised. Birds, half asleep and confused by the darkness, fluttered away before them in helpless fright, rabbits sprang from their forms, weasels glided away like flying shadows. What remained of the forest creatures rose and fled from the loathsome invasion; I heard the squeak of a terrified hare, the snort of stampeding deer, and the lumbering gallop of a bear; and all the time I was choking, half suffocated by the poisoned air.

Then, as I struggled to free myself from the silken snare about me, I cast a glance of deadly fear at the sorcerer below, and at the same moment I saw him turn in his tracks.

"Halt!" cried a voice from the bushes.

"Barris!" I shouted, half leaping up in my agony.

I saw the sorcerer spring forward, I heard the bang! bang! bang! of a revolver, and, as the sorcerer fell on the water's edge, I saw Barris jump out into the white glare and fire again, once, twice, three times, into the writhing figure at his feet.

Then an awful thing occurred. Up out of the black lake reared a shadow, a nameless shapeless mass, headless, sightless, gigantic, gaping from end to end.

A great wave struck Barris and he fell, another washed him up on the pebbles, another whirled him back into the water and then,—and then the thing fell over him,—and I fainted.

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This, then, is all that I know concerning Yue-Laou and the Xin. I do not fear the ridicule of scientists or of the press for I have told the truth. Barris is gone, and the thing that killed him is alive to-day in the Lake of the Stars while the spider-like

satellites roam through the Cardinal Woods. The game has fled, the forests around the lake are empty of any living creatures save the reptiles that creep when the Xin moves in the depths of the lake.

General Drummond knows what he has lost in Barris, and we, Pierpont and I, know what we have lost also. His will we found in the drawer, the key of which he had handed me. It was wrapped in a bit of paper on which was written;

"Yue-Laou the sorcerer is here in the Cardinal Woods. I must kill him or he will kill me. He made and gave to me the woman I loved,—he made her, —I saw him,—he made her out of a white water-lotus bud. When our child was born, he came again before me and demanded from me the woman I loved. Then, when I refused, he went away, and that night my wife and child vanished from my side, and I found upon her pillow a white lotus bud. Roy, the woman of your dream, Ysonde, may be my child. God help you if you love her, for Yue-Laou will give,—and take away, as though he were Xangi, which is God. I will kill Yue-Laou before I leave this forest,—or he will kill me.

"FRANKLIN BARRIS."

Now the world knows what Barris thought of the Kuen-Yuin and of Yue-Laou. I see that the newspapers are just becoming excited over the glimpses that Li-Hung-Chang has afforded them of Black Cathay and the demons of the Kuen-Yuin. The Kuen-Yuin are on the move.

Pierpont and I have dismantled the shooting-box in the Cardinal Woods. We hold ourselves ready at a moment's notice to join and lead the first Government party to drag the Lake of the Stars and cleanse the forest of the crab reptiles. But it will be necessary that a large force assembles, and a well-armed force,

for we never have found the body of Yue-Laou, and, living or dead, I fear him. Is he living?

Pierpont, who found Ysonde and myself lying unconscious on the lake shore, the morning after, saw no trace of corpse or blood on the sands. He may have fallen into the lake, but I fear and Ysonde fears that he is alive. We never were able to find either her dwelling place or the glade and the fountain again. The only thing that remains to her of her former life is the gold serpent in the Metropolitan Museum and her golden globe, the symbol of the Kuen-Yuin; but the latter no longer changes color.

IV.

THE HOLLOW LAND

William Morris

(1856)

Editor's Note

I *deem it most fitting* that the work of William Morris be represented in this initial volume of *Great Short Novels of Adult Fantasy,* as most historians and collectors of fantasy literature agree that the major tradition of the genre stems directly from his pioneering romances. I have elsewhere called William Morris "the man who invented fantasy," and the appellation, while dramatic, is not inaccurate.

Morris was born in 1834 and died in 1896. He was a giant of a man, a curious combination of dreamer and doer, and a one-man artistic renaissance. Poet, translator, painter, publisher, socialist, designer, artist, novelist, utopian political theorist—William Morris was many men rolled into one, and in his sixty-two years he lived several lifetimes and many careers.

Most people who know him at all these days know Morris as a famous Pre-Raphaelite painter, poet, and designer of tapestries, wallpaper or furniture. Others will know him as the founder of the Kelmscott Press, printer-designer of the most beautiful books printed in his age. Some will know him as a great early exponent of Socialism and one of the first editors of *Commonweal.*

But we in the world of fantastic literature know him and revere him as the Great Romancer, whose enchanting novels of imaginary Medieval worlds led

to the tradition that includes Lord Dunsany, James Branch Cabell, E. R. Eddison, Clark Ashton Smith, Robert E. Howard, C. S. Lewis, and J. R. R. Tolkien.

The greatest of his romances have already been revived in the Adult Fantasy Series: *The Wood Beyond the World* (1895) we included in our first year, and *The Well at the World's End* (1896) followed in our second. Last year we revived *The Water of the Wondrous Isles* (1897), and this year we will publish *The Roots of the Mountain.* It is my intention to continue this program until the complete fantastic romances of William Morris are all in print again, under the Sign of the Unicorn's Head.

Morris wrote very little short fiction, but happily there is *The Hollow Land,* which appeared when he was 22 and a student at Oxford. Not only is it one of the very earliest of his tales, but one of the most imaginative. Like an exquisite chalice of medieval silver, it is filled to the brim with wonder and magic and singing enchantment.

—L/C

THE HOLLOW LAND

"We find in ancient story wonders many told,
Of heroes in great glory, with spirit free and bold;
Of joyances and high-tides, of weeping and of woe,
Of noble recken striving, mote ye now wonders know."
Niebelungen Lied (see Carlyle's Miscellanies)

I

STRUGGLING IN THE WORLD

Do you know where it is—the Hollow Land?

I have been looking for it now so long, trying to find it again—the Hollow Land—for there I saw my love first.

I wish to tell you how I found it first of all; but I am old, my memory fails me: you must wait and let me think if I perchance can tell you how it happened.

Yea, in my ears is a confused noise of trumpet-blasts singing over desolate moors, in my ears and eyes a clashing and clanging of horse-hoofs, a ringing and glittering of steel; drawn-back lips, set teeth, shouts, shrieks, and curses.

How was it that no one of us ever found it till that day? for it is near our country: but what time have we to look for it, or any good thing; with such biting carking cares hemming us in on every side—cares about great things—mighty things: mighty things, O

my brothers! or rather little things enough, if we only knew it.

Lives passed in turmoil, in making one another unhappy; in bitterest misunderstanding of our brothers' hearts, making those sad whom God has not made sad,—alas, alas! What chance for any of us to find the Hollow Land? What time even to look for it?

Yet who has not dreamed of it? Who, half miserable yet the while, for that he knows it is but a dream, has not felt the cool waves round his feet, the roses crowning him, and through the leaves of beech and lime the many whispering winds of the Hollow Land?

Now, my name was Florian, and my house was the house of the Lilies; and of that house was my father lord, and after him my eldest brother Arnald; and me they called Florian de Liliis.

Moreover, when my father was dead, there arose a feud between the Lilies' house and Red Harald; and this that follows is the history of it.

Lady Swanhilda, Red Harald's mother, was a widow, with one son, Red Harald; and when she had been in widowhood two years, being of princely blood, and besides comely and fierce, King Urrayne sent to demand her in marriage. And I remember seeing the procession leaving the town, when I was quite a child; and many young knights and squires attended the Lady Swanhilda as pages, and amongst them, Arnald, my eldest brother.

And as I gazed out of the window, I saw him walking by the side of her horse, dressed in white and gold very delicately; but as he went it chanced that he stumbled. Now he was one of those that held a golden canopy over the lady's head, so that it now sunk into wrinkles, and the lady had to bow her head full low, and even then the gold brocade caught in one of the long slim gold flowers that were wrought round about the crown she wore. She flushed up in

her rage, and her smooth face went suddenly into the carven wrinkles of a wooden water-spout, and she caught at the brocade with her left hand, and pulled it away furiously, so that the warp and woof were twisted out of their place, and many gold threads were left dangling about the crown; but Swanhilda stared about when she rose, then smote my brother across the mouth with her gilded sceptre, and the red blood flowed all about his garments; yet he only turned exceeding pale, and dared say no word, though he was heir to the house of the Lilies: but my small heart swelled with rage, and I vowed revenge, and, as it seems, he did too.

So when Swanhilda had been queen three years, she suborned many of King Urrayne's knights and lords, and slew her husband as he slept, and reigned in his stead. And her son, Harald, grew up to manhood, and was counted a strong knight, and well spoken of, by then I first put on my armour.

Then, one night, as I lay dreaming, I felt a hand laid on my face, and starting up saw Arnald before me fully armed. He said, "Florian, rise and arm." I did so, all but my helm, as he was.

He kissed me on the forehead; his lips felt hot and dry; and when they bought torches, and I could see his face plainly, I saw he was very pale. He said:

"Do you remember, Florian, this day sixteen years ago? It is a long time, but I shall never forget it unless this night blots out its memory."

I knew what he meant, and because my heart was wicked, I rejoiced exceedingly at the thought of vengeance, so that I could not speak, but only laid my palm across his lips.

"Good; you have a good memory, Florian. See now, I waited long and long: I said at first, I forgive her; but when the news came concerning the death of the king, and how that she was shameless, I said

I will take it as a sign, if God does not punish her within certain years, that he means me to do so; and I have been watching and watching now these two years for an opportunity, and behold it is come at last; and I think God has certainly given her into our hands, for she rests this night, this very Christmas eve, at a small walled town on the frontier, not two hours' gallop from this; they keep little ward there, and the night is wild: moreover, the prior of a certain house of monks, just without the walls, is my fast friend in this matter, for she has done him some great injury. In the courtyard below a hundred and fifty knights and squires, all faithful and true, are waiting for us: one moment and we shall be gone."

Then we both knelt down, and prayed God to give her into our hands: we put on our helms, and went down into the courtyard.

It was the first time I expected to use a sharp sword in anger, and I was full of joy as the muffled thunder of our horse-hoofs rolled through the bitter winter night.

In about an hour and a half we had crossed the frontier, and in half an hour more the greater part had halted in a wood near the Abbey, while I and a few others went up to the Abbey gates, and knocked loudly four times with my sword-hilt, stamping on the ground meantime. A long, low whistle answered me from within, which I in my turn answered: then the wicket opened, and a monk came out, holding a lantern. He seemed yet in the prime of life, and was a tall, powerful man. He held the lantern to my face, then smiled, and said, "The banners hang low." I gave the countersign, "The crest is lopped off." "Good my son," said he; "the ladders are within here. I dare not trust any of the brethren to carry them for you, though they love not the witch either, but are timorsome."

"No matter," I said, "I have men here." So they entered and began to shoulder the tall ladders: the prior was very busy. "You will find them just the right length, my son, trust me for that." He seemed quite a jolly, pleasant man, I could not understand his nursing furious revenge; but his face darkened strangely whenever he happened to mention her name.

As we were starting he came and stood outside the gate, and putting his lantern down that the light of it might not confuse his sight, looked earnestly into the night, then said: "The wind has fallen, the snow flakes get thinner and smaller every moment, in an hour it will be freezing hard, and will be quite clear; everything depends upon the surprise being complete; stop a few minutes yet, my son." He went away chuckling, and returned presently with two more sturdy monks carrying something: they threw their burdens down before my feet, they consisted of all the white albs in the abbey: "There, trust an old man, who has seen more than one stricken fight in his carnal days; let the men who scale the walls put these over their arms, and they will not be seen in the least. God make your sword sharp, my son."

So we departed, and when I met Arnald again, he said that what the prior had done was well thought of; so we agreed that I should take thirty men, an old squire of our house, well skilled in war, along with them, scale the walls as quietly as possible, and open the gates to the rest.

I set off accordingly, after that with low laughing we had put the albs all over us, wrapping the ladders also in white. Then we crept very warily and slowly up to the wall; the moat was frozen over, and on the ice the snow lay quite thick; we all thought that the guards must be careless enough, when they did not even take the trouble to break the ice in the moat.

So we listened—there was no sound at all, the Christmas midnight mass had long ago been over, it was nearly three o'clock, and the moon began to clear, there was scarce any snow falling now, only a flake or two from some low hurrying cloud or other: the wind sighed gently about the round towers there, but it was bitter cold, for it had begun to freeze again; we listened for some minutes, about a quarter of an hour I think, then at a sign from me, they raised the ladders carefully, muffled as they were at the top with swathings of wool. I mounted first, old Squire Hugh followed last; noiselessly we ascended, and soon stood altogether on the walls; then we carefully lowered the ladders again with long ropes; we got our swords and axes from out of the folds of our priests' raiments, and set forward, till we reached the first tower along the wall; the door was open, in the chamber at the top there was a fire slowly smouldering, nothing else; we passed through it, and began to go down the spiral staircase, I first, with my axe shortened in my hand.—"What if we were surprised there," I thought, and I longed to be out in the air again;—"What if the door were fast at the bottom."

As we passed the second chamber, we heard some one within snoring loudly: I looked in quietly, and saw a big man with long black hair, that fell off his pillow and swept the ground, lying snoring, with his nose turned up and his mouth open, but he seemed so sound asleep that we did not stop to slay him.—Praise be!—the door was open, without even a whispered word, without a pause, we went on along the streets, on the side that the drift had been on, because our garments were white, for the wind being very strong all that day, the houses on that side had caught in their cornices and carvings, and on the rough stone and wood of them, so much snow, that except here and there where the black walls grinned

out, they were quite white; no man saw us as we stole along, noiselessly because of the snow, till we stood within 100 yards of the gates and their house of guard. And we stood because we heard the voice of some one singing:

"Queen Mary's crown was gold,
King Joseph's crown was red,
But Jesus' crown was diamond
That lit up all the bed
Mariae Virginis."

So they had some guards after all; this was clearly the sentinel that sang to keep the ghosts off;—Now for a fight.—We drew nearer, a few yards nearer, then stopped to free ourselves from our monks' clothes.

"Ships sail through the Heaven
With red banners dress'd,
Carrying the planets seven
To see the white breast
Mariae Virginis."

Thereat he must have seen the waving of some alb or other as it shivered down to the ground, for his spear fell with a thud, and he seemed to be standing open-mouthed, thinking something about ghosts; then, plucking up heart of grace, he roared out like ten bull-calves, and dashed into the guard-house.

We followed smartly, but without hurry, and came up to the door of it just as some dozen half-armed men came tumbling out under our axes: thereupon, while our men slew them, I blew a great blast upon my horn, and Hugh with some others drew bolt and bar and swung the gates wide open.

Then the men in the guard-house understood they were taken in a trap, and began to stir with great confusion; so lest they should get quite waked and

armed, I left Hugh at the gates with ten men, and myself led the rest into that house. There while we slew all those that yielded not, came Arnald with the others, bringing our horses with them; then all the enemy threw their arms down. And we counted our prisoners and found them over fourscore; therefore, not knowing what to do with them (for they were too many to guard, and it seemed unknightly to slay them all), we sent up some bowmen to the walls, and turning our prisoners out of gates, bid them run for their lives, which they did fast enough, not knowing our numbers, and our men sent a few flights of arrows among them that they might not be undeceived.

Then the one or two prisoners that we had left, told us, when we had crossed our axes over their heads, that the people of the good town would not willingly fight us, in that they hated the queen; that she was guarded at the palace by some fifty knights, and that beside, there were no others to oppose us in the town; so we set out for the palace, spear in hand.

We had not gone far, before we heard some knights coming, and soon, in a turn of the long street, we saw them riding towards us; when they caught sight of us they seemed astonished, drew rein, and stood in some confusion.

We did not slacken our pace for an instant, but rode right at them with a yell, to which I lent myself with all my heart.

After all they did not run away, but waited for us with their spears held out; I missed the man I had marked, or hit him rather just on the top of the helm; he bent back, and the spear slipped over his head, but my horse still kept on, and I felt presently such a crash that I reeled in my saddle, and felt mad. He had lashed out at me with his sword as I came on, hitting me in the ribs (for my arm was raised), but only flatlings.

I was quite wild with rage, I turned, almost fell upon him, caught him by the neck with both hands, and threw him under the horse-hoofs, sighing with fury: I heard Arnald's voice close to me, "Well fought, Florian": and I saw his great stern face bare among the iron, for he had made a vow in remembrance of that blow always to fight unhelmed; I saw his great sword swinging, in wide gyres, and hissing as it started up, just as if it were alive and liked it.

So joy filled all my soul, and I fought with my heart, till the big axe I swung felt like nothing but a little hammer in my hand, except for its bitterness: and as for the enemy, they went down like grass, so that we destroyed them utterly, for those knights would neither yield nor fly, but died as they stood, so that some fifteen of our men also died there.

Then at last we came to the palace, where some grooms and such like kept the gates armed, but some ran, and some we took prisoners, one of whom died for sheer terror in our hands, being stricken by no wound; for he thought we would eat him.

These prisoners we questioned concerning the queen, and so entered the great hall.

There Arnald sat down in the throne on the dais, and laid his naked sword before him on the table: and on each side of him sat such knights as there was room for, and the others stood round about, while I took ten men, and went to look for Swanhilda.

I found her soon, sitting by herself in a gorgeous chamber. I almost pitied her when I saw her looking so utterly desolate and despairing; her beauty too had faded, deep lines cut through her face. But when I entered she knew who I was, and her look of intense hatred was so fiend-like, that it changed my pity into horror of her.

"Knight," she said, "who are you, and what do you want, thus discourteously entering my chamber?"

"I am Florian de Liliis, and I am to conduct you to judgment."

She sprang up, "Curse you and your whole house, —you I hate worse than any,—girl's face,—guards! guards!" and she stamped on the ground, her veins on the forehead swelled, her eyes grew round and flamed out, as she kept crying for her guards, stamping the while, for she seemed quite mad.

Then at last she remembered that she was in the power of her enemies, she sat down, and lay with her face between her hands, and wept passionately.

"Witch,"—I said between my closed teeth, "will you come, or must we carry you down to the great hall?"

Neither would she come, but sat there, clutching at her dress and tearing her hair.

Then I said, "Bind her, and carry her down." And they did so.

I watched Arnald as we came in, there was no triumph on his stern white face, but resolution enough, he had made up his mind.

They placed her on a seat in the midst of the hall over against the dais. He said, "Unbind her, Florian." They did so, she raised her face, and glared defiance at us all, as though she would die queenly after all.

Then rose up Arnald and said, "Queen Swanhilda, we judge you guilty of death, and because you are a queen and of a noble house, you shall be slain by my knightly sword, and I will even take the reproach of slaying a woman, for no other hand than mine shall deal the blow."

Then she said, "O false knight, show your warrant from God, man, or devil."

"This warrant from God, Swanhilda," he said, holding up his sword, "listen!—fifteen years ago, when I was just winning my spurs, you struck me, disgracing me before all the people; you cursed me, and meant

that curse well enough. Men of the house of the Lilies, what sentence for that?"

"Death!" they said.

"Listen!—afterwards you slew my cousin, your husband, treacherously, in the most cursed way, stabbing him in the throat, as the stars in the canopy above him looked down on the shut eyes of him. Men of the house of Lily, what sentence for that?"

"Death!" they said.

"Do you hear them, Queen? There is warrant from man; for the devil, I do not reverence him enough to take warrant from him, but, as I look at that face of yours, I think that even he has left you."

And indeed just then all her pride seemed to leave her, she fell from the chair, and wallowed on the ground moaning, she wept like a child, so that the tears lay on the oak floor; she prayed for another month of life; she came to me and kneeled, and kissed my feet, and prayed piteously, so that water ran out of her mouth.

But I shuddered, and drew away; it was like having an adder about one; I could have pitied her had she died bravely, but for one like her to whine and whine!—pah!—

Then from the dais rang Arnald's voice terrible, much changed. "Let there be an end of all this." And he took his sword and strode through the hall towards her; she rose from the ground and stood up, stooping a little, her head sunk between her shoulders, her black eyes turned up and gleaming, like a tigress about to spring. When he came within some six paces of her something in his eye daunted her, or perhaps the flashing of his terrible sword in the torch-light; she threw her arms up with a great shriek, and dashed screaming about the hall. Arnald's lip never once curled with any scorn, no line in his face changed: he said, "Bring her here and bind her."

But when one came up to her to lay hold on her she first of all ran at him, hitting with her head in the belly. Then while he stood doubled up for want of breath, and staring with his head up, she caught his sword from the girdle, and cut him across the shoulders, and many others she wounded sorely before they took her.

Then Arnald stood by the chair to which she was bound, and poised his sword, and there was a great silence.

Then he said, "Men of the House of the Lilies, do you justify me in this, shall she die?" Straightway rang a great shout through the hall, but before it died away the sword had swept round, and therewithal was there no such thing as Swanhilda left upon the earth, for in no battle-field had Arnald struck truer blow. Then he turned to the few servants of the palace and said, "Go now, bury this accursed woman, for she is a king's daughter." Then to us all, "Now knights, to horse and away, that we may reach the good town by about dawn." So we mounted and rode off.

What a strange Christmas-day that was, for there, about nine o'clock in the morning, rode Red Harald into the good town to demand vengeance; he went at once to the king, and the king promised that before nightfall that very day the matter should be judged; albeit the king feared somewhat, because every third man you met in the streets had a blue cross on his shoulder, and some likeness of a lily, cut out or painted, stuck in his hat; and this blue cross and lily were the bearings of our house, called "De Liliis." Now we had seen Red Harald pass through the streets, with a white banner borne before him, to show that he came peaceably as for this time; but I know he was thinking of other things than peace.

And he was called Red Harald first at this time,

because over all his arms he wore a great scarlet cloth, that fell in heavy folds about his horse and all about him. Then, as he passed our house, some one pointed it out to him, rising there with its carving and its barred marble, but stronger than many a castle on the hill-tops, and its great overhanging battlement cast a mighty shadow down the wall and across the street; and above all rose the great tower, or banner floating proudly from the top, whereon was emblazoned on a white ground a blue cross, and on a blue ground four white lilies. And now faces were gazing from all the windows, and all the battlements were thronged; so Harald turned, and rising in his stirrups, shook his clenched fist at our house; natheless, as he did so, the east wind, coming down the street, caught up the corner of that scarlet cloth and drove it over his face, and therewithal disordering his long black hair, well nigh choked him, so that he bit both his hair and that cloth.

So from base to cope rose a mighty shout of triumph and defiance, and he passed on.

Then Arnald caused it to be cried, that all those who loved the good House of the Lilies should go to mass that morning in Saint Mary's Church, hard by our house. Now this church belonged to us, and the abbey that served it, and always we appointed the abbot of it on condition that our trumpets should sound all together when on high masses they sing the "Gloria in Excelsis." It was the largest and most beautiful of all the churches in the town, and had two exceeding high towers, which you could see from far off, even when you saw not the town or any of its other towers: and in one of these towers were twelve great bells, named after the twelve Apostles, one name being written on each one of them; as Peter, Matthew, and so on; and in the other tower was one great bell only, much larger than any of the others,

and which was called Mary. Now this bell was never rung but when our house was in great danger, and it had this legend on it, "When Mary rings the earth shakes;" and indeed from this we took our war cry, which was, "Mary rings;" somewhat justifiable indeed, for the last time that Mary rang, on that day before nightfall there were four thousand bodies to be buried, which bodies wore neither cross nor lily.

So Arnald gave me in charge to tell the abbot to cause Mary to be tolled for an hour before mass that day.

The abbot leaned on my shoulder as I stood within the tower and looked at the twelve monks laying their hands to the ropes. Far up in the dimness I saw the wheel before it began to swing round about; then it moved a little; the twelve men bent down to the earth and a roar rose that shook the tower from base to spirevane: backwards and forwards swept the wheel, as Mary now looked downwards towards earth, now looked up at the shadowy cone of the spire, shot across by bars of light from the dormers.

And the thunder of Mary was caught up by the wind and carried through all the country; and when the good man heard it, he said goodbye to wife and child, slung his shield behind his back, and set forward with his spear sloped over his shoulder, and many a time, as he walked toward the good town, he tightened the belt that went about his waist, that he might stride the faster, so long and furiously did Mary toll.

And before the great bell, Mary, had ceased ringing, all the ways were full of armed men.

But at each door of the church of Saint Mary stood a row of men armed with axes, and when any came, meaning to go into the church, the two first of these would hold their axes (whose helves were about four feet long) over his head, and would ask him, "Who

went over the moon last night?" then if he answered nothing or at random they would bid him turn back, which he for the more part would be ready enough to do; but some, striving to get through that row of men, were slain outright; but if he were one of those that were friends to the House of the Lilies he would answer to that question, "Mary and John."

By the time the mass began the whole church was full, and in the nave and transept thereof were three thousand men, all of our house and all armed. But Arnald and myself, and Squire Hugh, and some others sat under a gold-fringed canopy near the choir; and the abbot said mass, having his mitre on his head. Yet, as I watched him, it seemed to me that he must have something on beneath his priest's vestments, for he looked much fatter than usual, being really a tall lithe man.

Now, as they sung the "Kyrie," some one shouted from the other end of the church, "My lord Arnald, they are slaying our people without;" for, indeed, all the square about the church was full of our people, who for the press had not been able to enter, and were standing there in no small dread of what might come to pass.

Then the abbot turned round from the altar, and began to fidget with the fastenings of his rich robes.

And they made a lane for us up to the west door; then I put on my helm and we began to go up the nave, then suddenly the singing of the monks and all stopped. I heard a clinking and a buzz of voices in the choir. I turned, and saw that the bright noon sun was shining on the gold of the priest's vestments, as they lay on the floor, and on the mail that the priests carried.

So we stopped, the choir gates swung open, and the abbot marched out at the head of *his* men, all fully

armed, and began to strike up the psalm "Exsurgat Deus."

When we got to the west door, there was indeed a tumult, but as yet no slaying; the square was all a-flicker with steel, and we beheld a great body of knights, at the head of them Red Harald and the king, standing over against us; but our people, pressed against the houses, and into the corners of the square, were, some striving to enter the doors, some beside themselves with rage, shouting out to the others to charge; withal, some were pale and some were red with the blood that had gathered to the wrathful faces of them.

Then said Arnald to those about him, "Lift me up." So they laid a great shield on two lances, and these four men carried, and thereon stood Arnald, and gazed about him.

Now the king was unhelmed, and his white hair (for he was an old man) flowed down behind him on to his saddle; but Arnald's hair was cut short, and was red.

And all the bells rang.

Then the king said, "O Arnald of the Lilies, will you settle this quarrel by the judgment of God?" And Arnald thrust up his chin, and said, "Yea." "How then," said the king, "and where?" "Will it please you try now?" said Arnald.

Then the king understood what he meant, and took in his hand from behind tresses of his long white hair, twisting them round his hand in his wrath, but yet said no word, till I suppose his hair put him in mind of something, and he raised it in both his hands above his head, and shouted out aloud, "O knights, hearken to this traitor." Whereat, indeed, the lances began to move ominously. But Arnald spoke.

"O you king and lords, what have we to do with you? Were we not free in the old time, up among the

hills there? Wherefore give way, and we will go to the hills again; and if any man try to stop us, his blood be on his own head; wherefore now," (and he turned) "all you House of the Lily, both soldiers and monks, let us go forth together fearing nothing, for I think there is not bone enough or muscle enough in these fellows here that have a king that they should stop us withal, but only skin and fat."

And truly, no man dared to stop us, and we went.

II

FAILING IN THE WORLD

Now at that time we drove cattle in Red Harald's land.

And we took no hoof but from the Lords and rich men, but of these we had a mighty drove, both oxen and sheep, and horses, and besides, even hawks and hounds, and huntsman or two to take care of them.

And, about noon, we drew away from the cornlands that lay beyond the pastures, and mingled with them, and reached a wide moor, which was called "Goliath's Land." I scarce know why, except that it belonged neither to Red Harald or us, but was debatable.

And the cattle began to go slowly, and our horses were tired, and the sun struck down very hot upon us, for there was no shadow, and the day was cloudless.

All about the edge of the moor, except on the side from which we had come was a rim of hills, not very high, but very rocky and steep, otherwise the moor itself was flat; and through these hills was one pass, guarded by our men, which pass led to the Hill castle of the Lilies.

It was not wonderful, that of this moor many wild stories were told, being such a strange lonely place, some of them one knew, alas! to be over true. In the old time, before we went to the good town, this moor had been the mustering place of our people, and our house had done deeds enough of blood and horror to turn our white lilies red, and our blue cross to a fiery one. But some of those wild tales I never believed; they had to do mostly with men losing their way without any apparent cause, (for there were plenty of landmarks,) finding some well-known spot, and then, just beyond it, a place they had never even dreamed of.

"Florian! Florian!" said Arnald, "for God's sake stop! as every one else is stopping to look at the hills yonder; I always thought there was a curse upon us. What does God mean by shutting us up here? Look at the cattle; O Christ, they have found it out too! See, some of them are turning to run back again towards Harald's land. Oh! unhappy, unhappy, from that day forward!"

He leaned forward, rested his head on his horse's neck, and wept like a child.

I felt so irritated with him, that I could almost have slain him then and there. Was he mad? had these wild doings of ours turned his strong wise head?

"Are you my brother Arnald, that I used to think such a grand man when I was a boy?" I said, "or are you changed too, like everybody, and everything else? What do *you* mean?"

"Look! look!" he said, grinding his teeth in agony.

I raised my eyes: where was the one pass between the rim of stern rocks? Nothing: the enemy behind us—that grim wall in front: what wonder that each man looked in his fellow's face for help, and found it not. Yet I refused to believe that there was any

truth either in the wild stories that I had heard when I was a boy, or in this story told me so clearly by my eyes now.

I called out cheerily, "Hugh, come here!" He came. "What do you think of this? Some mere dodge on Harald's part? Are we cut off?"

"Think! Sir Florian? God forgive me for ever thinking at all; I have given up that long and long ago, because thirty years ago I thought this, that the House of Lilies would deserve anything in the way of bad fortune that God would send them: so I gave up thinking, and took to fighting. But if you think that Harald had anything to do with this, why—why—in God's name, I wish *I* could think so!"

I felt a dull weight on my heart. Had our house been the devil's servants all along? I thought we were God's servants.

The day was very still, but what little wind there was, was at our backs. I watched Hugh's face, not being able to answer him. He was the cleverest man at war that I have known, either before or since that day; sharper than any hound in ear and scent, clearer sighted than any eagle; he was listening now intently. I saw a slight smile cross his face; heard him mutter, "Yes! I think so: verily that is better, a great deal better." Then he stood up in his stirrups, and shouted, "Hurrah for the Lilies! Mary rings!" "Mary rings!" I shouted, though I did not know the reason for his exultation: my brother lifted his head, and smiled too, grimly. Then as I listened I heard clearly the sound of a trumpet, and enemy's trumpet too.

"After all, it was only mist, or some such thing," I said, for the pass between the hills was clear enough now.

"Hurrah! only mist," said Arnald, quite elated; "Mary rings!" and we all began to think of fighting: for after all what joy is equal to that?

There were five hundred of us; two hundred spears, the rest archers; and both archers and men at arms were picked men.

"How many of them are we to expect?" said I.

"Not under a thousand, certainly, probably more, Sir Florian." (My brother Arnald, by the way, had knighted me before we left the good town, and Hugh liked to give me the handle to my name. How was it, by the way, that no one had ever made *him* a knight?)

"Let every one look to his arms and horse, and come away from these silly cows' sons!" shouted Arnald.

Hugh said, "They will be here in an hour, fair Sir."

So we got clear of the cattle, and dismounted, and both ourselves took food and drink, and our horses; afterwards we tightened our saddle-girths, shook our great pots of helmets on, except Arnald, whose rusty-red hair had been his only head-piece in battle for years and years, and stood with our spears close by our horses, leaving room for the archers to retreat between our ranks; and they got their arrows ready, and planted their stakes before a little peat moss: and there we waited, and saw their pennons at last floating high above the corn of the fertile land, then heard their many horse-hoofs ring upon the hard-parched moor, and the archers began to shoot.

It had been a strange battle; we had never fought better, and yet withal it had ended in a retreat; indeed all along every man but Arnald and myself, even Hugh, had been trying at least to get the enemy between him and the way toward the pass; and now we were all drifting that way, the enemy trying to cut us off, but never able to stop us, because he could only throw small bodies of men in our way, whom we scattered and put to flight in their turn.

I never cared less for my life than then; indeed, in spite of all my boasting and hardness of belief, I should have been happy to have died, such a strange weight of apprehension was on me; and yet I got no scratch even. I had soon put off my great helm, and was fighting in my mail-coif only: and here I swear that three knights together charged me, aiming at my bare face, yet never touched me. For, as for one, I put his lance aside with my sword, and the other two in some most wonderful manner got their spears locked in each other's armour, and so had to submit to be knocked off their horses.

And we still neared the pass, and began to see distinctly the ferns that grew on the rocks, and the fair country between the rift in them, spreading out there, blue-shadowed.

Whereupon came a great rush of men of both sides, striking side blows at each other, spitting, cursing, and shrieking, as they tore away like a herd of wild hogs. So, being careless of life, as I said, I drew rein, and turning my horse, waited quietly for them. And I knotted the reins, and laid them on the horse's neck, and stroked him, that he whinnied, then got both my hands to my sword.

Then, as they came on, I noted hurriedly that the first man was one of Arnald's men, and one of our men behind him leaned forward to prod him with his spear, but could not reach so far, till he himself was run through the eye with a spear, and throwing his arms up fell dead with a shriek. Also I noted concerning this first man that the laces of his helmet were loose, and when he saw me he lifted his *left* hand to his head, took off his helm and cast it at me, and still tore on; the helmet flew over my head, and I sitting still there, swung out, hitting him on the neck; his head flew right off, for the mail no more held than a piece of silk.

"Mary rings," and my horse whinnied again, and we both of us went at it, and fairly stopped that rout, so that there was a knot of quite close and desperate fighting, wherein we had the best of that fight and slew most of them, albeit my horse was slain and my mail-coif cut through. Then I bade a squire fetch me another horse, and began meanwhile to upbraid those knights for running in such a strange disorderly race, instead of standing and fighting cleverly.

Moreover we had drifted even in this successful fight still nearer to the pass, so that the conies who dwelt there were beginning to consider whether they should not run into their holes.

But one of those knights said: "Be not angry with me, Sir Florian, but do you think you will go to Heaven?"

"The saints! I hope so," I said, but one who stood near him whispered to him to hold his peace, so I cried out:

"O friend! I hold this world and all therein so cheap now, that I see not anything in it but shame which can any longer anger me; wherefore speak out."

"Then, Sir Florian, men say that at your christening some fiend took on him the likeness of a priest and strove to baptize you in the Devil's name, but God had mercy on you so that the fiend could not choose but baptize you in the name of the most holy Trinity: and yet men say that you hardly believe any doctrine such as other men do, and will at the end only go to Heaven round about as it were, not at all by the intercession of our Lady; they say too that you can see no ghosts or other wonders, whatever happens to other Christian men."

I smiled.—"Well, friend, I scarcely call this a disadvantage, moreover what has it to do with the matter in hand?"

How was this in Heaven's name? We had been quite still, resting while this talk was going on, but we could hear the hawks chattering from the rocks, we were so close now.

And my heart sunk within me, there was no reason why this should not be true; there was no reason why anything should not be true.

"This, Sir Florian," said the knight again, "how would you feel inclined to fight if you thought that everything about you was mere glamour; this earth here, the rocks, the sun, the sky? I do not know where I am for certain, I do not know that it is not midnight instead of undern: I do not know if I have been fighting men or only *simulacra*—but I think, we all think, that we have been led into some devil's trap or other, and—and—may God forgive me my sins!—I wish I had never been born."

There now! he was weeping—they all wept—how strange it was to see those rough, bearded men blubbering there, and snivelling till the tears ran over their armour and mingled with the blood, so that it dropped down to the earth in a dim, dull, red rain.

My eyes indeed were dry, but then so was my heart; I felt far worse than weeping came to, but nevertheless I spoke cheerily.

"Dear friends, where are your old men's hearts gone to now? See now! This is a punishment for our sins, is it? Well, for our forefathers' sins or our own? If the first, O brothers, be very sure that if we bear it manfully God will have something very good in store for us hereafter; but if for our sins, is it not certain that He cares for us yet, for note that He suffers the wicked to go their own ways pretty much; moreover brave men, brothers, ought to be the masters of *simulacra*—come, is it so hard to die once for all?"

Still no answer came from them, they sighed heavily only. I heard the sound of more than one

or two swords as they rattled back to the scabbards: nay, one knight, stripping himself of surcoat and hauberk, and drawing his dagger, looked at me with a grim smile, and said, "Sir Florian, do so!" Then he drew the dagger across his throat and he fell back dead.

They shuddered, those brave men, and crossed themselves. And I had no heart to say a word more, but mounted the horse which had been brought to me and rode away slowly for a few yards; then I became aware that there was a great silence over the whole field.

So I lifted my eyes and looked, and behold no man struck at another.

Then from out of a band of horsemen came Harald, and he was covered all over with a great scarlet cloth as before, put on over the head, and flowing all about his horse, but rent with the fight. He put off his helm and drew back his mail-coif, then took a trumpet from the hand of a herald and blew strongly.

And in the midst of his blast I heard a voice call out: "O Florian! come and speak to me for the last time!"

So when I turned I beheld Arnald standing by himself, but near him stood Hugh and ten others with drawn swords.

Then I wept, and so went to him weeping; and he said, "Thou seest, brother, that we must die, and I think by some horrible and unheard-of death, and the House of the Lilies is just dying too; and now I repent me of Swanhilda's death; now I know that it was a poor cowardly piece of revenge, instead of a brave act of justice; thus has God shown us the right.

"O Florian! curse me! So will it be straighter; truly thy mother when she bore thee did not think of this; rather saw thee in the tourney at this time, in her

fond hopes, glittering with gold and doing knightly; or else mingling thy brown locks with the golden hair of some maiden weeping for the love of thee. God forgive me! God forgive me!"

"What harm, brother?" I said, "this is only failing in the world; what if we had not failed, in a little while it would have made no difference; truly just now I felt very miserable, but now it has passed away, and I am happy."

"O brave heart!" he said, "yet we shall part just now, Florian, farewell."

"The road is long," I said, "farewell."

Then we kissed each other, and Hugh and the others wept.

Now all this time the trumpets had been ringing, ringing, great doleful peals, then they ceased, and above all sounded Red Harald's voice.

(So I looked round towards that pass, and when I looked I no longer doubted any of those wild tales of glamour concerning Goliath's Land; and for though the rocks were the same, and though the conies still stood gazing at the doors of their dwellings, though the hawks still cried out shrilly, though the fern still shook in the wind, yet beyond, oh such a land! not to be described by any because of its great beauty, lying, a great *hollow* land, the rocks going down on this side in precipices, then reaches and reaches of loveliest country, trees and flowers, and corn, then the hills, green and blue, and purple, till their ledges reached the white snowy mountains at last. Then with all manner of strange feelings, "my heart in the midst of my body was even like melting wax.")

"O you House of the Lily! you are conquered—yet I will take vengeance only on a few, therefore let all those who wish to live come and pile their swords, and shields, and helms behind me in three great

heaps, and swear fealty afterwards to me; yes, all but the false knights Arnald and Florian."

We were holding each other's hands and gazing, and we saw all our knights, yea, all but Squire Hugh and his ten heroes, pass over the field singly, or in groups of three or four, with their heads hanging down in shame, and they cast down their notched swords and dinted, lilied shields, and brave-crested helms into three great heaps, behind Red Herald, then stood behind, no man speaking to his fellow, or touching him.

Then dolefully the great trumpets sang over the dying House of the Lily, and Red Harald led his men forward, but slowly: on they came, spear and mail glittering in the sunlight; and I turned and looked at that good land, and a shuddering delight seized my soul.

But I felt my brother's hand leave mine, and saw him turn his horse's head and ride swiftly toward the pass; that was a strange pass now.

And at the edge he stopped, turned round and called out aloud, "I pray thee, Harald, forgive me! now farewell all!"

Then the horse gave one bound forward, and we heard the poor creature's scream when he felt that he must die, and we heard afterwards (for we were near enough for that even) a clang and a crash.

So I turned me about to Hugh, and he understood me though I could not speak.

We shouted all together, "Mary rings," then laid our bridles on the necks of our horses, spurred forward, and—in five minutes they were all slain, and I was down among the horse-hoofs.

Not slain though, not wounded. Red Harald smiled grimly when he saw me rise and lash out again; he and some ten others dismounted, and holding their long spears out, I went back—back, back,—I saw

what it meant, and sheathed my sword, and their laughter rolled all about me, and I too smiled.

Presently they all stopped, and I felt the last foot of turf giving under my feet; I looked down and saw the crack there widening; then in a moment I fell, and a cloud of dust and earth rolled after me; then again their mirth rose into thunder-peals of laughter. But through it all I heard Red Harald shout, "Silence! Evil dogs!"

For as I fell I stretched out my arms, and caught a tuft of yellow broom some three feet from the brow, and hung there by the hands, my feet being loose in the air.

Then Red Harald came and stood on the precipice above me, his great axe over his shoulder; and he looked down on me not ferociously, almost kindly, while the wind from the Hollow Land blew about his red raiment, tattered and dusty now.

And I felt happy, though it pained me to hold straining by the broom, yet I said, "I will hold out to the last."

It was not long, the plant itself gave way and I fell, and as I fell I fainted.

III

LEAVING THE WORLD—FYTTE THE FIRST

I had thought when I fell that I should never wake again; but I woke at last: for a long time I was quite dizzied and could see nothing at all: horrible doubts came creeping over me; I half expected to see presently great half-formed shapes come rolling up to me to crush me; some thing fiery, not strange, too utterly horrible to be strange, but utterly vile and ugly, the sight of which would have killed me when I was upon

the earth, come rolling up to torment me. In fact I doubted if I were in hell.

I knew I deserved to be, but I prayed, and then it came into my mind that I could not pray if I were in hell.

Also there seemed to be a cool green light all about me, which was sweet.

Then presently I heard a glorious voice ring out clear, close to me—

> "Christ keep the Hollow Land
> Through the sweet spring-tide,
> When the apple-blossoms bless
> The lowly bent hill side."

Thereat my eyes were slowly unsealed, and I saw the blessedest sight I have ever seen before or since: for I saw my Love.

She sat about five yards from me on a great grey stone that had much moss on it, one of the many scattered along the side of the stream by which I lay; she was clad in loose white raiment close to her hands and throat; her feet were bare, her hair hung loose a long way down, but some of it lay on her knees: I said "white" raiment, but long spikes of light scarlet went down from the throat, lost here and there in the shadows of the folds, and growing smaller and smaller, died before they reached her feet.

I was lying with my head resting on soft moss that some one had gathered and placed under me. She, when she saw me moving and awake, came and stood over me with a gracious smile.—She was so lovely and tender to look at, and so kind, yet withal no one, man or woman, had ever frightened me half so much.

She was not fair in white and red, like many beautiful women are, being rather pale, but like ivory for smoothness, and her hair was quite golden, not light yellow, but dusky golden.

I tried to get up on my feet, but was too weak, and sank back again. She said:

"No, not just yet, do not trouble yourself or try to remember anything just at present."

There withal she kneeled down, and hung over me closer.

"To-morrow you may, perhaps, have something hard to do or bear, I know, but now you must be as happy as you can be, quietly happy. Why did you start and turn pale when I came to you? Do you not know who I am? Nay, but you do, I see; and I have been waiting here so long for you; so you must have expected to see me. You cannot be frightened of me, are you?"

But I could not answer a word, but all the time strange knowledge, strange feelings were filling my brain and my heart, she said:

"You are tired; rest, and dream happily."

So she sat by me, and sang to lull me to sleep, while I turned on my elbow, and watched the waving of her throat: and the singing of all the poets I had ever heard, and of many others too, not born till years long after I was dead, floated all about me as she sang, and I did indeed dream happily.

When I awoke it was the time of the cold dawn, and the colours were gathering themselves together, whereat in fatherly approving fashion the sun sent all across the east long bars of scarlet and orange that after faded through yellow to green and blue.

And she sat by me still; I think she had been sitting there and singing all the time; all through hot yesterday, for I had been sleeping day-long and night-long, all through the falling evening under moonlight and starlight the night through.

And now it was dawn, and I think too that neither of us had moved at all; for the last thing I remembered before I went to sleep was the tips of her fingers

brushing my cheek, as she knelt over me with down-drooping arm, and still now I felt them there. Moreover she was just finishing some fainting measure that died before it had time to get painful in its passion.

Dear Lord! how I loved her! Yet did I not dare to touch her, or even speak to her. She smiled with delight when she saw I was awake again, and slid down her hand on to mine, but some shuddering dread made me draw it away again hurriedly; then I saw the smile leave her face: what would I not have given for courage to hold her body quite tight to mine? But I was so weak. She said:

"Have you been very happy?"

"Yea," I said.

It was the first word I had spoken there, and my voice sounded strange.

"Ah!" she said, "you will talk more when you get used to the air of the Hollow Land. Have you been thinking of your past life at all? If not, try to think of it. What thing in Heaven or Earth do you wish for most?"

Still I said no word; but she said in a wearied way:

"Well now, I think you will be strong enough to get to your feet and walk; take my hand and try."

Therewith she held it out: I strove hard to be brave enough to take it, but could not; I only turned away shuddering, sick, and grieved to the heart's core of me; then struggling hard with hand and knee and elbow, I scarce rose, and stood up totteringly; while she watched me sadly, still holding out her hand.

But as I rose, in my swinging to and fro the steel sheath of my sword struck her on the hand so that the blood flowed from it, which she stood looking at for a while, then dropped it downwards, and turned to look at me, for I was going.

Then as I walked she followed me, so I stopped and turned and said almost fiercely:

"I am going alone to look for my brother."

The vehemence with which I spoke, or something else, burst some blood-vessel within my throat, and we both stood there with the blood running from us on to the grass and summer flowers.

She said: "If you find him, wait with him till I come."

"Yea," and I turned and left her, following the course of the stream upwards, and as I went I heard her low singing that almost broke my heart for its sadness.

And I went painfully because of my weakness, and because also of the great stones; and sometimes I went along a spot of earth where the river had been used to flow in flood-time, and which was now bare of everything but stones; and the sun, now risen high, poured down on everything a great flood of fierce light and scorching heat, and burnt me sorely, so that I almost fainted.

But about noontide I entered a wood close by the stream, a beech-wood, intending to rest myself; the herbage was thin and scattered there, sprouting up from amid the leaf-sheaths and nuts of the beeches, which had fallen year after year on that same spot; the outside boughs swept low down, the air itself seemed green when you entered within the shadow of the branches, they over-roofed the place so with tender green, only here and there showing spots of blue.

But what lay at the foot of a great beech tree but some dead knight in armour, only the helmet off? A wolf was prowling round about it, who ran away snarling when he saw me coming.

So I went up to that dead knight, and fell on my

knees before him, laying my head on his breast, for it was Arnald.

He was quite cold, but had not been dead for very long; I would not believe him dead, but went down to the stream and brought him water, tried to make him drink—what would you? He was as dead as Swanhilda: neither came there any answer to my cries that afternoon but the moaning of the wood-doves in the beeches.

So then I sat down and took his head on my knees, and closed the eyes, and wept quietly while the sun sank lower.

But a little after sunset I heard a rustle through the leaves, that was not the wind, and looking up my eyes met the pitying eyes of that maiden.

Something stirred rebelliously within me; I ceased weeping, and said: "It is unjust, unfair: What right had Swanhilda to live? Did not God give her up to us? How much better was he than ten Swanhildas? And look you—See!—he is DEAD."

Now this I shrieked out, being mad; and though I trembled when I saw some stormy wrath that vexed her very heart and loving lips, gathering on her face, I yet sat there looking at her and screaming, screaming, till all the place rang.

But when growing hoarse and breathless I ceased; she said, with straightened brow and scornful mouth:

"So! Bravely done! Must I then, though I am a woman, call you a liar, for saying God is unjust? You to punish her, had not God then punished her already? How many times when she woke in the dead night do you suppose she missed seeing King Urrayne's pale face and hacked head lying on the pillow by her side? Whether by night or day, what things but screams did she hear when the wind blew loud round about the Palace corners? And did not that face too, often come before her, pale and bleed-

ing as it was long ago, and gaze at her from unhappy eyes! Poor eyes! With changed purpose in them—no more hope of converting the world when that blow was once struck, truly it was very wicked—no more dreams, but only fierce struggles with the Devil for very life, no more dreams but failure at last, and death, happier so in the Hollow Land."

She grew so pitying as she gazed at his dead face that I began to weep again unreasonably, while she saw not that I was weeping, but looked only on Arnald's face, but after turned on me frowning.

"Unjust! Yes, truly unjust enough to take away life and all hope from her; you have done a base cowardly act, you and your brother here, disguise it as you may; you deserve all God's judgment—you—"

But I turned my eyes and wet face to her, and said:

"Do not curse me—there—do not look like Swanhilda: for see now, you said at first that you have been waiting long for me, give me your hand now, for I love you so."

Then she came and knelt by where I sat, and I caught her in my arms and she prayed to be forgiven.

"O, Florian! I have indeed waited long for you, and when I saw you my heart was filled with joy, but you would neither touch me nor speak to me, so that I became almost mad, forgive me, we will be so happy now. O! do you know this is what I have been waiting for all these years; it made me glad, I know, when I was a little baby in my mother's arms to think I was born for this; and afterwards, as I grew up, I used to watch every breath of wind through the beech-boughs, every turn of the silver poplar leaves, thinking it might be you or some news of you."

Then I rose and drew her up with me; but she knelt again by my brother's side, and kissed him, and said:

"O brother! The Hollow Land is only second best

of the places God has made, for Heaven also is the work of His hand."

Afterwards we dug a deep grave among the beech-roots and there we buried Arnald de Liliis.

And I have never seen him since, scarcely even in dreams; surely God has had mercy on him, for he was very leal and true and brave; he loved many men, and was kind and gentle to his friends, neither did he hate any but Swanhilda.

But as for us two, Margaret and me, I cannot tell you concerning our happiness, such things cannot be told; only this I know, that we abode continually in the Hollow Land until I lost it.

Moreover this I can tell you. Margaret was walking with me, as she often walked near the place where I had first seen her; presently we came upon a woman sitting, dressed in scarlet and gold raiment, with her head laid down on her knees; likewise we heard her sobbing.

"Margaret, who is she?" I said: "I knew not that any dwelt in the Hollow Land but us two only."

She said, "I know not who she is, only sometimes, these many years, I have seen her scarlet robe flaming from far away, amid the quiet green grass: but I was never so near her as this. Florian, I am afraid: let us come away."

FYTTE THE SECOND

Such a horrible grey November day it was, the fog-smell all about, the fog creeping into our very bones.

And I sat there, trying to recollect, at any rate something, under those fir-trees that I ought to have known so well.

Just think now; I had lost my best years some-

where; for I was past the prime of life, my hair and beard were scattered with white, my body was growing weaker, my memory of all things was very faint.

My raiment, purple and scarlet and blue once, was so stained that you could scarce call it any colour, was so tattered that it scarce covered my body, though it seemed once to have fallen in heavy folds to my feet, and still, when I rose to walk, though the miserable November mist lay in great drops upon my bare breast, yet was I obliged to wind my raiment over my arm, it dragged so (wretched, slimy, textureless thing!) in the brown mud.

On my head was a light morion, which pressed on my brow and pained me; so I put my hand up to take it off; but when I touched it I stood still in my walk shuddering; I nearly fell to the earth with shame and sick horror; for I laid my hand on a lump of slimy earth with worms coiled up in it. I could scarce forbear from shrieking, but breathing such a prayer as I could think of, I raised my hand again and seized it firmly. Worse horror still! The rust had eaten it into holes, and I gripped my own hair as well as the rotting steel, the sharp edge of which cut into my fingers; but setting my teeth, gave a great wrench, for I knew that if I let go of it then, no power on the earth or under it could make me touch it again. God be praised! I tore it off and cast it far from me; I saw the earth, and the worms and green weeds and sun-begotten slime, whirling out from it radiatingly, as it spun round about.

I was girt with a sword too, the leathern belt of which had shrunk and squeezed my waist: dead leaves had gathered in knots about the buckles of it, the gilded handle was encrusted with clay in many parts, the velvet sheath miserably worn.

But, verily, when I took hold of the hilt, and dreaded lest instead of a sword I should find a ser-

pent in my hand; lo! then, I drew out my own true blade and shook it flawless from hilt to point, gleaming white in that mist.

Therefore it sent a thrill of joy to my heart, to know that there was one friend left me yet: I sheathed it again carefully, and undoing it from my waist, hung it about my neck.

Then catching up my rags in my arms, I drew them up till my legs and feet were altogether clear from them, afterwards folded my arms over my breast, gave a long leap and ran, looking downward, but not giving heed to my way.

Once or twice I fell over stumps of trees, and such-like, for it was a cut-down wood that I was in, but I rose always, though bleeding and confused, and went on still; sometimes tearing madly through briars and gorse bushes, so that my blood dropped on the dead leaves as I went.

I ran in this way for about an hour; then I heard a gurgling and splashing of waters; I gave a great shout and leapt strongly, with shut eyes, and the black water closed over me.

When I rose again, I saw near me a boat with a man in it; but the shore was far off; I struck out toward the boat, but my clothes which I had knotted and folded about me, weighed me down terribly.

The man looked at me, and began to paddle toward me with the oar he held in his left hand, having in his right a long, slender spear, barbed like a fish-hook; perhaps, I thought, it is some fishing spear; moreover his raiment was of scarlet, with upright stripes of yellow and black all over it.

When my eye caught his, a smile widened his mouth as if some one had made a joke; but I was beginning to sink, and indeed my head was almost under water just as he came and stood above me, but before it went quite under, I saw his spear gleam,

then *felt* it in my shoulder, and for the present, felt nothing else.

When I woke I was on the bank of that river; the flooded waters went hurrying past me; no boat on them now; from the river the ground went up in gentle slopes till it grew a great hill, and there, on that hill-top,—Yes, I might forget many things, almost everything, but not that, not the old castle of my fathers up among the hills, its towers blackened now and shattered, yet still no enemy's banner waved from it.

So I said I would go and die there; and at this thought I drew my sword, which yet hung about my neck, and shook it in the air till the true steel quivered, then began to pace towards the castle. I was quite naked, no rag about me; I took no heed of that only thanking God that my sword was left, and so toiled up the hill. I entered the castle soon by the outer court; I knew the way so well, that I did not lift my eyes from the ground, but walked on over the lowered drawbridge through the unguarded gates, and stood in the great hall at last—my father's hall —as bare of everything but my sword as when I came into the world fifty years before: I had as little clothes, as little wealth, less memory and thought, I verily believe, than then.

So I lifted up my eyes and gazed; no glass in the windows, no hangings on the walls; the vaulting yet held good throughout, but seemed to be going; the mortar had fallen out from between the stones, and grass and fern grew in the joints; the marble pavement was in some places gone, and water stood about in puddles, though one scarce knew how it had got there.

No hangings on the walls—no; yet, strange to say, instead of them, the walls blazed from end to end with scarlet paintings, only striped across with green

damp-marks in many places, some falling bodily from the wall, the plaster hanging down with the fading colour on it.

In all of them, except for the shadows and the faces of the figures, there was scarce any colour but scarlet and yellow. Here and there it seemed the painter, whoever it was, had tried to make his trees or his grass green, but it would not do; some ghastly thoughts must have filled his head, for all the green went presently into yellow, out-sweeping through the picture dismally. But the faces were painted to the very life, or it seemed so;—there were only five of them, however, that were very marked or came much in the foreground; and four of these I knew well, though I did not then remember the names of those that had borne them. They were Red Harald, Swanhilda, Arnald, and myself. The fifth I did not know; it was a woman's and very beautiful.

Then I saw that in some parts a small penthouse roof had been built over the paintings, to keep them from the weather. Near one of these stood a man painting, clothed in red, with stripes of yellow and black: Then I knew that it was the same man who had saved me from drowning by spearing me through the shoulder; so I went up to him, and saw furthermore that he was girt with a heavy sword.

He turned round when he saw me coming, and asked me fiercely what I did there.

I asked why he was painting in my castle.

Thereupon, with that same grim smile widening his mouth as heretofore, he said, "I paint God's judgments."

And as he spoke, he rattled the sword in his scabbard; but I said,

"Well, then, you paint them very badly. Listen; I know God's judgments much better than you do. See

now; I will teach you God's judgments, and you shall teach me painting."

While I spoke he still rattled his sword, and when I had done, shut his right eye tight, screwing his nose on one side; then said:

"You have got no clothes on, and may go to the devil! What do *you* know about God's judgments?"

"Well, they are not all yellow and red, at all events; you ought to know better."

He screamed out, "O you fool! Yellow and red! Gold and blood, what do they make?"

"Well," I said; "what?"

"HELL!" And, coming close up to me, he struck me with his open hand in the face, so that the colour with which his hand was smeared was dabbed about my face. The blow almost threw me down; and, while I staggered, he rushed at me furiously with his sword. Perhaps it was good for me that I had got no clothes on; for, being utterly unencumbered, I leapt this way and that, and avoided his fierce, eager strokes till I could collect myself somewhat; while he had a heavy scarlet cloak on that trailed on the ground, and which he often trod on, so that he stumbled.

He very nearly slew me during the first few minutes, for it was not strange that, together with other matters, I should have forgotten the art of fence: but yet, as I went on, and sometimes bounded about the hall under the whizzing of his sword, as he rested sometimes, leaning on it, as the point sometimes touched my head and made my eyes start out, I remembered the old joy that I used to have, and the *swy, swy,* of the sharp edge, as one gazed between one's horse's ears; moreover, at last, one fierce swift stroke, just touching me below the throat, tore up the skin all down my body, and fell heavy on my thigh, so that I drew my breath in and turned white;

then first, as I swung my sword round my head, our blades met, oh! to hear that *tchink* again! and I felt the notch my sword made in his, and swung out at him; but he guarded it and returned on me; I guarded right and left, and grew warm, and opened my mouth to shout, but knew not what to say; and our sword points fell on the floor together: then, when we had panted awhile, I wiped from my face the blood that had been dashed over it, shook my sword and cut at him, then we spun round and round in a mad waltz to the measured music of our meeting swords, and sometimes either wounded the other somewhat but not much, till I beat down his sword on to his head, that he fell grovelling, but not cut through. Verily, thereupon my lips opened mightily with "Mary rings."

Then, when he had gotten to his feet, I went at him again, he staggering back, guarding wildly; I cut at his head; he put his sword up confusedly, so I fitted both hands to my hilt, and smote him mightily under the arm: then his shriek mingled with my shout, made a strange sound together; he rolled over and over, dead, as I thought.

I walked about the hall in great exultation at first, striking my sword point on the floor every now and then, till I grew faint with loss of blood; then I went to my enemy and stripped off some of his clothes to bind up my wounds withal; afterwards I found in a corner bread and wine, and I eat and drank thereof.

Then I went back to him, and looked, and a thought struck me, and I took some of his paints and brushes, and kneeling down, painted his face thus, with stripes of yellow and red, crossing each other at right angles; and in each of the squares so made I put a spot of black, after the manner of the painted

letters in the prayer-books and romances when they are ornamented.

So I stood back as painters use, folded my arms, and admired my own handiwork. Yet there struck me as being something so utterly doleful in the man's white face, and the blood running all about him, and washing off the stains of paint from his face and hands, and splashed clothes, that my heart misgave me, and I hoped that he was not dead; I took some water from a vessel he had been using for his painting, and, kneeling, washed his face.

Was it some resemblance to my father's dead face, which I had seen when I was young, that made me pity him? I laid my hand upon his heart, and felt it beating feebly; so I lifted him up gently, and carried him towards a heap of straw that he seemed used to lie upon; there I stripped him and looked to his wounds, and used leech-craft, the memory of which God gave me for this purpose, I suppose, and within seven days I found that he would not die.

Afterwards, as I wandered about the castle, I came to a room in one of the upper storeys, that had still the roof on, and windows in it with painted glass, and there I found green raiment and swords and armour, and I clothed myself.

So when he got well I asked him what his name was, and he me, and we both of us said, "Truly I know not." Then said I, "but we must call each other some name, even as men call days."

"Call me Swerker," he said, "some priest I knew once had that name."

"And me Wulf," said I, "though wherefore I know not."

Then I tried to learn painting till I thought I should die, but at last learned it through very much pain and grief.

And, as the years went on and we grew old and

grey, we painted purple pictures and green ones instead of the scarlet and yellow, so that the walls looked altered, and always we painted God's judgments.

And we would sit in the sunset and watch them with the golden light changing them, as we yet hoped God would change both us and our works.

Often too we would sit outside the walls and look at the trees and sky, and the ways of the few men and women we saw; therefrom sometimes befell adventures.

Once there went past a great funeral of some king going to his own country, not as he had hoped to go, but stiff and colourless, spices filling up the place of his heart.

And first went by very many knights, with long bright hauberks on, that fell down before their knees as they rode, and they all had tilting-helms on with the same crest, so that their faces were quite hidden: and this crest was two hands clasped together tightly as though they were the hands of one praying forgiveness from the one he loves best; and the crest was wrought in gold.

Moreover, they had on over their hauberks surcoats which were half scarlet and half purple, strewn about with golden stars.

Also long lances, that had forked knights'-pennons, half purple and half scarlet, strewn with golden stars.

And these went by with no sound but the fall of their horse-hoofs.

And they went slowly, so slowly that we counted them all, five thousand five hundred and fifty-five.

Then went by many fair maidens whose hair was loose and yellow, and who were all clad in green raiment ungirded, and shod with golden shoes.

These also we counted, being five hundred; more-

over some of the outermost of them, viz., one maiden to every twenty, had long silver trumpets, which they swung out to right and left, blowing them, and their sound was very sad.

Then many priests, and bishops, and abbots, who wore white albs and golden copes over them; and they all sang together mournfully, *"Propter amnen Babylonis;"* and these were three hundred.

After that came a great knot of the Lords, who were tilting helmets and surcoats emblazoned with each one his own device; only each had in his hand a small staff two feet long whereon was a pennon of scarlet and purple. These also were three hundred.

And in the midst of these was a great car hung down to the ground with purple, drawn by grey horses whose trappings were half scarlet, half purple.

And on this car lay the King, whose head and hands were bare; and he had on him a surcoat, half purple and half scarlet, strewn with golden stars.

And his head rested on a tilting helmet, whose crest was the hands of one praying passionately for forgiveness.

But his own hands lay by his side as if he had just fallen asleep.

And all about the car were little banners, half purple and half scarlet, strewn with golden stars.

Then the King, who counted but as one, went by also.

And after him came again many maidens clad in ungirt white raiment strewn with scarlet flowers, and their hair was loose and yellow and their feet bare: and, except for the falling of their feet and the rustle of the wind through their raiment, they went past quite silently. These also were five hundred.

Then lastly came many young knights with long bright hauberks falling over their knees as they rode,

and surcoats, half scarlet and half purple, strewn with golden stars; they bore long lances with forked pennons which were half purple, half scarlet, strewn with golden stars; their heads and their hands were bare, but they bore shields, each one of them, which were of bright steel wrought cunningly in the midst with that bearing of the two hands of one who prays for forgiveness; which was done in gold. These were but five hundred.

Then they all went by winding up and up the hill roads, and, when the last of them had departed out of our sight, we put down our heads and wept, and I said, "Sing us one of the songs of the Hollow Land."

Then he whom I had called Swerker put his hand into his bosom, and slowly drew out a long, long tress of black hair, and laid it on his knee and smoothed it, weeping on it: So then I left him there and went and armed myself, and brought armour for him.

And then came back to him and threw the armour down so that it clanged, and said:

"O! Harald, let us go!"

He did not seem surprised that I called him by the right name, but rose and armed himself, and then he looked a good knight; so we set forth.

And in a turn of the long road we came suddenly upon a most fair woman, clothed in scarlet, who sat and sobbed, holding her face between her hands, and her hair was very black.

And when Harald saw her, he stood and gazed at her for long through the bars of his helmet, then suddenly turned, and said:

"Florian, I must stop here; do you go on to the Hollow Land. Farewell."

"Farewell." And then I went on, never turning back, and him I never saw more.

And so I went on, quite lonely, but happy, till I had reached the Hollow Land.

Into which I let myself down most carefully, by the jutting rocks and bushes and strange trailing flowers, and there lay down and fell asleep.

FYTTE THE THIRD

And I was waked by some one singing; I felt very happy; I felt young again; I had fair delicate raiment on, my sword was gone, and my armour; I tried to think where I was, and could not for my happiness; I tried to listen to the words of the song. Nothing, only an old echo in my ears, only all manner of strange scenes from my wretched past life before my eyes in a dim, far-off manner: then at last, slowly, without effort, I heard what she sang.

"Christ keep the Hollow Land
All the summer-tide;
Still we cannot understand
Where the waters glide;

Only dimly seeing them
Coldly slipping through
Many green-lipp'd cavern mouths.
Where the hills are blue."

"Then," she said, "come now and look for it, love, a hollow city in the Hollow Land."

I kissed Margaret, and we went.

Through the golden streets under the purple shadows of the houses we went, and the slow fanning backward and forward of the many-coloured banners cooled us: we two alone; there was no one with us,

no soul will ever be able to tell what we said, how we looked.

At last we came to a fair palace, cloistered off in the old time, before the city grew golden from the din and hubbub of traffic; those who dwelt there in the old ungolden times had had their own joys, their own sorrows, apart from the joys and sorrows of the multitude: so, in like manner, was it now cloistered off from the eager leaning and brotherhood of the golden dwellings: so now it had its own gaiety, its own solemnity, apart from theirs; unchanged, unchangeable, were its marble walls, whatever else changed about it.

We stopped before the gates and trembled, and clasped each other closer; for there among the marble leafage and tendrils that were round and under and over the archway that held the golden valves, were wrought two figures of a man and woman, winged and garlanded, whose raiment flashed with stars; and their faces were like faces we had seen or half seen in some dream long and long and long ago, so that we trembled with awe and delight; and I turned, and seeing Margaret, saw that her face was that face seen or half seen long and long and long ago; and in the shining of her eyes I saw that other face, seen in that way and no other long and long and long ago—my face.

And then we walked together toward the golden gates, and opened them, and no man gainsaid us.

And before us lay a great space of flowers.

AFTERWORD

Here ends the first of what we hope will be several annual journeys through the worlds of wonder dreamed by some of the finest fantasy writers of all time.

This first volume of *Great Short Novels of Adult Fantasy* suggests the scope and variety open to us in the books to come. The authors represented here are American, English and French.

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It is such rare authors whose works I will be searching for in the years to come. And it is such tales as the brillant stories in this book that you will find in next year's *Great Short Novels of Adult Fan-*

tasy #2, wherein we shall voyage through four more worlds of wonder.

I wish you many happy journeys in the years to come!

LIN CARTER

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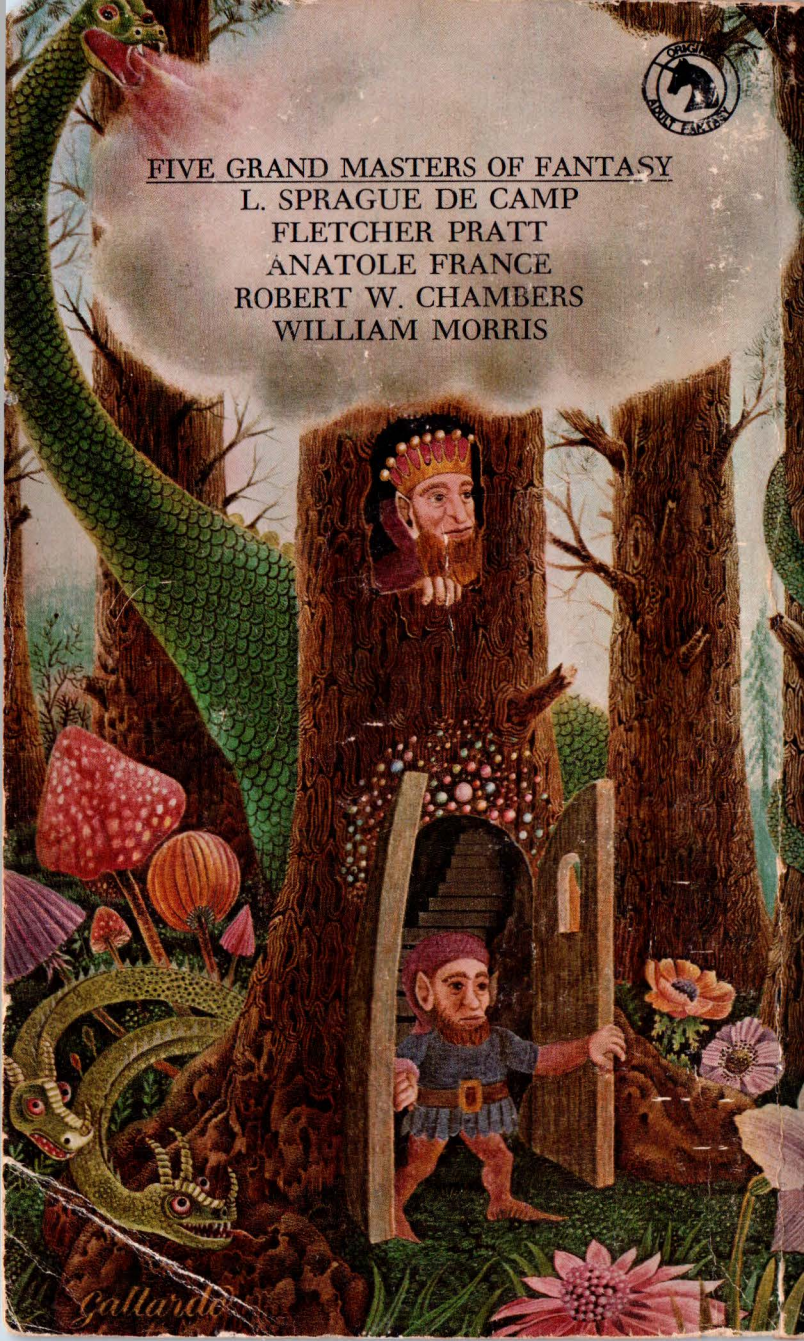
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