THE VOICE OF THE MOUNTAIN

DOUBLEDAY SCIENCE FICTION

A NOVEL OF SILVER JOHN

MANLY WADE WELLMAN

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THE VOICE OF THE MOUNTAIN

MANLY WADE WELLMAN

Silver John—so named for the lithe and powerful strings of his ever-present guitar—is back. In this fifth and most exciting novel in the series, Manly Wade Wellman's popular hero is called by the voice of Cry Mountain... into a confrontation with his most threatening adversary.

There are a wealth of cryptic stories about Cry Mountain, and as John listens to the tales of eerie, hostile animals, of brave daredevils who fared up the slopes never to return, and hears the enigmatic, unnatural keening voice emanating from the mountain, his adventuresome spirit is aroused. Too curious and intrigued—some might say foolhardy—to be dissuaded, John begins his long, perilous trek up the steep mountainside. There he finds mystery and danger enough for any man, and eventually meets the courtly, assured Ruel Harpe, descendant of the

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infamous Micajah Harpe. John soon discovers the darker side of Ruel Harpe's hospitality and finds honesty and courage the only weapons against powerful sorcery and temptation.

Winner of the Gandalf Award for Lifetime Achievement from the World Fantasy Convention, **Manly Wade Wellman** has been writing award-winning tales of fantasy, mystery, horror, and science fiction since 1927. Besides his tales of Silver John the Balladeer, Wellman has also created of the highly acclaimed series featuring adventurer John Thunstone. Mr. Wellman lives in Chapel Hill, North Carolina.

JACKET BY CATHY CANZANI
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THE VOICE OF THE MOUNTAIN

By Manly Wade Wellman

THE VOICE OF THE MOUNTAIN
WHAT DREAMS MAY COME
THE HANGING STONES
THE LOST AND THE LURKING
AFTER DARK
THE OLD GODS WAKEN

THE VOICE OF THE MOUNTAIN

MANLY WADE WELLMAN

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1984

All of the characters in this book
are fictitious, and any resemblance
to actual persons, living or dead,
is purely coincidental.

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For three old and valued friends

Bob Bloch
Fritz Leiber
Frank Belknap Long

One man with a dream, at pleasure,
Shall go forth and conquer a crown;
And three with a new song's measure
Can trample an empire down.

—Arthur William O'Shaughnessy

FOREWORD

Be it pointed out, the various books of supernatural science and philosophy herein referred to actually exist, or in one case is intriguingly rumored to exist. Several actual persons come in for mention, though they do not take part in the story. And certain monsters are part of the folklore of the Southern mountains.

But, so far as I can learn, there is no mountain called Cry anywhere in the world, and its tale as told here is entirely imaginary.

Manly Wade Wellman

Chapel Hill, North Carolina
April 22, 1984

THE VOICE OF THE MOUNTAIN

Adventure was his coronal,
And all his wealth was wandering.
—Henry Herbert Knibbs

I

Back in and round here, amongst all these tall heights and deep hollows, there used to be places nobody outside knew much about; because nobody outside had air been there to find out about them. When it comes down to the true fact today, there are still a right good few unbeknownst places here and yonder. But no way near so many of them as there were back then, that day I went a-shammocking round and round and found out that for hell's sake I'd gone and lost myself on a great big old mountain slope of trees.

What I'd gone into those parts for was to learn what I might could find out about something I'd heard was named Cry Mountain. Folks here and there and yonder allowed that it was a mountain that could cry out aloud to heaven above and earth beneath, which you all will agree me was a curious enough tale. Curious enough even for me, who'd seen and done some curious things on other mountains called Hark and Dogged and Yandro and so on. That day I'd stopped at Sam Heaver's crossroads store, where one time earlier I'd done a good deed by a-killing the terrible thing they called the Ugly Bird. Pretty Winnie still worked for Mr. Sam, and she gave me a smile, and her hair was like the thundercloud before the rain comes down. Back yonder that time, she'd said to me that she'd say a prayer for me air night of her life, and now she told me that she'd kept her word on that.

Mr. Sam and I sat on the store porch and ate canned ham

spread on soda crackers and drank from bottles of pop. I asked him could I leave my gear there behind his counter—my bedroll and spare shirt and soogan sack—and go have a look round in the woods there.

"Sure enough and welcome, John," he granted me, and so I strolled away. My silver-strung guitar I took along, just from force of long habit. A-walking in amongst tall, leafy trees upslope, I strummed to myself and sort of whispered some old songs I liked.

Those were songs that had won their service stripes, like "Young Hunting" and "Poor Ellen Smith" and "Rebel Soldier" and "My Lord, What a Morning." I likewise tried to work out one I was a-making up myself at the time:

> "What's up across the mountain,
> What's there on the yonder side?
> Nobody's here to tell me,
> Nobody to be my guide,
> But nair you doubt, I'm a-going to find out,
> All over this world so wide . . ."

It took me a patch of time to pick all those and think them over in my mind, while I went on up a sort of slope and down another, a-working westward by where the sun had started its sink to the tall horizon. And I went another sight farther than I'd truly meant to go, a-being so long in my legs in their old jeans pants. I felt a tad tired and sat down on a round rock to peel off my slouch hat and wipe the sweat off my face. With my guitar betwixt my knees, I looked to where two hemlocks grew up beside a serviceberry tree from which the white flowers had long gone with the spring. Somehow other, it seemed to me, those two hemlocks and that serviceberry looked a right much like some other trees I'd looked on before; though where that might could have been, I couldn't rightly say.

I got up off the rock and lit out again, upslope and down, mostly through pine and laurel and hickory and sourwood. Those trees looked familiar, but why not? They grow all through these mountains. I walked on for maybe better than an hour, and decided I'd have me another rest. I wished I'd fetched along my old army canteen full of water. I sat down on a rock, and looked to where grew two hemlocks and a serviceberry tree.

This time, I well knew they were the same trees I'd seen before. And I was on the same rock where I'd sat myself a while back. I'd just been a-traveling in a big old blind circle.

I fear I cussed out loud at myself for a-doing such a fool thing. But my next thing to do had better be a smart thing, one way or the other.

I sat on that rock just long enough to make up my mind on what to do. I sure enough didn't know which way to take to get back to Sam Heaver's store, nor yet halfway which one. I'd just been a-rambling round, a-singing to myself like a gone gump, without an eye to my back trail. Well then, I took a look to where the tree-grown slope rose above me, with the sun a-making long shadows here and yonder. If I kept on and up and up, I'd come to the top of some ridge. From there, if somehow I got my luck back, perhaps I'd see something of the country below me, see something that might could be a help to a man who'd gone and got himself lost on that lonesome mountainside.

So I took off again, a-starting to feel thirsty. There was no trail thereabouts, and the trees and brush were a hamper to me. By then, the light was a-getting dimmed out. Evening was on its way in and it turned things gray. And no spring, no stream could I find. I reckoned I'd come right high up at that point, and likely there'd been no rain lately. I kept on and on, near to three hours longer, till the air turned from gray to plumb

gloomy, and well I knew there was no sense a-roving into the night.

I'd been a damn fool enough already, and I couldn't be more of a damn sight bigger one if I tried to climb that slope in the dark, the moonless dark under a sky all speckly with stars above the branches of the trees. I was tired and thirsty and lost, but I purely had to make me a camp.

So I stooped down and dragged together chunks of dead branches. I broke them up to the right size. In my pocket I had me a little bitty box of matches, and I gathered dry twigs and set them afire, then put bigger pieces in. That gave me some sort of cheer in the gathered-down night. I could hear tree frogs a-singing off there somewhere, and once an owl spoke, a long wail. I sat there by my fire and wished I had me some of that food I'd eaten on the porch of Sam Heaver's store, and a long drink of water from his spring. What a cool spring that was, I recollected. I picked my guitar and somehow I found myself a-picking one of the saddest songs I know:

"Poor little lamb,
Poor little lamb,
Lost way down in the valley,
Birds from the skies a-picking out its eyes,
And the poor little thing cried 'Mammy' . . ."

I stopped then. My voice sounded right cracked and pasty. For lack of water, I put a pebble in my mouth to see if that would wet it. It didn't wet me much, but somehow I wasn't as bad off as that poor little lamb. Not quite. Not yet. I huddled down close to my fire, and somehow I slept.

But I woke up like as if I'd heard a sound and, as I woke, I could still hear it. Off yonder, nobody could possibly have said where, a big old voice made a moan in the night. *Awooo awooo* . . .

And, gentlemen, that was a right pitiful sound to hear.

While I lay beside my fire and wondered, it died away. What on this earth could make such a lonesome sound? I listened, but all was quieted down again. I put more wood on the dying coals, and finally I got myself back to sleep again.

When I woke up for good, it was a gray morning with lacy hunks of fog all amongst the trees round about me. I fought the best I could against all the tiredness and thirstiness I felt. I shoved on my old hat and slung my guitar behind me, and started on up that slope again.

Still no water, air place I went, but I had me a trifle of luck when I found a bird's nest in a bush, with four freckled eggs in it. I sucked those four eggs. They weren't what you'd call rightly fresh, but they gave some ease to my dried-out throat, and when I moved on ahead, they kept me a-moving.

It was about ten o'clock by sun when I came to the rocky backbone ridge of that mountain so high, and I could look all round me for I can't rightly tell how many miles in all directions.

That crazy-headed way I'd come up didn't have what a man could call a safe promise for a-going down again. Back down yonder I could just see hollows and rises, plumb fluffed over with trees. Naught that looked like Mr. Sam's store or air other house, high or low. So I set my eyes forward to the west, down an everlasting slope to a deep valley and what seemed to be, right far off and far down, a dark crease at the bottom that might could be where a stream ran. I wished to my soul that I was next to that stream, to drink deep from it, maybe to jump right into it with all my sweaty clothes on. But then I likewise made out, in a little clearing down there, a cabin.

So far down and away was that cabin that it didn't look as big as the matchbox in my pocket, it looked more to be about the size of the joint of my thumb. There it stood, so far down

below me. From where its chimney would have to be, a gray thread of smoke came a-tumbling up into the air.

A cabin chimney with smoke to it meant that somebody was at home there. Just possibly, a kind-hearted, helpful somebody. For I'd got to where I could use some kind-hearted help. I said myself a congratulation with my dried-out lips, then I said a prayer for strength, and started down to that cabin.

And, gentlemen, I was something like three hours on the way. For the slope of the mountain was high, high, steep, steep, all the long way down, as steep as it could be and still get itself named a slope. You purely had to lower yourself from rock to rock on it, all amongst trees and clumpy patches of brush a-hanging there with their roots in the rock. Time and time again, I'd come down to a rocky ledge as high above the next one below as the eaves of a house. And meanwhile, as I scrambled my way, I was dead tired and near about gone crazy from thirst. I took me a tumble or two on that hellacious journey down. Once, if I hadn't landed in a bunch of thorny bushes, likely I'd have smashed my guitar that I loved with all my heart.

I lay where I'd fallen for a moment, a-feeling to see if the bushes had kept my bones from a-being busted here or there, and that's where I heard again what I'd heard in my camp the night before, that muttering moan with a howl cut up into it.

Awooo awooo awoooawoooawooo . . .

Not rightly what you'd love to hear, if you'd got yourself lost and alone.

The cry died out. I was right glad to hear it no more, and I made myself busy to crawl out from amongst those bushes that had broken my fall. The thorns on them raked my hands and face. I picked up my hat and, more careful now, I started my climb down again. I was thirsty right down to my toenails, and I felt weaker with air foot. I made it toward the bottom of the

slope below. Gentlemen, I'd nair wish you all such a task as that.

But some way or other I did make it, came all the way to more level ground and the cabin and its gray chimney smoke. I sort of staggered toward the door of it. That was a cleated-together door, of two broad planks chopped with an adze. My knees shook under me like grass stems in a high wind. From somewhere down in my dry throat I got strength enough to call out:

"Hello, the house! Hello!"

The cleated plank door opened in the wall of clay-chinked logs, with a creak of rusty hinges. A man came out and gopped at me.

"Hey, friend," he said. "You look to be in a fix."

I wasn't about to argue that point with him. I got out just one hoarse word, and that word was "Water."

"Surest thing you know," he said, and walked quick to where I stood a-swaying on my feet. He was about as tall as up to my ear, built close-coupled, with a black-and-white checked shirt and old jeans pants like mine. He had a tawny brown beard, thick-grown and cut short to his jaw. He got his chunky right arm round me and helped me make a few stumbling steps to the door and up over the door-log and inside.

"You have you a seat right there," he bade me, and slid me onto a sort of homemade sofa of a thing with a dark blue blanket on it. Then he went to where a galvanized iron pail stood on a bench and dipped a tin cup into it and fetched it to me. I took it in both my shaky hands. There was maybe an inch of water in the bottom of the cup. I drank it down in just one swig, and I could swear to heaven I heard it sizzle in my throat.

"Is that all the water you're a-going to give me?" I was able to ask him.

"You can have some more directly," he said, a-taking the cup

back. "Maybe your mouth is wet enough with that swallow to tell me what I might could call you."

"Just call me John," I said.

"John," he echoed me. "Shoo, are you that John, the one they call Silver John? I should ought to have guessed it, by them silver strings on your guitar there. All right now, you can have you some more water."

He gave me another inch in the cup and watched me while I drank it. Then he stooped down and dragged my old boots off me, one and then the other. I wanted to say I'd do that, but I'd have been too tired out to try. Then he fetched me a little bitty more water, and then more again. Each drink of it just purely soaked into me till at last I found myself a-sitting up straight, not all limped over, and a-feeling a right much better.

"John," he said, "if I'd given you a whole big bunch of water right off, you'd have made yourself sick a-drinking it down fast, likely right bad sick. But by now, you look to be fairly all right. I'll fix us up a little snack to eat, and you can tell me how came you to be in that bind I found you in."

He started in to stir up a corn dodger in an iron pan and built a fire in his stone fireplace and propped the pan slantways to cook the dodger. From a shelf he took down a little can of Vienna sausages and prized that open. Next, he fetched water in a tin basin for me to wash off my face and hands, and that made me feel another sight better yet. I told him my tale of how I'd got myself lost, and my ears felt long and fuzzy to own up to it. He heard me all out to the end, and then he allowed it might could have happened to air man of mankind if he got to a-wandering round in that lost part of the mountains.

While I talked, I was a-having me a pretty close look at where I'd been fetched into. The room must have been all the front half of the cabin, something like sixteen feet square as I

reckoned. Its walls showed to be of logs with plaster chinking betwixt them, and here and there was tacked up a colored picture. The floors were of broad adze-chopped planks, round about eighteen inches across, fastened down with hardwood pegs and smooth from rubbing or either just a-being trod on for years and years. The furniture—table, chairs, bench, cot bed in a back corner, the sofa-thing I sat on—all of it was homemade and stout-made. The legs of the things were thick pieces of branch from this hardwood tree or that, the bark still on. The chairs and the sofa were seated with broad splits of wood. A black bearskin lay out in front of the fireplace. As for that fireplace itself, it was mortared of different stones, gray, dark gray, brown, one or two bits a sort of greenish. On the fireboard shelf above it were stacked pots and dishes, and there were four–five books that looked worn from lots of a-being read.

Meanwhile, the food got cooked. He cut the great big hot dodger in two and put a hunk on each of two old plastic plates, and dumped out the sausages for the both of us. I got off the sofa and came and sat on a chair, and you'd purely better believe I tied into those good rations. He set out a glass jar of honey to dab on the dodger and poured mugs of hot coffee as black as midnight and strong as a plow mule, and we sat and ate and drank together like as if we'd known one another all our lives.

Air bite of that food, air sup of that coffee, did wonders for making me feel more like my own man again. The achy tiredness leaked out of my back, my legs, my eyes.

When we'd finished our eating, he put out two little glasses and poured some blockade whiskey for us. It was straw-colored and sharp and so good you could bite it right out at the rim of the glass.

"Now, John," he said, "you've done told me something about yourself. Maybe it's my turn to tell you about myself."

So he told me about himself, and it was a right interesting tale to hark at.

II

He was named Tombs McDonald and, the way he told it, here's how come him to get that name:

Once, thirty-some-odd years back from where he'd got to be when he told me, a nice old couple named Peter and Sancy McDonald went out to take them a night walk, past an old neglected burying ground on a hill slope, mostly grown up with brush and weeds round the graves. It was a right dark night without more than just a little old scrap of moon in the sky; and as they walked past together, they heard a sad whining and whimpering in there amongst where the graves were. They must have had good sand in their craw, because they went right into that creepy burying ground to see what it was a-making such a noise. And on top of a worn-down grave rock there lay a little baby child, all wrapped up in a ragged quilt, and it was a-crying like that little lost lamb in that song I sung you all.

Not only were Peter and Sancy McDonald brave folks, they were good-hearted, kindly folks. They fetched that poor crying baby child home to their farm cabin, gave it warm milk for its supper, washed it up clean, fixed it a soft bed in an old basket woven of willow twigs. Next day they inquired all round of their neighbor folks if air soul had lost a child, but nobody had. So they decided, since they'd nair had children of their own, they'd adopt this lost one and raise it up. It was a boy baby, and they named him Tombs because that meant where he'd been found.

Tombs McDonald allowed to me he'd had the best of a raising up, and a right happy one to boot. His step-folks were just poor farmers, but they were proud ones. They worked hard on their little patch of ground, and they taught Tombs to work, too, but they didn't work him to death. They gave him time to play. His step-daddy was a good carpenter and builder, and he taught Tombs about that. Taught him likewise to plant by the moon and the zodiac signs, how to raise good corn and good potatoes and all like that. Taught him what wood to cut for a fishing pole, how to bait for trout, for bass, for other fish. Saw that he got what learning a pretty good little country school could give him. But those old McDonald step-folks were up in years; they died within just a few days of one another when Tombs was about nineteen. He saw them buried and prayed over, and he sold the place they'd inherited to him for a few hundred dollars, and lit out into the world to work for himself.

He tried at different jobs, on farms and in a couple of towns. He worked in a lumber mill and in a slaughterhouse, he did a hitch in the army, though not overseas and under fire like me. I reckon he did all right at those, but he nair much relished a-taking orders from another man, be it an army colonel or a straw boss somewhere. So at last he came to where he was a-living now, bought himself his chunk of land, and ran him up a cabin on it, with the help of a couple of friends. For food, he raised him some corn and vegetables, he hunted wild meat, he caught fish. The reason he picked out that special spot to live was that he could find gold nearby, for what money he needed.

"Gold?" I repeated him when he said that. "You got yourself a gold mine here? I nair heard the like of that in these parts."

He grinned me with square teeth in his beard. "Why, John, this here state produced more gold than air other in the Union, right up to the time of the big rush to California. But no, naught to be called a real mine hereabouts. There's a stream off

behind my place here that works down from quartzy rocks somewhere. I can wash me out specks of the stuff there, enough if I make a true day of it to get me twenty dollars' worth of it sometimes. I'll show you later."

The rest of his life story was that he felt well and happy, a-living alone thataway. The books on his mantel were *Walden* by Thoreau and *Robinson Crusoe* by Defoe, and one of those big books on building and repairing that teaches you all the way from how to drive a nail to how to build a chimney that will draw. And, naturally, a Bible.

"Thoreau and old man Crusoe's boy Robinson have taught me a right much about building and farming," he said. "I've read them over and over, so many a time I could near about quote them to you from memory. But how you come on by now, John?"

"I'm fine," I said, "and I thank you most to death for a-looking after me the way you have."

"Feel up to a-taking a little walk out?"

"I'd like that, first-class."

He fetched a basin, another basin than the one I'd washed my face in. This one was made of iron, it was round and shallow. He likewise picked up a rough towel and a little chunk of yellow soap. We went outside, and it felt right good to be on my feet. I had on my boots again, couldn't recollect when I'd put them on.

"You seem to snap back right quick," said Tombs.

"Well now," I said, "I always try to keep in the best shape I can, and that little rest I had, and the food and coffee and blockade helped."

Outside the cabin, I saw that Tombs had good big trees in his yard, pine and oak and hickory. The ground behind was cleared, and he had sheds back yonder. One was a corncrib, another was a smokehouse. And there was a chicken run, with a

rooster and a few hens a-picking up corn flung there. On behind the sheds, a well-kept vegetable garden. He had turnips, I saw, and squashes, tomatoes, cabbage. And beyond the garden, quite a corn patch, and the corn a-getting ripe.

"I always grow enough corn for both me and the chickens," Tombs said. "I get me a peck of it ground air week for meal. I know right well how to make bread of it. Thoreau's book taught me some about that."

I looked at his smokehouse. "I take it you dry yourself some hams and bacon," I said, "but I don't see your hog lot."

"I use wild hogs," said Tombs. "They run in these woods, they feed on fallen acorns and all like that, they get up sometimes to three–four hundred pounds. Autumn time, with frosty days, I take me my gun and go out, hunt one or two of them down, and butcher them. They eat right good—better than just a tame hog as I reckon—but I'll tell you a true word, they can be mean. You'd better shoot them plumb center, else they'll get after you, try to kill you. The last one I killed and butchered out looked near about as big as the smokehouse. Likely we'll have us a slice off a smoked shoulder of his for supper tonight."

On the far side of the garden patch and corn rows came the woods, and a trail showed into it. We came along in amongst the trees to the side of a swift-running branch. On the far side grew more trees, steep uphill, but I made out that there was a sort of gap beyond the water.

"Where does that get to?" I inquired Tombs, but another answer came from over yonder. That long-drawn-out, lonesome call, *awooo awooo.* The voice of the mountain.

"That there's where Cry Mountain is," said Tombs. "To me, it sounds like as if it says, stay away, stay away. And I stay away. Somehow other, I ain't got no relish to go there."

I changed the subject: "You gave me honey to eat, but I haven't seen your bee gums."

"My bees are wild, too," he said. "I hunt their trees, cut them down, and fetch their honey home. Sometimes I get enough to wag it to a store and sell it."

While we talked he was a-shucking off his clothes and I did the same. He waded into the stream and soaped himself all over and sat down, beardy chin deep, to wash the suds off. Then he took his iron pan and waded away upstream and scooped mud and gravel and water into the pan and sloshed it back and forth.

"Sure enough," he yelled to me. "You can pan day wages out of here if you want to stand up to your tail all day long in this chizzly cold water."

I waded in, too. He'd said the true word, it was cold, but it braced me up to feel it. I soaped and rinsed and got out, then I squatted down to soap and wash out my sweaty shirt and socks and underwear, for I had no other change of clothes. I wrang those things out and spread them on some bushes and sat down in a patch of sun. That felt right good and helped me to dry off. After while, Tombs came to show me what he'd found. The mud was all washed out of the pan and in the bottom, amongst some gravels, clung a few bright yellow specks, bright where the sun touched on them.

"No great much, you'll likely tell me," he said, "but air little bit a man gets, added to what he's got, makes just a little bit more. Gold is a-getting up in price these days. I'll fetch along a little poke of dust to Larrowby—that's the closest settlement. Fetch it there tomorrow."

"And I'll go with you," I decided.

"Shoo, John, it's a good few miles. Do you want to try that after all the climbing and shammocking round you've been up to today?"

"Just let me have a good night's sleep and I'll be up to my usual again."

I put on just my jeans pants and boots and toted my wet things as we went back to the cabin. As we came in past the garden, I had time to note what a good-built little cabin it was. We hung up my wet clothes in front of the fireplace and built a little blaze to help them dry out. Tombs rummaged out his jug of blockade whiskey and we each one had a fair whet of that. When I allowed one more time that I'd go with him to Larrowby, he still wondered me should I walk so far.

"When I was a soldier, I was in the infantry," I said. "We'd go long ways on foot. I recollect one time we marched eighteen miles a day, three days in a row, and we fought at the end of that."

He sort of gopped at me. "You truly done that? Fought at the end of them three marching days? Did you win the fight?"

"Yes, we won, but I don't enjoy to talk about it, not even to think about it. Tell me something about this Larrowby town we'll be a-going to tomorrow."

"Why, as to that, Larrowby ain't rightly to be called a town, it's just a little bitty settlement. It's most part just one family, the Larrowbys. Good folks, the sort of folks I'd wager you'd like. It's near about the only place I go to, most times. I shop there a little, get my mail there, if there's aught of mail to get. And talk to friends I know."

He went on to say that there was a good general store there, and a little church with a preacher, and a doctor, too, and maybe twenty cabins with farming families in them. He made me feel right anxious to go see for my own self. "Just a little bitty settlement," he said again.

"No matter how little bitty a settlement is," I said, "there always seems to be a pretty girl in it, and usually a bad man."

"Can't rightly speak to a bad man in Larrowby, but there's sure God a pretty girl there," he said, and deep in his beard he smiled a smile to himself.

We more or less loafed the rest of that day. Tombs put his specks of gold with some others, into a little small poke of deer leather he'd tanned and sewed himself. For supper we had good soup made of corn, with wild greens and some slips of smoked meat from that big wild hog he told me about. I allowed I was a-being too much trouble.

"Nair bit of trouble, John," Tombs said. "I'm proud to have you. What you think of this smoked meat?"

"It eats right good," I said. "I noticed your smokehouse sort of stands away from the cabin. Doesn't somebody come now and then and carry some meat off?"

"Oh, sure," he said. "Somebody hungry, I always figure. If a hungry man came to my door and asked, I'd share what I had with him. With air man who needs it more than I do, and I don't need it right bad."

It did me good to hear him talk thataway. "But what can I do for you?" I inquired him.

"Why don't you get your guitar and let's hear some music?"

So I picked and sang, and he joined in with me. I recollect what some of the songs were, they were "Dream True" and "Curtains of Night" and some verses of "Cripple Creek." Tombs could sing fairly good, sang true at least. He purely loved those old songs, vowed he'd heard them often, had near about forgotten them, and didn't want to forget them all over again.

It got dark, and he fetched out a Bear-Paw quilt and an old blue blanket to make me up a bed on his woven-seated sofa. I lay down there and went off to sleep like a groundhog in the winter.

Maybe I did wake up one time in the night, or halfway woke up. I reckon it must have been that mountain, a-crying out in the dark. At sunup next morning, we had us a breakfast of fried eggs and prime home-smoked bacon and more corn dodgers

with honey to them. I inquired Tombs if he'd heard that sound in the dark hours.

"I've heard it so much I'm kindly used to it," he replied me. "I don't care for it, but I settled here so close because of the gold in that stream out yonder. I hope that ain't a greedy-sounding thing to say."

"No, sir," I said. "Nothing greedy about you, Tombs."

"Well, I don't pan out more gold than will pay for what I need in cash. All right now, John, we'll wash up here and take off for Larrowby, if you'll just let me feed my chickens first."

"Go out there and feed them now," I said, "and let me do the dishes and get my boots on."

He went out, and I put on my shirt. It had dried out overnight, only it was all crinkly from washing. I could have used a shave, but I didn't have me a razor, nor Tombs wouldn't have one with his beard. I washed up our breakfast dishes and flung the soapy water out, and back came Tombs. We made ready to take off.

Tombs had filled a croker sack with a peck of shelled corn and maybe a quart over, and I hiked it up on my shoulder to wag along with my guitar. He put his little purse of gold in his pants pocket and picked him up a clay jug, half a gallon size, with a stopper cork in it. Outside, it was fine weather, with the sun a-getting from dawn to morning amongst the leafy trees. We left out of Tombs's front yard and took a sort of trail betwixt oaks and locusts and little clumps of mountain laurels, with pines and hemlocks tall behind them.

"I'm near about the only human soul uses this here path," allowed Tombs, "though I reckon there's animals walks on it."

"I reckon the same," I said, for there were deer tracks in two–three soft, damp places.

We went a-using along there beside the least trickle of water, hardly enough to be called a branch. The trees went up on

ground that rose in slopes both right and left, trees of all sorts a-growing there. And closer in to the sides of the trail, here and there where the sun soaked through, blue dustflowers and specklesy-blooming jewelweed grew in bunches and beds. I can't rightly say for certain how far we went—two miles, maybe three—before we got to a place where the trees had been chopped back from the branch, and there stood a shackly little old shed hogpenned up of logs, for a tub mill. Tombs hollered out "Hello!" and through the open door showed a lanky old miller in a straw hat and dusty big overalls. He hailed Tombs by name.

"John," said Tombs to me, "shake hands with my friend Chop Temple," and we shook hands together. Chop Temple stared me up and down.

"I take it you're the John we hear tell about so much," he said. "Silver John, the man with the silver-strung guitar."

"That's who," I agreed him.

"And here, Chop," said Tombs, a-hiking the sack of corn off my shoulder. "There's a peck in there for you to grind for me, and enough on top of the peck for the toddick to pay you. We'll come back by this evening for it."

"Sure thing," said Chop Temple, a-taking the sack in his hands. "But before youins go, would John just pick a song one time for me to hear?"

So I tuned my strings here and there, and sang him some of "Old Mountain Dew" that Mr. Bascom Lamar Lunsford made up long ago:

"They took me to court and I'm here to report
It looked like my case was lost,
But the judge said to me, 'I will set you free
If you will pay the cost;
They call it that old mountain dew,

And them that refuse it are few,
You've acted the man and I'll help you if I can,
Just give me some good old mountain dew.' "

Chop Temple laughed so hard at that, I got to believing what I'd started to suspect; that he had his tub mill out there so far from folks because a right much of his business would be to grind meal and make malt out of sprouted corn for blockade distillers. "John," he said to me, "you act like as if you'd known these here woods since yesterday."

"Yesterday was the first day I got into them," I said.

Tombs allowed again that we'd come back later for our meal, and we kept on our way. It was maybe another two–three miles along, Tombs stopped on the path.

"I'll just leave this here jug," he said. "I'll put five dollars in it."

"Where you figure on a-leaving it?" I asked.

"Yonder on the bank there's a big old tulip poplar with a hole in it, and I know that tree and so likewise does a fellow I trust."

"Here," and I dug down into my pants pocket. "Here's a five-dollar bill, let me pay the price."

He argued me, but I argued him down and he took the money and rolled it up and stuck it through the curly handle of the jug. Then he swarved on up the bank to leave it. When he came down we started on ahead, and I picked and sang more of Mr. Bascom's old song:

"There's an old hollow tree up the road here from me,
Where I lay down a dollar or two;
I go away and then, when I come back again,
There's some good old mountain dew . . ."

"I vow and declare, you done sung a parable," said Tombs. "Come along now, we're near about to Larrowby."

"You step out like as if you're right anxious to see that pretty girl you say lives there."

"Just you wait till you see her."

We slogged along betwixt thickets and rocks, and then we got to the Larrowby settlement.

It was more or less the way Tombs had told, a few houses bunched up together at the bottom of a big wide hollow. Up the slopes on all sides, the trees had been mostly cut away and you could see fields of corn and gardens of vegetables, and here and there pastures of green grass with cows and sheep in them. The stream we'd followed ran through amongst the cabins, and there was a sort of main street of stomped-down clay that must be right miry in a rainstorm. And folks were out here and yonder, and when they saw us they hollered out Tombs's name:

"Tombs McDonald, as I live and draw breath!"

"Hey, Tombs, how you, how you come on?"

"Who's that there stranger man you done fetched with you?"

A dozen of them came and gathered with us, country-dressed men and country-dressed women and a couple–three children, all of them healthy-looking, happy-faced. Tombs hollered them back:

"This here's a friend of mine, and his name's John!"

They all came closer round to shake hands, to say they'd heard tell good things about me, to ask me to pick them a song. I did, and it was a song I'd always loved:

> "Vandy, Vandy, I've come to court you,
> Be you rich or be you poor,
> And if you'll kindly entertain me,
> I will love you forever more . . ."

They hollered and clapped for that, and wanted another; but Tombs allowed we had business to tend to, and headed for the biggest house in sight. The most part of them trailed along with us.

That house Tombs headed for was broad-fronted, the only one in Larrowby with two floors to it. It was a country-style general store, the walls of wide planks straight up and down and painted white, with thick home-split shakes to cover the roof. All the way across the front ran a porch. Inside were counters and shelves and barrels and stacked-up things—canned goods, different things in jars and sacks and boxes and so on, cheap clothes and shoes, bundles of brooms and rakes and all like that. Up on one wall, a big calendar with a picture of an Indian a-paddling a canoe. In one corner, a little desk with pigeonholes back of it and a sign that said LARROWBY POST OFFICE. Behind the main counter stood a stocky gray man in a shop apron, and a fair-haired rosy-cheeked girl that was bound to be the one Tombs swore was so pretty.

"Why, Tombs!" she said, and her voice sang his name, and her smile bunched her rosy cheeks and purely lighted up the whole place.

"Hey there, Myrrh," he said back, with a big smile of his own. "Let me introduce you my friend John. This here is Myrrh Larrowby, John, and here's her daddy, Mr. Jonas Larrowby."

Mr. Jonas Larrowby shook me by the hand and looked at my guitar. He allowed, the way all those others had, that he knew who I was, had heard right good things about me. Tombs was a-talking up a storm to Myrrh while she waited on a couple of men at the counter. One of them asked her to open him a can of greengage plums, the other called for sliced peaches. She opened the cans and gave them plastic spoons and they ate the fruit right out of the cans, the same way folks used to do in

country stores in years back before there was ice cream so far from town.

Jonas Larrowby acted like as if it made his day to meet me. "We're proud to have you here, John," he said. "Is there aught in this world we can do for you?"

"I'd like to get to a phone," I told him. "To make a long-distance call. I'll pay what the call costs."

"Shoo," he said, "call who air you want to, air place in this whole country, and forget about the payment. I say, it's a privilege to have you with us. There's the phone over yonder, next to the post office desk."

I put through a call to Sam Heaver, to tell him I'd got myself lost up that mountain, but I'd been found again and was all right. He was truly glad and relieved to hear me say it. Then I turned round to where Jonas Larrowby had Tombs's crumbs of gold out to weigh on a little scale.

All the time, more and more folks were a-coming in. Naturally, in that sort of settlement, the store was where all sorts would come in to see what might could be a-going on. I shook hands with a big sight of folks, and I found time to talk to two men.

One was their old doctor, Sam Bullard. He wore jeans about like mine, he was short and stocky-built. His hair was as white as a fresh-picked flock of cotton, down yonder in the lowlands low. He wore spectacles fitted close and chubby to his lined face. About eighty years old, as I reckoned, but a-plenty of gristle in him still.

"Sure enough," he told me, "I try to look after these Larrowby folks when they're ailing. If to look after them is beyond me, I see that they get to the hospital at the county seat. It's good to make your acquaintance, John. And here, let me make you acquainted with Preacher Davis Larrowby too. Right this

minute, I'd judge that you and I and Preacher are the only intellectuals in the neighborhood."

Preacher Davis Larrowby was as gaunted up as a rake, and near about twice as tall. He even towered a couple inches over me, a-standing straight and high for all he must have been near about as old as Dr. Bullard. He had on a long black jimswinger coat, but his shirt was a blue work shirt, with an old string necktie. He had a long nose and a long jaw, and grinned with teeth like a friendly horse.

"Intellectual," he repeated the word. "Doc, you love that term. Well, at that, you have a big shelf of books, I have a big shelf of books. We've always borrowed one another's books, and given them back again. John, will you be here Sunday? You'll be welcome at our church. It's only a little shed of a place, but it's easy to recognize from the cross on top. The Lord's Service Station, some people here call it."

"That's a right good name for a church," I said. "Preacher, I can't rightly say where I'll be on Sunday, but if I'm here I'll come hark at your sermon."

"Our observances are simple," he said. "Enough people come to sing a hymn or two and say a prayer and maybe profit by the Golden Text. And during the school year, I teach the children in this area. That fixes me with enough to live on."

"But hardly enough to go wild on," said the doctor. "He gets some money, and meat and cornmeal and firewood, and he has a good cabin; his kinfolks pitched in and built it for him, about a quarter of a century ago. And he preaches good sermons, so I've been led to believe. I don't go to church very often myself. I don't know whether he prefers the Old Testament or the New."

"I prefer both," Preacher Larrowby said, with a chuckle in it. "If you would read those two Testaments, Doc, you'd find some interesting things in them."

Just then, the other folks hollered me to pick guitar again. They were out on the wide porch, a-forming up two sets of fours to dance. So I picked for them, and Doc Bullard called the dance figures. What I picked was a string of fast-step dance tunes like "Cripple Creek" and "Old Joe Clark" and "Laurel Lonesome" and so on. I saw Tombs out there, a-stepping it off with Myrrh Larrowby, and her cheeks were rosy with how she enjoyed herself.

After while, the dancing stopped and I went back into the store to buy me some clothes. Another blue shirt, some underwear, a couple pairs of socks, a razor. Time passed and Tombs allowed we could buy us some lunch there, but Doc Bullard bade us come eat with him. His cabin had a great big living room in front and a side room he called his office, with a kitchen shedded on behind. His nice old wife gave us fried chicken and white bread and butter, and Tombs made her a present of a jar of wild honey. After we'd eaten, Preacher Larrowby came in the front door and had coffee with us, and he inquired me what I figured to do thereabouts.

"Mainly, find out all I can about Cry Mountain," I said. "Does air soul go there?"

Just as I spoke those words, we heard the cry. It was fainter there than at Tombs's cabin, but you could sure enough hear it, from how many miles off I couldn't guess.

Awoooooo, it howled its call to us, and I hope none of you all air hear the like. It died down and away, and we all looked at one another.

"I've heard that some have tried it, long ago, and didn't come back," said Preacher. "I remember one such—his name was Zeb Plattenburg—and nothing's been heard of him since, not in all those years."

"People here have got into the wise habit of staying away from Cry Mountain," Doc added on.

"Certainly, I've never been there in all my long life," Preacher said.

"I haven't, either," said Doc, "nor do I plan to go."

"I plan to go," I said.

They all opened their eyes wide on me, like as if I'd said I planned to open the brass gates of hell and walk in.

III

After some more talk, and I tell you all that it was talk that plumb steered away from Cry Mountain, Tombs and I went back to Jonas Larrowby's store to pick up the things we'd shopped there. I looked along the shelves of canned things and chose out three different items and paid for them.

"You seem to do a good business here," I said to Mr. Jonas.

"Good enough to live all right," he said. "Once in a big while there's a little shoplifting, but not enough to matter."

Meanwhile, Tombs was a-talking to Myrrh, and plain to see she harked at him, and smiled bunchy-cheeked like as if she liked to hark at him. At last we said our goodbyes to folks in the store and folks outside, and headed back the way we'd come.

Gentlemen, each and all of us know how it is; you travel a strange way and it seems quite a trudge. Then you make your return, and it's not so far back over the same ground. So it didn't seem air much of a time before we came to where Tombs scrambled up the bank to that hollow tree.

But he was gone quite a spell of time, while I stood and waited and hoped he was all right. When he came back down again, he carried a curly-eared jug, but not the same one he'd left.

"I didn't find aught up there, so I went to the house of the blockader," he explained me. "We figured some good neighbor had helped himself. So I bought us another half gallon."

I recollected what Jonas Larrowby had said about shoplifters.

"You should ought to have let me pay," I said, for I had still a little money in my pocket.

"No way," said Tombs. He unstoppered the jug and handed it to me.

"Take you a whet, John," he invited me. "I truly tell you, this is the pure quill, it's as good blockade as you'll find in all these here mountains."

I turned it up over my elbow and took a mouthful. It was as good as he'd said, lively and flavory. He took the jug in his turn and had him his drink.

"That would make a man wish he was a drunkard," he allowed.

He undid his belt and ran it through the ear of the jug and buckled up again. As we walked on, I touched my silver strings and sang him some lines of an old song:

> "You'll nair get shed of old drunkards,
> I'll tell you the reason why—
> There's two old drunkards get theirselves born
> For air old drunkard to die."

Tombs laughed about that. "And ain't it the truth?" he said. "Though you nor I ain't to be numbered with the drunkards. Where did you learn that one?"

"Down in the lowlands," I replied him. "In a county named Moore."

We kept on a-using along, with the trees and the rocks and that little branch of water to company us, and finally we came to Chop Temple's mill. He was ready with the meal from the corn we'd left, and we each tasted a tweak of it before he did up the mouth of the sack. It was as sweet in the mouth as syrup. I hiked the sack on my shoulder, and we bade him a good day and took our trail again. It was near about three

o'clock in the evening, as I judged by the sun, when we came to Tombs's cabin and toted our stuff in and put it down.

We sat down, me on the sofa, Tombs on a chair, and he looked at me.

"All right," he said, "what are your thoughts?"

"Right off," I said back, "I see what you meant about the pretty girl in Larrowby. Miss Myrrh Larrowby is the pure sunshine for beauty. I can see right plain why you want to be with her whenair you can."

He made a shrug of his shoulders. "There's folks one place another would say I'm not good enough for her. Folks who question why I live out here by my lone self, folks who'd even say I ain't got a very reputable reputation."

"If you ask me," I said, a-thinking how to use my words, "I'd say that the important one to judge on you, it's Miss Myrrh her own self. And I'd likewise judge that she thinks a right much of you."

"Oh, she's polite and clever to all the folks, she's always that. But you know, John, she's a big sight younger than I am. Years and years younger. Maybe she's nice to me just because she reckons I'm an old man."

"I'd nair think such a thing if I were in your place," I said back. "She doesn't act to you like as if she thought you were old. And I'll wager you that over the years you'd find out that she'd catch up to you some way."

"Maybe," he said. "Maybe. And now, one other thing."

"What other thing?"

"You allowed you'd go search for Cry Mountain. Climb it."

"Yes, sir," I nodded him. "I said that thing. I mean that thing. I always mean what I say."

"Don't you go trying it, John."

He spoke those words so sharp, I cocked my eye on him.

"Looky here, Tombs," I said, "are you a-telling me or a-asking me?"

"I meant just to ask you, John, ask you in a nice way. It's just I don't want aught bad to happen to you. Since I took care of you right good after you'd been lost yesterday, I've got what I've heard Doc Bullard call a proprietary interest in folks he's helped out of fixes."

"Yes," I granted him, "you did help like a true friend. And I won't forget your help till my day to die. But well you know that a man's got to do what he's got to do."

"All right," he changed the subject, "why don't we go out and have us a little swim, wash off about twelve miles of sweat?"

We took the soap and towels and went out to do that thing. While we flung off our clothes at the edge of the branch, a low, far-off growl of thunder sounded at us; sounded to our left, some place away downstream. We both looked up at the blue sky. No clouds there to matter, but there had been that thunder.

"Thunder on the left," muttered Tombs in his beard. "That has some kind of meaning."

"I've often heard tell, it signifies that something big is on the way to happen to you," I said. "A good thing or a bad thing, the old saying nair says which one, so far as I know."

"Like that little verse we used to say when I was just a chap," said Tombs, and he repeated it:

> "A mole upon the face
> Tells that something will take place,
> But not what that something will be.

"Only you nor neither I got a mole on the face," he added on.

We both laughed over that, and felt some easier, and got into the chill-watered branch.

That's right, the water was just as cold as when I'd been in it before, and after I'd lathered up and rinsed off I rubbed hard with the towel. We got our clothes back on and went back to the cabin. There, I built up a fire of hardwood chunks on the hearth.

"Let's call it my turn to fix dinner," I said, and reached into the paper poke of things I'd bought in Larrowby and fetched out the three cans.

Tombs sort of goggled at them. "You a-going to feed us just canned stuff?" he wanted to know.

"Wait till you eat it before you fault it," I said back. I found a kettle the right size and opened the first can. It was beef stew with potatoes, a brand I knew was good. I dumped that in, then a can of cut green beans, then a can of little small onions. I stood with the kettle in my hand and waited for the fire to burn down a tad, make good coals. Then I hung the kettle on its hook and stirred it with an iron spoon. When the time was right, I sprinkled in some salt and pepper.

"At least we can have some corn pone to go with that," allowed Tombs, and started to mix meal and water for it.

When it was suppertime I took the kettle off and dished my mixture into two plates. Tombs had acted sort of bothered with the idea all along, but the first forkful he put in his mouth, he cheered for it.

"This is champion to eat, John," he said. "How'd you learn to do it?"

"Just chance," I replied him. "Chance works the most part of things in this world. I was alone in a little cabin at Haynie's Fork, a-getting ready to scratch up some supper for me, when Obray Ramsey and Byard Ray came to the door. I looked amongst what cans I had, and I mixed us up just what we've

got here now—stew, beans, onions. They tied into it and ate it and vowed it as first-rate, same as you did. So now and then I fix it again."

We cleaned up the last speck, and washed the pot and the plates and so on. After that, another drink, just a thimbleful, of the blockade whiskey. Tombs called for me to pick guitar, and I did that, and we sang a couple songs together. Then I tried the one I'd made up, back a day and a half ago when I was a-fixing to get myself lost:

> "What's up across the mountain,
> What's there on the yonder side?
> Nobody's here to tell me,
> Nobody to be my guide,
> But nair you doubt, I'm a-going to find out,
> All over this world so wide . . ."

"I swanny, John, that sounds to be the story of your life," said Tombs. "A-going round and round, a-finding things out. That's your occupation, and I do hope and pray the good Lord it won't be your sudden downfall."

"It's not been that yet," I said. "Not so far."

"Folks will tell you, there's always a first time. Now hang up on the picking and singing for a spell, John, I've purely got to beg you out of a-hunting for Cry Mountain."

"Save your breath and cool your coffee, Tombs. I'm a-going."

"At least let me to tell you what I've heard tell about Zeb Plattenburg. He went there, and he nair came back."

"So I heard Preacher Larrowby say. What's the story on Zeb Plattenburg?"

So Tombs told it, like this:

Zebulon Vance Plattenburg was named for the governor and senator all these mountains are so proud of, and he was an

upstanding young man of Larrowby who did his best to be a hero himself. A good shot with a deer rifle ("Maybe near about as good as you or either me, John," Tombs put in), a dancer who could dance to dawn's early light, a courter and kisser of a-many a pretty girl.

This Zeb fellow liked to cut shines, pester folks with his talk. Once, at some play party maybe ten–fifteen years ago, there'd been thunder and lightning and it was a-pouring the rain, and Zeb had run out in the yard and got himself soaked through to his underwear and dared God Almighty to strike him down with a thunderbolt. Nobody at the party had enjoyed to hear him carry on thataway. Tombs said he'd been there, and had signed a cross on himself to keep evil away. But folks were right impressed with Zeb Plattenburg. And when Cry Mountain raised its voice, he had a reason to pester folks worse yet.

He'd vowed and sworn up and down he'd find that mountain ("Just like you, John") and he'd climb it, choke off its cry so folks could rest easier. No matter what his friends could say, he set off to do it. And nair did he come back. Nor did the bravest man of Larrowby dare go see what had happened to him, all the years since.

When Tombs finished his tale, I said, "And you reckon I'm just another Zeb Plattenburg when I say I'll go."

"No, sir," said Tombs, "you ain't another Zeb Plattenburg. He was just a brag man. All he did, the day long from morning to night, was brag on himself. He'd brag himself into fist-and-skull fights one place another, and the most part of the time he won those fights. You ain't like that, though I'd reckon you'd do yourself proud in a little turn-up. But I'd say, whatair Zeb said he'd do, he'd do it or die a-trying, and you're like him thataway."

"Yes," I said, "yes, likely I am. I'll go out and look for Cry Mountain tomorrow morning."

"If that's your last word—"

"It's my last word, all right."

"If that's it," said Tombs, "then all I can do is help you the best I can."

I shook my head hard at him. "Don't you try to come along. This thing is my business."

"I don't aim to come along. Just to get you started on your way, and pray till you get back."

"Pray," I repeated him. "Do that, Tombs. Prayer just might could be called for."

I reckoned it was my time to change a subject, so I picked up my guitar. I didn't reckon I'd do a song about aught that was creepy, so I tried some of a cheerful one:

> "Yonder comes my pretty little girl,
> How do you think I know?
> I know her by her yellow curls,
> A-hanging down so low . . ."

Tombs cocked his ear to hark at that, and when I was done he said, "Sing it again one more time," and I did. When I was done, he sparkled his eyes at me for relish of the thing.

"I vow up and down," he said, "that there makes me think of Myrrh."

"The way you are," I said back, "what is there good and pretty you hear or see that you don't think of her? You've got it bad, Tombs, or likely I should ought to say, you've got it good. I do wish you and Miss Myrrh joy of one another."

"And I sure enough wish your wish sure enough comes true." He got up from where he sat. "Hell, what crazy words did I say just then? Let's not bother to figure them out. Let's just have us another thimbleful of that there how-come-you-so we picked up on the trail home from Larrowby."

He poured us out two drinks, and the liquor was nice on the

tongue and warm all the way down. We sipped and talked, and the sipping and the talking were both right good. After that, I looked out what I'd pack to take with me—the shirts and socks and so on I'd bought in Larrowby. Tombs fetched me a croker sack to stow them into, and likewise an old army canteen on an army web pistol belt.

"You'll need that," he said. "You won't want to get yourself all dried out, the way you were when you came to my door."

"I don't like to take your canteen, Tombs," I argued him.

"Shoo, I got me more than one of those. Didn't I tell you that when I was in the service, I worked some with the supply sergeant?" Then he stopped, and even his beard went into serious lines. "John, I'll say one more time, I beg to you, don't go up Cry Mountain."

"And one more time, I'll not listen."

"Bullheaded, ain't you?"

"That's a true word, Tombs. Now, I'm a-going to lie down and have a sleep."

I stretched out on his sofa with the blue blanket on me, and my eyes closed and I drifted right off, quick and easy.

Maybe I had dreams, I sure enough should ought to have had dreams to warn me of what would come; but if I did dream, I've purely forgotten what it was. I woke when the morning was at a gray, to hear Tombs a-bustling here and yonder.

"You lie back, take it easy, you've got a hard day ahead of you," he said. "I'm a-fixing us what'll be a good breakfast. I'd put baited lines in the branch out yonder, and I've pulled us out two of the best trout you could call for."

He said the truth that time. He'd scaled and gutted those trout before they'd more than stopped a-wiggling, and with hoecake and honey and coffee they were fit for the best folks on earth to eat. I had a quick shave and dragged on my boots and

picked up the croker sack he'd given me, and slung on my guitar.

"Belt that canteen on you," he told me. "I put spring water in it, and there's an old saying round here that if you drink the spring water in these here parts, you'll find your way back to drink it again, come hell or heaven or the day of judgment."

"I hope to my heart that that comes true for me," I said.

"And here." He held out something in a paper poke. "I split some hoecakes and laid in slices of that wild hog ham. You may find that worth your biting into along your way." He squinted his eyes at me. "John, I pure down wish you'd change your mind."

"I don't do that when my mind's made up," I said.

"Oh, sure, sure."

He walked out with me and all the way to his branch where he panned his specks of gold. He took me to where big rocks stuck up, with the water a-swirling round them.

"You can cross over here, John," he said.

"And which way to Cry Mountain on the other side?" I asked.

As I spoke, I heard that cry, *Awoooooo.*

"Just you keep an ear ready to hark at that," said Tombs. "That'll guide you. John, I ain't about to tell you goodbye. Goodbye has a sort of final sound. I'll just say, do your best where you're a-going, and come back here and stay a week."

We shook hands together. His grip was as strong as a trap. Then I put myself to that crossing on the rocks. One–two of them were mossy and slippery, but I made the trip all right. On the far side I turned. Tombs still stood there. I put up a hand to him, and he put up a hand to me. Then I headed in amongst the trees on my bank of the stream, and I saw him no more.

No trail there, but I set my face for where Cry Mountain's cry had risen.

Those trees were thick-grown and big, all kinds. From high on some of them hung down crawly vines. I pushed along under them. It was dead quiet under there, quiet as in some church where they were a-getting ready to bury somebody that was dead. And it was dim dark, too; the sun was up but it didn't get through all the leaves and vines. Underfoot, my boots found fallen twigs and pine straw, and likewise pebbles and rocks. That part of the mountain forest was like as if no living soul had air walked in it except maybe the panther, bear, and fox. Just them and, one time back yonder, that Zeb Plattenburg man they'd told me about. And he, if I was to credit them, had gone only one way through, had nair come back to tell of it.

I wondered myself did I truly stay on the right way to Cry Mountain. I'd been a-trying to seek that way for an hour. I stopped and tasted the good sweet water in the canteen lent me by Tombs McDonald. Then I stood still and harked, with naught to hear but my own breathing. I stood till Cry Mountain cried out.

Yes, I was headed right, and no I reckon about it. I walked toward where the cry rose, walked even before it died out, and kept on a-walking.

I scrambled up a slope under more trees and more. I came to where the trees thinned. The way along got easier, and I kept my feet to it. Once again I rested and supped enough water to wet my mouth inside. At last I got to the top of a ridge.

Beyond the ridge, the trees were just brush for quite a stretch, and above them and on past them I saw what purely had to be Cry Mountain.

IV

All right, gentlemen, you all wonder me what did Cry Mountain look like, and how came me to know it was Cry Mountain?

From off where I stood up to look, it sort of flew up against the sky. It was tall, tall, and it was bare, bare, and it was steep, steep, steep. It was shaped like a bucket turned upside down. The naked rock it was made of had a tan-gray color, and looked so straight up and down that you'd reckon a mountain boomer squirrel would have its job cut out for it to climb up. High at the top, which figured to be flat, grew trees, thick and green. And on the tan-gray side of Cry Mountain a-facing me ran a crooked line up, like some Z's one on top of the other. That line looked green, too, a dark green, and if trees hung on there, a man might hang on to the trees to help him mount up.

Cry Mountain, naked and steep, stood so high above other heights right and left, they looked like brushy knolls. It stood where it was and, if I'd had aught of a doubt, it named itself to me with its cry, *Awoooooo* . . .

I headed for it.

The trees were thinned out as I went down a long slope, and there was some coarse grass that whispered against my boots. A spotted snake went whipping away as I came. I didn't see what kind it was, but I jumped about a foot. My idea of nothing to do is mess round with snakes. The sun was a-getting high in a blue sky without a cloud in it, and I judged it to be maybe half past ten when I started that approach march toward Cry

Mountain. I kept on my way, but I stopped maybe each twenty minutes or so, just to squat down and breathe a few breaths. By noon I came to a clear little branch of sweet water and I took me more of a blow there. I didn't eat the lunch Tombs had fixed for me, but I did drink from the branch and filled up my canteen again and washed my face and neck and ears. I felt as good and fresh as I could hope when I headed along through little belts of trees, toward Cry Mountain off there.

It was an hours-long walk again, with all the time the steep bare mountain a-coming closer and closer, till it took up a big bunch of the country ahead. I got to where I could make out the way the rock of it was, steep and mostly smooth and a little bitty bit shiny in the sun. It didn't call to me now, maybe it just waited. There was no sound except a little puff of wind, a-rustling the grass and the leaves of trees here and there.

It was still a right good walk to the foot of Cry Mountain. Trees thinned out into brush and tussocky grass, and the sun got hot and bright. By the time I stopped again, the sun said maybe five o'clock and Cry Mountain shut off all things in sight ahead, and rose up above me near about straight.

But I came no closer. I'd been on the march all day, and there wouldn't be enough light for me to get all the way up. I camped, under some pines and oaks.

To do that thing, I raked up leaves and pine straw into a heap to lie down on. Then I pulled together dry twigs of pine for kindling, and broke up fallen branches of oak for longer burning. All that wood I stacked together to be used. My canteen shook like as if it needed to be filled full again, so I made a little scout at the foot of the mountain. Sure enough, I found a nice running stream that must be what came down from above, and I drank a handful and it was as good as a man might want. So I filled the canteen and headed back to where I'd fixed to stay the night.

The sun was a-dimming away beyond the height, and things got slatey gray. I busted up a couple of handfuls of pine twigs and took just the one match to light them. On that blaze I put chunks of hardwood, little ones first, then big, and the fire handled them and grew bigger and brighter. It was a comfortabler fire than my other one had been, when I was lost on the mountain betwixt Sam Heaver's store and Tombs McDonald's cabin. I wondered myself how Tombs was a-doing right then, and I hoped in my soul he didn't pester himself on account of me. By then I'd got right hungry, and I fetched out the johnnycake and ham and enjoyed to eat it. At last I went and fetched in big wood chunks and piled them close to my fire, but not close enough to catch. I dragged off my boots and stretched out on the bed I'd made of leaves and pine straw and looked up to where the sky had gone black and little crumbs of stars were out, like pieces of the day.

I studied those stars. I'll nair get tired out a-studying them. The patterns they make: the Big Bear and its baby, the Little Bear, with the North Star, Polaris, at the tip of its tail; over across the sky from those, Cassiopeia like a big bright W of stars; all the other patterns I'd been taught to pick out, back when I was a boy. I thought about how long the stars had been spread out thataway, how when men lived in caves and made their knives and hatchets out of stone, the stars had been like that for the cave folks to wonder at. How far off they were, I'd had that told to me too, but my poor mind couldn't figure it. But they were there, the stars were there, and I was there too, and it might could be they studied me the way I studied them. I hoped to myself that they wished me the best of luck. So then, I slept.

Sleeping was no chore, gentlemen. After all, I'd come maybe something like fifteen tough miles since morning, up and down slopes and amongst trees and all like that, so I felt like

a-stretching out for sleep. I woke up once in the wee small hours, because my fire had died down and I was chilly. I pushed on more wood, watched it catch and blaze, and looked up at all the stars. They were still up there, in their forever pattern. Back to sleep I went, and when I roused again it was dawn, gray dawn with some pink in it, which should ought to mean a fine day with no rain.

I had more johnnycake with ham. Tombs had given me three. I wondered where I'd eat the third, and what would be a-going on. I drank from my canteen and picked up my stuff and slung my guitar behind me. I headed for Cry Mountain, which just then took up all the space in front of me.

I went straight there, to where that winding line of trees came down. Water came down with them, fell about five–six feet in a little tumble, and I had a drink and filled up my canteen again. Then I looked at what had to be the way up.

That was the start of things, gentlemen, and nair have I had air such a climb. In my day, both before then and later, I've been on mountains, with strange things to happen on them. Up on Hark Mountain I'd scrambled alone one time, and One Other waited in the pool at the top. I'd gone up Yandro, and a thousand things made me thankful I could find my way down again. And likewise Teatray, and Wolter, and one named Dogged, and others without names I can call to mind. And those mountains had things on them, things I'd just as soon not call to mind either. High mountains are a feeling, Lord Byron said once, but he nair said what sort of feeling. I've had my troubles on high mountains.

Not that Cry Mountain would be champion tall. I'd say it stuck up about fourteen hundred feet above the ground on all sides, though that ground would be considerably up above sea level. But the going up was what took it out of even a good climber with lots of gristle in him. Along that stream that wan-

dered here and there along ledges and down in falls to other ledges below, that was the one and only way up. As I've told you all, trees and bushes grew along it, to grab hold of to help you. There were bunches of laurel and little strings of pine and then oaks and gums and thorns and now and then black walnut. I grabbed onto those to pull myself along.

It was work to tire the best climber, and I stopped and stopped again to get my breath back. I heard naught, no bird nor either the rustle of an animal, but along the way I learnt there were things there.

At one place the stream beside me had hollowed out a wide, deep place, and the water in there was as clear as glass, with green weeds a-swaying in it. Green weeds and something else. I saw the something, and it saw me. Half-hidden amongst the green stuff, it looked like a woman under the water, a pretty woman naked as a jaybird, with streaming brown hair and two eyes fixed on me.

If that's truly what it was, she shifted down there and her naked arms reached up toward me. That's when I moved right out and up past another cataract, to where the stream was narrower and faster and, as I reckoned, safer to rest by. I'd heard tell of the Dakwa, the water-spirit of the Cherokees, that tempts you to within grab reach and drowns and eats you. Luns Lamar had spoken of such a thing, and there's a bunch of notes about it in Mr. Mooney's book of Cherokee beliefs. I didn't stay there to make sure it was a Dakwa. There might could be a fatal way of a-finding out.

Along the flowing water, my side of it, was soft earth in patches, and here and yonder amongst sprawly roots and tufty grass you might could see a footprint, or more footprints than one. I looked at a set of those.

They were hoofmarks, like what a right big deer would leave

if it could climb that far up on Cry Mountain. Sure. Only—what deer would walk on just only two feet?

Those tracks were made one by one, the way a man walks, a-putting one foot ahead of the other.

Well, maybe such a thing lived and walked on this earth. I recollected a book I'd seen in the library once, *Oddities* by Rupert T. Gould. And that Gould fellow knew what he was a-doing when he named his book that. Right the first chapter in it told what had happened more than a hundred years back, the westernmost part of England. There'd been a heavy snow to fall, and there were hoofmarks in it—hoofmarks in place after place, on top of houses and on walls. Hoofmarks, of something that walked on two hoofs. And folks in Devonshire were scared to go outdoors, and how should a man feel, all alone with a set of hoofmarks like that, on a mountain with a bad name?

I took me a good look all round, through the trees, and I was glad not to see aught that had such feet and walked thataway on only two of them.

Where there came down another little fall I pulled myself up to the ledge above, that sloped so that the stream could run along there. The trees I saw were oak and maple and locust, a-growing on both banks, with brush under them. I could see betwixt the trunks how far I'd come up, and likewise how far up the steep rocky face was above me. Still no sound of a bird or aught else. But if I could hear naught, I could feel. As I made my way on, I had me a feeling of something that followed.

That's no sure enough good feeling to have, all alone by yourself on such a climb. Because, as some of you all have heard tell, there's a thing in some parts of this mountain country they call the Behinder. It sneaks up along behind a lonely traveler, and he nair sees it because it's on his back quick as a mink on a

setting hen, and that's the last second of his life. It so happens that once I had me a glimpse of a Behinder, up on the top of Yandro Mountain, and I'm honest to tell you that the glimpse is enough to last me forever, if I live to be a hundred and twelve.

I kept on my way, with my wits about me and the tail of my eye a-looking past my shoulder. If that was a Behinder, a-making air so slightly a soundless stir in the leaves, I'd do what I could. I reckoned what to do, if it got close, would be all a sudden to whip round and look it betwixt its eyes (if a Behinder truly has what we understand eyes to be) and say, "All right, what the hell do you figure to do?"

But no great much of a comfort in that, not all alone a-picking my way along the ledge where the water ran and the trees grew. I stooped quick, and grabbed me up a rock, one that likely weighed four pounds and was a pinky-gray flint kind of a rock. That would smash a skull if I had to do that. If the Behinder sure enough has a skull, has a sure enough head.

But I'm glad to say that naught tried onto me as I went along the ledge beside the stream to where came another fall of water from above. The rock was straight up and down there, but into the face of it had been dug or chipped some pits, big enough to grab with the hand or shove into with a toe. Who or what had dug them? But they made a ladder up, and I dropped that rock I'd had and swarved my way up. I reckon it may have been twelve or fourteen feet to the ledge above, but it seemed like as if it was as tall up there as the top of a church steeple. I knew that if I looked down below me, the face of Cry Mountain would look as straight up and down as the wall of a room, with me like a fly a-walking up it. Well I knew that thing, and you all can just bet your necks I didn't look down. I kept a-climbing on those pits till I got to the flat face of a ledge

above, and I sat for a second and looked at what was up there with me.

Some black walnuts grew there, and beneath them some scrub of different kinds. Where the dark soil had been flung up by the flow of the water, there were some smaller plants, about a foot and a half high, a whole bed of them. I studied them.

They made quite a bunch, each one a-putting up two or three sets of five leaves; five leaves, like the green fingers of a hand spread out for a grab. I right off knew what they were. Ginseng, the scholar crowd will call it, that's a word from the Chinese language, I reckon, but here in these mountains we just call it sang and let it go at that.

You find you a nice patch of sang and you're in the money. The roots, dried and cured out the proper way, will fetch sixty dollars a pound, more or less, at the merchant's. And he sells it for away more than that, over yonder in China, where they say it will cure all sorts of ills, will make you live a hundred years, will make an old gray-haired grandsire get to chasing young women through the woods on a night when it's pouring the rain. There it grew, and in rich soil. All except in one place, under the leaves, the soil looked pale. I wondered myself if maybe rocks lay there. I put down my hand and pulled aside some five-fingered leaves to see what kind of rocks.

But not rocks, after all. Bones.

They were pale bones, as smooth as if they'd lain there a hundred years. And they were human bones. By their size, I reckoned they'd once been a fairly well-grown man.

I dragged the sang plants as far apart as I could to see those last remains of who had lived and now lived no more. The bones lay more or less together, not scattered out, the ribs there with arm bones to right and left and leg bones at the bottom. Like as if whoair it had been was down on his back to die. Only

there was no skull to them, no skull at all. Who had these dry bones been?

I made out a dark band that wound round the spine, and moved off quick, for it might could be a snake again. Then I had a second look, and it was just an old, old leather belt, near about rotted away. A big square brass buckle looked up at me. And it had two letters on it, two block letters.

ZP.

All right, I said to myself, ZP stands for a name, and I reckoned I'd heard the name, at Preacher Larrowby's house. ZP—Zeb Plattenburg. It had to be Zeb Plattenburg who lay there, what bones were left of him, where he'd been a-climbing Cry Mountain, the way he'd bragged he'd do, and had got that far and no farther.

I want you all to know I felt a chill in my own bones, a sort of stir in my hair. Tombs McDonald had said that Zeb Plattenburg had been a bold, daring young fellow, who'd more or less dared himself to try this climb, and had made it up as far as where the sang grew so thick and so rich. I took me a look all round and up and down, and was glad that no leaf stirred just then, no shadow moved. I got down on one knee and prayed a prayer for rest to the soul of Zeb Plattenburg, who'd climbed to there and died there because there was no rest in his bold, careless heart.

But what had gone with Zeb Plattenburg's head? I could find no trace of it. It couldn't have rolled away through that tangly bed of sang. Somebody—something—must have toted it off somewhere.

I got up from where I'd prayed and kept on up Cry Mountain, up beyond where Zeb Plattenburg hadn't lived to get to. For I, too, had sworn and vowed I'd make that climb to the top.

I worked my way along that ledge that had itself a bed of

sang, with under the sang what had to be Zeb Plattenburg's last resting place. I walked under trees beside the long flow of water and amongst bushes. Again there was the feel of a something on the follow behind me, and I looked back and looked again, and naught to see there. You all can bet I felt creepy. But all the while I was a-making it farther up to the top of Cry Mountain than Zeb Plattenburg had managed before he was some way struck dead and his skull taken away. I'd heard tell, time and again, that a pure heart will win over evil, and I sure enough wished that my heart was a purer one.

Where the water flowed down from above onto that woodsy ledge, I stopped and sat down. It wasn't noon yet, but I'd made myself tired and hungry with all that swarving and climbing. So I put myself on a knob of rock where I could look all ways—up, down, forward, and back—and got out the last chunks of corn bread and ham that Tombs had put together for me, and bit into them. I drank from my canteen to help the last crumbs down into me. Yet again, a long look all directions. If there was aught there, it was a-crowding in on me unseen.

I pulled my guitar round where I sat. I swept at the strings and worked me out a tune. I sang, with the words a-coming to me as I sang them:

"Cry Mountain, cry,
Why do you cry?
Does wind or rain
Put you in pain,
Or do you tell
A man will find hell
If he comes to your top?
Me, I won't stop
Till I reach to where I know
What it is makes you cry so . . ."

I stopped and made a whisper of the strings with my thumb. I thought to myself, that song was no great one, the words or either the music. But if I had me some time later, maybe I'd work it into something better. But what I did hope was that this mountain had heard me, that it knew it was John against the mountain. If I'd truly been a country fool to climb so high on it, I'd at least made it farther up than poor Zeb Plattenburg. And I'd climb higher yet. I turned my eyes upward to see how I could do it.

Right off, I saw how I'd nearly made it. The lip of the precipice was just above there, with trees grown close on it and a-bending down, big bushy-topped pines and old oaks, some more black walnut, maple, gum, and mountain ash and others. And next thing I saw, on the face of the rock ran a sort of cut-in ladder.

It was no little bunch of shallow hand- and footholds this time, like those I'd used below. These were deep and roomy, near about like a staircase, only the rock was too steep for a staircase. Like a ladder, as I've told you all. And there was no point in my a-waiting down there on that lump of rock. I swung my guitar back behind me, and I set myself to those steps and went up them.

I climbed and I climbed with both my hands and both my feet, and in time I got to the top. I dragged myself up on a flat place, level and broad, with tufty grass under the trees. I got hold of the stem of a sapling and hauled myself up to where I could stand.

The top of Cry Mountain was as flat as a table, but a table grown over with trees. I moved a little in amongst them. Through the leafy branches ahead I saw something else. A stockade, I made it out to be. Big stout poles of different kinds of wood, driven in so close together you could barely see betwixt them. Somebody had made that fence of poles, had

driven them in. I walked toward them, right delicate as I moved, ready for what might could happen.

Close in, I saw there was a gate. It was made of stout rails laid across. There was a foot log at the bottom and a cross-log at the top, and the gate fitted in there like as if a master builder had done it. Centermost of that log above the gate was fastened a skull, with eyes of dark shadow and a grin of its teeth. I looked up at it, and I could swear it looked down at me.

That selfsame moment, something made itself heard.

Not the voice of Cry Mountain this time, not that lonesome sound. It was a deep hum, like bees, but louder. I turned to see, and sure enough it *was* bees.

A swarm of them drifted amongst the trees toward me. There must have been a nation of them, bright and brown, and they were big—bigger than bees, than bumblebees—more like a world of flying mice or sparrows for size, and all of them a-humming as they came at me.

I ran hard against the rails of the gate, so hard I almost bounced off. I grabbed hold, a-fixing to climb over.

"I've been waiting for you to get here," said a deep voice the other side of the gate. "I've watched you all the way up. You'd better come in, quickly."

The heavy gate swung inward, with a screech of wood on wood. And you all can bet I flew through and inside it.

V

The gate swished in the air as it swung shut behind me. I heard the heavy snap it made as some kind of catch or lock caught itself. That swarm of great big bees came up and fluttered itself right against the rails of the gate. The bees hung there in the air like a lumpy brown blanket, feet tall and feet wide, and all the humming was like the rush of falling water.

"Don't be afraid of them now," the deep voice said to me. "A sting from one of them would kill you like the bite of a poisonous snake. But they never come past this fence."

I turned round and had my first sight of who was a-talking.

He was big, so heavyset that you didn't realize right off that he had a good height, but he wasn't porky. He looked as hard as iron. He'd weigh maybe twenty-five pounds more than I do. He wore a good-looking old-timey hunting shirt down to his knees, buckskin as pale as cream with long fringes at the sleeves and cape collar. On each side at the front was worked a thunderbird in red and blue beads. The collar lay open, and on his hairy chest hung what at first I thought was a crucifix. A red silk sash went round his waist. His square-jawed face looked middle-aged and smart as hell. The dark, gray-shot hair was balded off his brow, but it was long over his ears. He had a short, straight nose and a mustache swept out right and left, and on his lower lip and chin point a streak of beard the size and length of a paring-knife blade. His eyes, and they were eyes as gray and shadowy as smoke, studied me all over from head to foot.

"You're a tall man," said his deep, croony voice. "Taller than I am, and I'm six feet or nearly. And you're strong and active, you've had to be with all the climbing and hiking you've done these past few days." He stopped again, his eyes still a-climbing all over me. "And your name's John."

"How come you to know my name?"

"I make it my business to know some interesting things, even things far off beyond these mountains. I have methods of finding out—you may find them hard to believe. I let you come here because I thought we might profit each other." He smiled on me, a tight-mouthed smile. "As for me, my name's Ruel Harpe. Harpe with an *e* at the end of it."

"Harpe," I repeated him. "I've read that name in a history book."

"It's a name with an interesting significance, isn't it?"

While we talked, I was a-having myself a look round to make out what kind of a place this was on top of Cry Mountain. Outside the gate, those big bees had hummed off somewhere away. Where I was inside grew trees, all manner of trees. Pines and hemlocks and cedars, rich green. A stand of hickory. Laurel, thicketed here and yonder. And maple and ash and wild cherry and so on, but no brush—that had been cleared away. Streaks of sunlight came a-stabbing down here and there. Somewhere amongst trunks and branches, I thought I glimpsed somebody a-standing to watch and hark at Ruel Harpe and me, without a-coming into sight.

I turned back to where Ruel Harpe stood, still a-making his study of me. He put up a broad-backed hand and sort of stroked that blade of beard.

"An interesting significance," he repeated over again.

"There were two Harpes I read the mention of," I said. "Brothers, in what used to be wild country in Tennessee and Kentucky, back about the seventeen and nineties."

"That's right," he nodded me. "Micajah and Wiley Harpe. Big and Little Harpe, they were called. They're credited with being more or less the founding fathers of American outlawry."

"People were purely scared of them," I said.

"That's true, but the Harpes have never been truly understood. Anyway, here you are. It's my duty to show you hospitality."

You might could figure that when he said the word "hospitality," he was hospitable. But the sound of his deep voice was more like an order to come along, like as if I was under arrest. When we started out together, he didn't have his hand on my shoulder or aught like that. But it felt like it.

Well, the top of Cry Mountain, that flat, tree-grown top of it, was several acres big, as I judged. And grown up with trees but no brush under them as I've said, just flat, rich-looking ground, not what you'd expect on top of a mountain like that. Here and there grew bits of grass and patches of moss, one or two clumps of toadstools, and some flowers. I didn't seem to know those flowers, though I know most kinds hereabouts. The fenced-in part was maybe the size of a great big stable yard. As Ruel Harpe and I sort of ambled along together, it was a mite hard to recollect that I'd climbed up the steep, scary side of Cry Mountain like a fly a-going up a wall. And what he'd said about how he knew I was a-coming, how he'd more or less let me come, why, that was on my mind. I decided I'd ask him about it.

"You mean, you could have stopped me," I said, and thought, and decided to say it. "The way you stopped Zeb Plattenburg."

"Oh, that one," said Ruel Harpe. "He wasn't worth my trouble. You wonder what happened to him, down there? You should be able to guess. The bees. They settled on him, and

one sting should have been enough, but maybe a hundred of them stung him. A thousand."

I studied that. "These are special bees. But ordinary bees, they die when they sting."

"So do these bees die when they sting, but there are always more bees to take the places of the dead. Don't get out there where they can sting you, John. I might add I have other guardians on Cry Mountain than bees."

We walked along over the earth and rock under the trees. The light through the leaves was green, like maybe down at the bottom of the sea. I looked thisaway and that, but saw no sign of other living things, and no sign of a house or cabin. "Where do you live?" I inquired Harpe.

"We have comfortable quarters down under the rock."

"We?" I repeated him. "Then you're not alone up here, I take it."

"No, I'll introduce you to some companions pretty soon. Choice companions. I'm careful about companions."

"You nair wanted Zeb Plattenburg," I made a guess.

"The one whose bones lie down there? No, I hadn't any need of him. I let him get just so close, then I got rid of him."

"With your bees," I said. "Did they take his head? I didn't see it with the rest of his bones."

"It was brought to me by—something else. You've seen it over my gate. Impressive, isn't it? I sent a friendly creature for it."

I reckoned he wanted me to ask what sort of creature, but I didn't.

We'd walked while we talked, and we came to a big deep ditch of a place, with trees a-growing thick along both sides of it. It was ripped deep into the earth and rock, a good sixty feet long and ten or twelve feet wide, and when I looked down into it I couldn't make out the bottom, just shadowy rock sides that

looked as black as tar. Only, far far below, there was a flash that danced and winked like flames of fire.

"That," said Harpe, "is what makes the cry of Cry Mountain."

I looked down again into that dark gash with fire below. It made my head swim to look. "I reckon you mean that the wind blows in and makes the sound," I said.

"You're right, John, sometimes the wind does that. But there's a way to make the wind blow. Let me show you."

He stepped up to a big tree, a sort of poplar. There was a hole in its bark, and he dived his hand in and fetched out a crooked something that first off looked like bone. It was as long as from Harpe's elbow to his fingertips, and I saw that it was hollowed out to be a horn, with the small end shaped into a mouthpiece.

"I'd rather you wouldn't handle it, John," he said. "Just look at it."

I looked. Its outside was carved in crossed lines, some sort of a design. "What's it made of?" I inquired him.

"I think of ivory. Elephant ivory, carved by Indians. It was here when first I came, years ago. Of course, you're going to say that there were no elephants here in old times."

"No, I won't say that." I might could have mentioned the Bammat, now and then reported in the mountains, but I didn't. "The Indians knew about elephants before Columbus, they left images and pictures."

"Anyway, this makes the cry."

He set the horn to his mouth and blew a long, trembly note.

Next moment the voice of the mountain rose round us, *Awooooooo,* sad and drawn out, and so loud right there that the rocks under my boots seemed to shake and dance like a ship's deck in a storm. I was glad for that moaning call to die out of the air. I looked on Harpe, and likely my face was sort of blank,

for he laughed. A musical laugh it was. He put the horn back into its hollow tree.

"Yes," he said, "I can do that. It's all right for you to know, because here you are and here you'll stay. I was able to watch you as you came up here. I let you do it because I've heard about you—what you've been able to do in your time, really mysterious things. And I decided that it was high time for you to start doing them sensibly, profitably." He kept his eyes on me. "Doing them helpfully," he added on.

"I see," I said, for I did begin to see. "You want me to join in with you on something. What if I say no?"

"If you said no, you'd be sorry," he sort of drawled out. "Up here, nothing is done or left undone except as I say the word, and never will be."

"What if you died?"

"I won't just die. I'd have to be killed, and what can kill me?"

Plain as print, he believed what he said.

"And with me gone," he went ahead, "you wouldn't last an hour inside these stockades." Another look stare up and down me. "Maybe the bees would come in and find you. Maybe something else."

"What kind of something else?"

"Are you a praying man?" he questioned me back, right serious about it. "Then pray that you never find out. But for your own good, John, don't pray out loud.

"I've promised you hospitality," he said. "You can be at ease here, happy here. But—well, I'll put it this way. You've read in the Bible, I suppose."

"I've read the Bible through, a good few times. I asked you, what you a-driving at, and I wait for an answer."

So friendly was his smile. "If you're a Bible reader, John, you're familiar with what the Bible calls holy names. I must ask

you not to say any of those holy names out loud here. There might be something violent happen, to you and to me and to others."

His smile went, and he shrugged. "Enough of that. Let's go where we can be more comfortable."

He led me back away from that dark, ugly rip in Cry Mountain, led me amongst tall, thick-grown trees to where there grew a right big clump of laurel. Carefully he pulled aside branches to left and right, till I could see a hole amongst some rocks, not a great big raw one like the one that gave Cry Mountain its name. This was more or less the size of a door, and its shadows were soft. I could see that a slanting path went into it, and that the rock there was as smooth as a sidewalk.

"Come along," he bade me, and we two went down into that hole.

"Wouldn't a big rain flood you out here?" I asked.

"I can control rain," he said, a-leading me along. "I can bring it if we need it, stop it if we don't. I can do many things."

"Indians can bring rain, off in the Southwest," I said.

"Many people can do it. A man named McDonald, people called him Colonel Stingo, could bring rain if the crops needed it, keep rain away if racetracks had to be dry. He's in a book by A. J. Liebling."

"I know a Tombs McDonald."

"This was a different McDonald."

Ahead of us showed yellow light. Side by side we came into a big cave with smooth rock walls and ceiling, the size of a pretty fair sitting room. At the center of the ceiling the yellow light came from a sort of creamy globe. There was a heavy dark blue carpet on the floor, and on the walls were fixed shelves, stacked with all sorts of stuff, including a row of books. I made out two doorways at the back, one shut with a green curtain the color of weeds in a pond, the other curtained with blood-red cloth. In

another wall was what looked like a window, dull and gray. There were stout-made armchairs of shiny dark wood, with cushions the blue color of the carpet. From the ceiling in a back corner hung down a rope, braided of brown leather. Right at the middle of all this was a table made of red-stained wooden planks across trestles, and on it stood shiny clay cups and a shiny clay jug.

"Comfortable, I promised you," came Harpe's deep voice. "Simple comfort is enough for me, I don't demand the sybaritic. Know what 'sybaritic' means, John?"

"Yes," I said. "I know what that means."

He chuckled his chuckle. "You're well informed, John, articulate. I'm glad to find that in you. Now then, drop all that gear you carry and draw up a chair to the table, and let's have a drink and some talk."

I put my things against a wall and drew up a chair, and so did he, and we sat down. He crossed a leg over his other knee. I saw that his trousers were of creamy fringed buckskin, too. He shoved the jug and cups at me.

"Pour for us, John," he invited me, "and give me whichever cup you choose. I wouldn't want you to think I'd trick you with some clumsy thing to hurt you. The more so because I let you come here for our mutual benefit."

He seemed to insist on that thing, mutual benefit. I wondered why, and wanted to know. Instead I asked something else:

"Nobody knows you're here? Don't planes fly over?"

"No plane can see anything of interest through our trees. And no plane could land, not even a helicopter—no open space." He lifted his clay cup. "Here's to our better acquaintance. This happens to be an excellent article of what you call blockade, it's from a skillful distiller not too many miles from here. Sip it and tell me what you think."

I sipped it. It was as good as the blockade I'd drunk with Tombs McDonald. "Where did you get it?" I asked Harpe.

"I put in a call for it, you might say." He drank too, he drank fairly deep. "Now, John, I've shown my interest in you. Why not tell me about yourself?"

I had another sup myself. "All right," I said, "I've nair yet been ashamed to do that."

So I told him.

About a-being born in the Drowning Creek country, of a good father and mother, and how they'd died when I was only a boy. About how an old lady teacher took me in and raised me up, taught me to read and write and tell the truth and be honest. About how I'd learned to pick guitar and shoot with a gun, had got to be no slouch at either of those things. How I'd been in the army, had been sent to a stupid war across the sea, how I'd been in places I wondered myself if I'd ever get out of. How I'd been called the best scout, the best rifle shot in my whole division. How, afterward, I'd come back to my mountains and had gone here and yonder amongst them, and had seen me some strange things in them.

He harked at all I said, now and then having a sip of his blockade. Then: "What strange things?" he asked.

So I went on to tell him about how I killed the Ugly Bird, and won the thanks of folks and the prayers of Winnie. And how, on top of a mountain named Hark, I met One Other and drove him back into his pool. More things you've likely heard about—the deaths of witch-people like Aram Harnam and Mr. Loden and Forney Meechum and Shull Cobart—all of them mightily evil and evilly mighty, and all of them gone now to the place where they were a sure thing to go. Harpe heard me out, and he snickered.

"I must honestly say, John, it's a great pleasure to listen to you," he said. "To hear the language you speak."

"Language I speak?" I repeated him. "Why, it's just only the language of folks."

"Exactly," he nodded. "Your mountain language is expressive—I might even call it poetical. I hear you with admiration."

That would have been flattering, I reckon, if he didn't act so lofty about it, like as if he patted me on the head. He snickered again.

"But what's been your profit in all these things?"

I shook my head to him. "I've nair studied profit. I've just gone my way along, in the hope that I was a-doing right."

"And you've gone along into desperate perils and great toils," he judged. "Wouldn't you like to go easier and find some profit, some reward for your manifest talents?"

"Oh," I said, "time and time again I've been offered money, but I don't take that, don't much need it."

"Well," he said, "have you had the love of beautiful women?"

"None to speak of it," I replied him, for it wouldn't have been the right thing to speak up of beautiful women I'd known.

"Very well, let the thought sink in. Turn it over in your mind. But just now, it's more or less lunchtime. Join me in eating a little something, and I'll guarantee it will be savory."

He slapped his big hands together, and I saw shiny rings on the both of them. He slapped them again, and a third time. Those slaps were as loud as pistol shots.

The green curtain stirred out of one of the doorways, and in came a woman.

She was old. Her long straight hair was snowy white and her face was all chopped up with wrinkles, with a hooked nose and a hooked chin like the jaws of a pair of pliers, but she stood as straight as a pine sapling. Her dress was a dark blue, with silvery symbols on it, and round her scrawny neck she wore three jewel necklaces, white diamonds and green emeralds and red rubies.

They must have been worth a right big fortune apiece. She carried a big silver tray, with dishes all covered with napkins, and a bunch of knives and forks.

"Thank you, Scylla," said Harpe, grand as a king. "Sit down and eat with us. This is our guest, John."

She put the tray on the table and glared me with slitty eyes. "John," she said, harsh and shrill. "What do you think of what you've seen on the way up here, John?"

I'd got on my feet to reply her. "I've seen a right much strangeness, Miss Scylla, things that folks will wonder themselves about when I get down again to tell of them."

"What makes you think you'll be getting down again?" she shrilled at me.

"Scylla has a sardonic gift of speech," said Harpe, "but you'll get used to it. She's been my invaluable associate for many years. Will you be so good as to draw her up a chair?"

She sat down, and so did I again. Harpe took the napkins off the dishes and served us our plates. There was sliced roast beef, pink-brown. There were likewise rolls of hot white bread, and a dish of greens.

"Perhaps you'd like to ask a blessing, John, but remember my warning about Bible names," said Harpe, but there was a mock in his voice.

I bowed my head and recited:

"Three holy names guard me, and be and remain with me on the water and upon the land, in the forests or in the fields, in cities or deserts, in the whole world wherever I am."

Both Scylla and Harpe looked long at me. "Is that out of a prayer book?" asked Harpe as he cut himself a bite of beef.

"A sort of one," I said. "It's how I remember from *The Long Lost Friend.*"

I cut and ate some beef myself. It was prime.

"John is suspicious of us," muttered Scylla above her own plate.

"Then we'll allay his suspicions," said Harpe.

We ate our meat and greens and bread, and Harpe inquired Scylla about dessert. She got up and went out past that green curtain and fetched back a basket of oranges and grapes. We ate of those, and they were good. Then Harpe poured us all a taste of the blockade.

"John," he said, "you fetched your guitar all the way up to us. Won't you favor us with some music?"

"Why, sure," I agreed him and fetched my guitar over. I tuned it awhile and then I sang the one I'd made up at the start of this whole journey, made it up only about four days ago, a time that by now seemed long years back:

> "What's up across the mountain,
> What's there on the yonder side?
> Nobody's here to tell me,
> Nobody to be my guide,
> But nair you doubt, I'm a-going to find out,
> All over this world so wide . . ."

"That's not much of a song," vowed Scylla when I'd done.

"On the contrary, it's very much of a song," said Harpe. "It's an exercise in self-revelation for John. John the wanderer, John the seeker."

"I'll clear up," Scylla sniffed. "I'll leave you men to yourselves here."

She stacked the dishes on the tray and went a-stomping off with them. Harpe drank some blockade.

"I asked you for your story," he said, "and it's only fair play for me to tell you mine."

VI

"Let's begin with an ancestor of mine," Harpe said. "We've mentioned his name already. Micajah Harpe—Big Harpe, who frightened the whole old frontier."

"I've heard some little about him," I said.

"I'll tell you all about him. He was born in Orange County, North Carolina, somewhere about 1765. His parents were Scots emigrants, Tories in the Revolutionary War. He and his father were with Patrick Ferguson on Kings Mountain in 1780."

"Patrick Ferguson," I said the name after him. "I've read about him and his battle back then. Didn't he invent some kind of breech-loading rifle?"

"He did," said Harpe, "but the British didn't have the sense to adopt it and manufacture it. He told his troops that he was king of Kings Mountain, and all the devils in hell couldn't drive him off."

"The devils in hell nair made the try in person," I said. "It was a bunch of mountain men who got up there and killed or captured his whole British outfit."

"You know history, you continue to amaze me," said Harpe, with a smile. "Though at that, they didn't drive Ferguson off. They killed him up there, shot him full of bullets. What's that you're playing on your guitar?"

"Just a little old country song I hear sung now and then."

"Let's hear it, I like your songs."

So I did what he said. I sang:

"Johnson said to Dixon, one cold October day,
'Let's go up on Kings Mountain and drive the foe away;
A host of British Tories, up there they take their stand,
Because they rule the mountain, they think they rule
the land . . .' "

"Bravo," Harpe cried out when I'd finished, and clapped his big hands. "You're right, John, they killed or captured all the Tories. They killed Micajah Harpe's father and they captured Micajah, but he managed to slip away when they marched their prisoners off. He found his younger brother Wiley at home, and they went to live with the Cherokees and founded the profession of American outlawry."

He said it right proud, as if Micajah Harpe had founded the profession of American doctoring or the profession of American poetry-writing. He went ahead with his tale:

"They learned Indian methods and Indian wisdom; from the Cherokees and other tribes. Not just woodcraft; Indian medicine—Indian magic. They knew enough to get out of the Cherokee town of Nickajack, just before Andrew Jackson destroyed it. After that, they were their own tribe, that pair of brothers."

"That pair of brothers," I repeated after him. "I've read that they were someway supernatural—they killed like werewolves or vampires, the book said."

"The book you refer to is over there on my shelf. It's called *The Spawn of Evil,* it's a history of the early American outlawry the Harpes started—names like Mason, Ford, Murrel, and so on. But those later men only imitated the Harpes." His voice rose again, with that pride in it. "The bravest frontiersmen of Tennessee and Kentucky feared the very name of Harpe. But at last, in 1799, Micajah Harpe was captured and killed. They had a very, very hard time killing him, and he died game. His head

was cut off and stuck to the branch of a tree. The place still bears his name—Harpe's Head."

And the pride with that, too, like as if Ruel Harpe gloried in it.

"His brother got away that time," I recollected.

"Yes, all the way to the Mississippi. But he was identified and killed, too, and his head cut off, too, and set in a tree on the Natchez Trace." He studied me with his smokey eyes. "While the Harpes lived, they were kings in a country that feared them."

"And you're a Harpe, too."

"I'm a Harpe, too. Micajah Harpe had women with him from time to time. One of them was Betsy Roberts, and she'd borne Micajah a son. She also happened to have this amulet."

He held out the thing on his neck-chain. It was no crucifix, it was T-shaped, gold, with a twisty thing a-climbing on it, a dark thing that might could have been a monkey or either a lizard.

"If Micajah had been wearing it when they closed in on him—" said Harpe, half dreamily. "But he hadn't. After he was killed and his head cut off, Betsy Roberts married a man named Sol Hofstetter. By all accounts, her husband was what you'd call a fairly honest, ordinary fellow." A bit of a sneer to say that. "And the boy was called Joe Roberts, and grew up and joined the army."

"So far as I know, the boy's story runs out there," I said.

"No, it doesn't. He was at some frontier fort, and he deserted and joined an Indian tribe, like his father before him. Like his father before him, he learned Indian wisdom, Indian medicine, Indian magic. Finally he went to New Orleans, called himself Joseph Harpe there. He married, he had children of his own. He taught them what he knew, what his parents had known."

"Indian magic, you said."

"All kinds of magic," he said. "There are all kinds, as you're well aware. You know several kinds yourself, as I've heard."

I made myself as easy as I could in my chair. "How come you to know things about me?" I wondered out loud.

"We'll take that up later. Just now, I'm telling you about my ancestors. Well, the Harpe family went on. On and on and on." Again, he sounded almost dreamy. "And each generation studied all those kinds of magic, sometimes used them. And finally I was born, and took up the studies, and did extremely well at them."

"I see."

"Do you, John, really? I think you do see. Now we're down to my part of the story, my autobiography if you want to call it that. I hope I don't bore you, talking about myself."

"I don't reckon that's likely," I said. "So far, it's been right interesting."

"A cool one, aren't you, John?"

"I have to be cool, now and then."

"I'll go on," he said. "I'm not sure where I was born, it must have been about fifty years back. I think it was in New York. But by the time I was three, my parents had taken me to Chattanooga, and that's when they took me to join a coven."

"I see," I said again. "Witches want new members as young as they can get them."

"Very true, and very sensible. I got older and went to school —one way and another, I had a good education, I even got a master's degree at Vanderbilt. I studied a number of foreign languages and literatures. I also picked up a good grounding in occult matters. I was able to study important books. Over on the shelf there you'll find Barrett, you'll find the *Grand Albert*, you'll find a copy of a very rare and informative manuscript called *The Book of Abramelin*. Here, I'll fetch it."

He got up and crossed to the shelf and wagged back a book

bound in old dark leather. A-sitting down again, he opened it. I saw writing in both red and black, pen-and-ink writing.

"This is a copy of the original, in the Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal at Paris. There's been an English translation, but not a complete one—I think the translator thought there were certain passages better left out. This is the entire work. Do you read French, John?"

"Not right well. I learned me some French when I was a soldier, that's all."

He laughed. "I know about that soldier French, you learn it from girls for the most part. It's like Conan Doyle's Brigadier Gerard stories. All you can say is that you love only them, and will come back when your military service is over, right?"

"More or less," I admitted, and he laughed again. He thumbed through the book, a-looking at a page here and there.

"Abramelin's wisdom was noted down by a scholar of the occult named Abraham," he allowed. "Abraham started to travel in search of secret wisdom about the end of the fourteenth century. He went to Germany and Greece and Constantinople, finally to Egypt, where he studied with a magician named Abramelin." He closed the book and looked at me. "This is all new to you, of course."

"Not quite," I said back. "There's something about that book in *The Mysteries and Secrets of Magic,* by a fellow named Thompson."

"I continue to admire the way you've instructed yourself."

"Lots of what I read is against the belief of a heap of educated folks," I had to admit. "They accept other things."

"Paul Valéry once said, 'That which has always been accepted by everyone, everywhere, is almost certain to be false,' " he smiled at me.

"Who was Paul Valéry?" I asked him.

"Ah, at last we come to someone you haven't read. Valéry

was a fine poet and a penetrating essayist, and he reads much better in the original French than in translation. But to go on: Like Abraham, I've traveled here and abroad in search of wisdom. I've conferred with distinguished scholars and practitioners of the black arts. I winnowed out some clumsy imposters, and profited by genuine wielders of great powers. Along the way, I met Scylla, and she became my"—he broke off, just a moment—"my associate, my partner. I brought her here."

"To Cry Mountain."

"But I was here first. I'd heard rumors about Cry Mountain, how people stayed away from it, didn't talk about it. I came alone, and exerted my methods to make a safe, habitable place here."

"You set it up?" I said. "You all alone, the stockade and all?"

"As to that, I was able to bring in help," he smiled at me. "Help by magic that would be hard to believe. That may seem difficult to explain, but I could do it." He touched the thing on his neck he called an amulet. "To make it simple, you know how Aladdin was able to do wonders with his slave of the lamp. When this haven was built, I assembled guardians for it."

"Your swarm of bees," I suggested.

"And other things you've sensed. Then, out in the world again, I met Scylla and brought her here to help me. Outside the stockade there are various menaces, but inside it's safe, unless I have a notion to change that. This is home, John." He sort of stretched where he sat. "And it's going to be your home."

"What do you want to do up here?" I prodded at him. "What?"

"I have a certain ambition. Shall I tell you? Well then, once I was in India. I was in a city they called Nellore, and I made friends there. I can make friends."

I could see that he could make friends, though so far he

hadn't made a friend of me. I waited for him to go on. He went on:

"They took me along a river called Penner, to a town they said was Jonnawada. And at Jonnawada was a great temple called Kamakshi Devalayam."

All those foreign names he rolled out like as if he loved them. He went on:

"They did impressive things there. People came by the thousands, and priests and sorcerers helped them. Cured their diseases, settled their dilemmas, defeated their enemies, won love and riches and happiness for them."

"For a price, I'll wager you," I put in.

"Yes, the temple had stores of wealth—money, jewels, all that. But what I want is my own temple, with thousands coming for help up Cry Mountain."

"Coming for help," I said after him, "and a-paying you out money."

"As to that," he smiled, "I don't really need money. I want people to come for help and go away believing in me."

"Disciples?"

"Call them that. Just now, I'm in want of one book—as rare a book as there is on earth—to complete methods. Since you're here, I think you'll be a help in getting it. But even without it, I can get things just by wanting them."

"How do you do that?"

"Let me show you," he said. "What might you want, from anywhere on earth?"

I studied him. "I don't need aught, not very much. Maybe I'd like to see today's paper. I haven't seen a paper for quite a spell."

"What paper? Perhaps the *New York Times?*"

"Just the Asheville paper would suit me."

He got up and walked across the room to the far corner

where the rope hung. I saw how strong, how quiet, was the way his big body moved. He caught the rope and dragged down on it, like as if he was a-ringing a bell. Then he turned and came back, and in his hand was a folded-up newspaper. "Here you are," he said, and gave it to me.

It was the Asheville paper, sure enough, the paper for that day. A big-lettered headline about something Congress was a-doing, another headline farther down about a big hotel a-getting ready to be sold.

"All you had to do was pull the rope and there it was," I said to Harpe. "The same sort of pull to get you maybe a pound of butter or a ham of meat."

"Or clothes or shoes or anything. Good blockade whiskey, for instance. That's how I got the whiskey we've been drinking."

I recollected what I'd heard along the way from Tombs's cabin to Larrowby and back, about how things got lost or stolen, but I said naught about that. I listened while he talked ahead:

"If I want anything, I need only to think strongly about it and exactly where it is, then pull the rope. Scylla had the rope and installed it here. That sort of thing was being used more than three hundred years ago, by witches in Europe. I don't have to stir to have my wishes fulfilled."

"How do you know where things are outside?" I asked him. "How did you know about me?"

"You've asked that before. Let me show you. See the window over there?"

I looked at the window. "It's plumb dark," I said, "and no wonder, down here under the ground."

"Keep your eye on it, and tell me where you'd like to see things."

"Well," I said, "how about in the settlement called Larrowby?"

"Keep looking."

His hand held the amulet on his neck. He spoke five words like names, five words I'd hear again and again, and have in my memory. He rolled them out:

"Fetegan . . . Gaghagan . . . Beigan . . . Deigan . . . Usagan . . ."

The window quit a-being dark. It was a roily glow, like smoke. Then it cleared, and it showed me the little main street of Larrowby, the cabins, the church house yonder one way, the store with its sign the other.

"You see it," said Harpe. He'd come to stand beside me, still a-holding his amulet. "We move now. Move to the store."

It was like a moving picture, we sort of swam toward the porch. The door was open before us, and then we were inside. Folks a-shopping, a-talking. I saw Mr. Larrowby at the post office desk, a-selling stamps to somebody. Behind the counter was Myrrh, as pretty as the prettiest of pictures as she put things in a paper poke for a customer and asked him how his folks were.

"All right, I've seen it," I said, and Harpe mumbled those names again and the picture died out and the window went dark.

"Are you convinced?" Harpe inquired me.

"I've kindly got to be," I said. "There was the place and the store, and pretty Myrrh herself, a-talking."

"Pretty Myrrh," he echoed me. "You think she's truly pretty."

"She's pretty enough to be the prettiest girl in another sight bigger place than little bitty Larrowby," I said. "A man could walk a whole long summer day and not meet up with a prettier girl than she is."

"I see," Harpe said, and grinned so that his swept-out mustache wiggled on his face. I wondered myself what it was he thought he saw, but again I decided I wouldn't ask.

He patted his leather-covered book on the table. "There are many spells in here. Spells of great potency. Not quite everything I need, but still I can, for instance, go anywhere in the world simply by willing myself there."

"Is that a fact?" I said. "Sure enough?"

"Watch."

His left hand grabbed his amulet. He put his right hand on top of his head, so that it squashed his hair down. He mumbled something, too low for me to hear. Then I was just a-looking at his empty chair, where he didn't sit any more. He'd vanished away, like a busted soap bubble.

There wasn't aught I could do but sit and wonder myself how he'd done it. I reckon I sat for likely half a minute. Then he was back again, as sudden quick as he'd gone. He showed his teeth in a smile.

"I've been to New York, on Times Square," he said. "To prove it, I've brought you the *New York Times.*"

He held me out a folded newspaper. I opened it, and sure enough it was the *New York Times,* for that very day. The ink of it was so fresh printed that I could smell it. On the front page it said that some senator was a-scolding the President about one thing another.

"Convinced?" Harpe prodded at me.

"I reckon I am," I had to admit. "Now then, are you a-going to tell me that you can see the past and the future?"

"As to the past," he said, "I can't see back there clearly, but I can call up ghosts from the past. Shall I do that for you?"

"Not right this minute," I shook my head to him, for I didn't want too much to happen too quick.

"As to the future," he went on, as cheerful as a chickadee,

"nobody can see that except in blurs and spots, because the future has yet to become the present. But I can heal diseases. Or turn men into animals. Or raise monsters all around, the way I've done here."

"Outside the stockade, you mean."

"You've seen the swarm of bees. You've sensed other things. You know what the Behinder is."

"Yes, I know," I said. Nobody's supposed to see the Behinder, but I'd seen one once, on that other mountain named Yandro, and each day since I'd wished I hadn't seen it.

"And the Bammat and the Flat and the Skim," he went through a sort of catalogue. "Plus others. I've mustered them all out there, just outside our stockade. That's why you'd better not try to get out there among them."

He said it in the quietest voice you could call for.

"But wait," he said. "You've met Scylla. Let me introduce you to another pair of ladies."

VII

He slapped his big hands together three times, the way he'd done before. Scylla poked her cotton-topped head out past the green curtain of the door.

"Will you please ask Alka and Tarrah to come out here?" Harpe said to her. "I've been informing John about a few basic matters, and now it's time for a conference of all of us."

Scylla bobbed out of sight again. Harpe offered me the blockade jug, and I trickled me about a thimbleful into my clay cup. He poured himself a right good jolt. He seemed to be able to handle good jolts.

The curtain moved again and in walked Scylla, and behind her two other women. I got up on my feet. Harpe didn't stir an inch out of his chair. He might just as well have been a judge a-holding court.

"Ladies," he said, "permit me to introduce to you our guest and new companion, John. John—no more of a name than that, no less. You will remember times that we've watched him, heard him, knew that he was determined to come up here to us. We've let him come, and now we make him welcome to our community."

I stood and looked on those women. Scylla I'd met. She creased her scowl at me. Of the other two, one was tall and gaunt and as straight as a guitar string, with a smooth-cheeked face and a firm-held mouth and behind great big glasses dark eyes so bright and sharp they could near about cut into you.

She wore a black skirt and tailored jacket and a white blouse, more or less like some boss lady in an office somewhere. With her came a young one, a right young one, and she smiled on me like a cat on a dish of cream, with little, even white teeth a-showing inside wide, full red lips. Her black hair hung heavy on her shoulders, below a red ribbon tied on it above the ears. Her face was round and rosy-tanned, and her eyes were brown as brown. Her tight-filled blouse was a rosy tan color, too, it more or less matched her face, and her short skirt was a darker brown. No stockings on her curvy legs with the same rosy tan on them, and on her feet sandals of dark shiny leather straps with what looked like silver buckles.

"John, this is Alka," Harpe made an introduction, and the tall one's tawny-braided head nodded me. "And this is Tarrah."

The young girl said, "Hello," and smiled me the wider.

"Sit down at the table with us, ladies," Harpe said to them. "Sit down, all of you. John will be interested to hear how you came to be on Cry Mountain, and what you do here to help me in a truly great endeavor."

They dragged them up chairs and sat down. Tarrah, the young one, fetched her chair right close to mine. Harpe poured more liquor into clay cups and gave them round. Scylla's scowling face looked like as if it didn't want to see me. The one named Alka nodded again as she took her cup. Tarrah giggled up at me. When I sat down, something sort of snuggled up against my boot. I didn't need to look down to know that that was Tarrah's sandal.

She kept her smile on me.

"We make John welcome here," said Harpe again. "We know of things he's done, we know how very well and profitably he'll fit in with us."

"I don't aim to stay," I said right out.

"But you must stay, John," said Harpe, and silk was in his

voice. "You realize by now that you couldn't venture outside our stockade and live more than five minutes."

I couldn't think of air reply to that. Harpe nodded Scylla. "You first, my dear," he said.

She sat a-clutching her cup. I saw her bony knuckles all white with the clutch.

"I'm from Salem in Massachusetts," she began in her shrill voice.

"Yes, and what a historic town," put in Harpe. "The town of witchcraft. Where, back in 1692, the colonial judges executed witches."

"I've read about it some," I said. "What the histories call the Salem witchcraft delusion."

"No delusion," Scylla scraped out. "Those judges didn't know how to go about their oyer and terminer trials. Why, some of them couldn't even sign their names. And they hanged some of the old religion, but others they missed." Her eyes glittered like chunks of glass. "A lot of others. The old religion goes on."

"And you're a Salem witch by blood descent and home training," said Harpe. "Isn't that so?"

"That's so, and I'm glad it's so. I had the old wisdom, I had the old powers. Many came to consult me, including Ruel Harpe."

"We decided to become partners," Harpe added on, "and to establish our headquarters here on Cry Mountain."

"I located Cry Mountain, from rumors drifting up to Salem," said Scylla. "I chose it."

"True," Harpe agreed her, "but it was I who came here first, by myself, made sure how carefully it was avoided, and gathered a crew of helpers to build our stockade and our living quarters." He made a wave of his hand. "All this, and the grounds outside."

"That rope in the corner," cawed Scylla, "the one we tug to bring us whatever we want—it was mine in Salem, it's mine here."

"It's ours, Scylla, it's ours," said Harpe. "Community property. Thank you for your interesting history. Now, Alka, it's your turn."

Alka put up a thin hand to straighten her big glasses. "I was a librarian," she said. "On the staff of the library of Miskatonic University at Arkham, Massachusetts."

"Arkham," tittered Scylla. "Don't I know that town?"

"Among my duties was the directorship of the library's considerable collection of occult literature and memorabilia," Alka went on. "I became very much interested in it. I wrote articles on occultism for various reviews. I took to attending the meetings of two interesting cults in town. I felt that most of the members were stumbling fanatics without much understanding, but I found that I could perform unusual effects—what some would call miracles."

I felt a nudge against my leg. That would be Tarrah's plump knee, sort of out from under her short skirt.

"At my library post, I met many earnest researchers into the occult. Writers, for instance—Robert Bloch called on me, and Fritz Leiber, and Frank Belknap Long. And then, Ruel Harpe."

"Yes, indeed," Harpe drawled.

"And we had a pleasant luncheon together, Ruel and I," Alka said, "and he persuaded me to come here to be with him and Scylla, help them with what I'd learned. And I came, and I'm glad to be here. That's my story."

"Not quite all of it, John," said Harpe with his drawl. "When I visited her, I was able to warn her that the Massachusetts State Bureau of Investigation was mounting a troublesome probe into those Arkham cult meetings. And I knew that her

name was on the list of those to be questioned. Dear Alka, you got out of there just in time."

"You're right, Ruel, I did. And I managed to bring along some manuscripts from the library. They've been interesting, haven't they?"

"Interesting," he said, "and helpful."

"One we don't have yet," squalled out Scylla. "The Judas book."

"That wasn't in the collection at Miskatonic," said Alka. "I've heard some reports of it, that's all."

"If I knew just where it was, I'd bring it here," allowed Harpe.

"Judas book?" I wondered them. "What's that?"

Harpe wagged his head, like as if I'd shown my ignorance. "You know who Judas was, John. Judas the betrayer, isn't that how you think of him?"

"Yes," I said. "For thirty pieces of silver."

"Judas isn't properly understood these days," Harpe said. "There's a story, a highly intriguing one, to the effect that he wasn't really a betrayer. He informed on his master and took pay for it because he expected his master to do miracles, come to the throne as king of the whole world."

He'd told all that without a-using the name of Judas's master. I recollected what he'd said about not a-speaking holy names.

"But it didn't happen thataway," I pointed out.

"No," Harpe agreed me. "When Judas saw that he'd taken the wrong thing for granted, that what his master chose was martyrdom, he gave back the thirty pieces of silver and hanged himself. But not at once. First, before putting the rope around his neck, he wrote his own Gospel—the Gospel According to Judas. With all his concept of miraculous power and world rule."

"Well," I said, "I want to know."

"If I had the Gospel According to Judas, I'd know far more than I know by studying Abramelin," vowed Harpe. "Maybe that's to come, now that I have you to help. But meanwhile, you'll be interested to hear from Tarrah."

Tarrah smiled us all round, and she kept her knee nudged on mine.

"All right," she started out, "I've been in this business all my life. My mother took me to my first witch meeting in Ohio when I wasn't much more than a baby girl. I learned how to make rain fall, how to curse people blind and deaf, things like that. I was doing all sorts of things—profitably—when I was just sixteen. I did them so well that people got suspicious of me in the town where I lived. So I thought I'd look for another field for my talents. I went to New Mexico, to a little town called Estevanico."

"Estevanico," Harpe said the name. "Little Stephen. Someone of that name roamed over the Southwest with Cabeza de Vaca. I wonder if your town was named for him."

"I wouldn't know," vowed Tarrah. "It was a town of Chicanos—Latin-American people—and they took to talk and my charms and I was living more or less happily. I could make mothers have easy births, I told fortunes, I cured sick goats—things like that. But there came a time when a nice-looking young fellow said I'd put a spell on him to make him fall in love with me. And his father and mother raised up a gang of neighbors, and they were going to hang me."

She stopped long enough to smile all round again. Then:

"They got a wagon and pulled it under a tree and stood me on the wagon and put a rope around my neck and threw the loose end over a branch. They were just about to drag the wagon out from under me and let me hang. But right then, who came through the crowd but Mr. Ruel Harpe."

"I'd had my eye on you, my dear," he said, with his own smile. "I try to pay close attention to people with special gifts. John, for example."

"He came through and jumped up on the wagon with me," Tarrah went ahead with her tale. "He asked them, in Spanish, to let him speak for five minutes. They let him do that. He pleaded my case. He reminded them what would happen to them at the hands of the law if they killed me. At the end of the five minutes, he took that noose of rope off my neck and took my hand and helped me down off the wagon. We walked off through the gang and nobody said a word or made a move to stop us. All the time, he talked about Cry Mountain and I said I'd like to be there. Then—he was gone from beside me."

"Vanished?" I asked.

"He was just gone from there. Next moment, I was here, right in this room where we're sitting now. He fetched me here. I suppose he pulled on that rope of Scylla's."

"Exactly," nodded Harpe. "There, John, you have all our stories. And you can see how happy we'd be to have you throw in with us."

"I don't see how you can do otherwise," Alka said to me.

"No," grated Scylla. "It's a fair offer, John."

"It's sure enough a direct one," I said, "but, folks, things like this take time to think over. I'd like to think awhile. I'd like to walk outside."

"Why not?" Harpe granted me. "Walk out there and think. By now, you'd know better than to get outside the stockade."

I got up and bowed to Harpe and those three women, and headed out at the cave-tunnel where I'd been led in. I took along my old guitar, just from the force of habit. I strummed the strings into a whisper of music, on my way to the open.

I had a better look at things than I'd had at first. The trees grew thick and the ground under them had moss and those

bunches of toadstools, in different poisonous-looking colors. Here and yonder, flowers grew, and hard to say what flowers they were, though I'd thought I knew most kinds. Some of the tree trunks had vines a-growing up and round them, ivy and honeysuckle and so on, with leaves in clumps that looked like faces. You all know how leaves can grow like that, gentlemen, with pits of dark shadow in amongst the green leaves, to make eyes and mouths, with the eyes a-staring at you all. Human faces. Dog and cat faces. Snake faces. I've seen those leaf-faces so often, and I nair did much like them.

I walked along to that ripped-out gulley where wind could make the voice of the mountain. It looked bigger and uglier than when Harpe had showed it to me. I looked to the other side of it, I wondered myself could I jump over yonder. Likely I could, but why take the chance right then? I came to the rugged rock of the very edge, and stooped over to look into it.

How far did it go down? I couldn't even make a guess, but it went down down down, into a darkness so deep it looked almost solid, until it came to the red flamy color down there. For all I could say for certain, that crack in Cry Mountain could go all the way down to the middle of the world. I looked and wondered, till I felt sort of dizzy, and stepped back off away from it, into the clear and the safe. I strummed my guitar again, and headed back toward the gate in the stockade.

A stream ran to there. It came from a spring that bubbled and sighed. The stream ran beside me as I walked. I came to the gate, the big tall rails it was made of, and I saw a little space next to it where the stream flowed out and on, thisaway and that, down the mountain. Betwixt the upright posts I looked out at the woods on the other side.

In amongst the thick-grown trees stood what first I thought was a trunk swaddled up in vines as black as ink. But it stirred there, it wasn't a tree. It shifted on two feet. It sort of fiddled

with two long, shaggy arms. Then it slid farther back into the woods and out of my sight. All I could figure of it was it was what some call the Sasquatch, some call the Bigfoot, brought up there by Harpe to guard his stockade.

It was gone, and there was a flutter amongst some leafy branches, like a flock of birds. Only they weren't true birds. Not with those webby wings like bats. They looked as big as geese, and they had long tails, like no bats on this earth. Those tails were spiked at the ends, like arrows. They flew away and I made out some other thing, so deep back in the trees that all I could tell for certain sure was that it was big, big. Bigger than a horse, than a bull. As big as an elephant, bigger. I could just get a glimpse of curling white tusks. On Yandro Mountain they'd called such a thing a Bammat.

I felt right much like a-singing a charm I knew. I swept the silver strings of my guitar, and I sang:

"Three holy kings, four holy saints,
At heaven's high gate that stand,
Speak out to bid all evil wait
And stir no foot or hand . . ."

"That's a pretty tune, John," cooed a voice right next to my elbow, "though I don't like the lyric very much."

I swung myself round, purely embarrassed that somebody had been able to sneak up on me thataway. Sure enough, it was Tarrah.

She was a-smiling, with her full dark red lips that I reckoned had the only makeup air place on her rosy tan face. She stood close to me with that smile. A-looking on her, and what man wouldn't give her a look, I figured she didn't wear aught under that tight blouse. She plumped out inside it at the front, and you could see the two little buds of her nipples, a-shoving at the cloth.

"You don't mind that I came out to be here with you?" she asked.

"No, I don't mind."

"You're sort of cute," she giggled.

That was a funny word to put on a man who's a tad over six feet, who's built rangy and hard, who wears crumpled old country clothes and has a face that's been worked over by wind and weather, with a day's whisker stubble on it. But "cute" can be a sort of word of all work with some lady-folks. I used to know one who said the Grand Canyon was cute. Meanwhile, Tarrah was a-going on with her talk:

"I'm glad you're going to be here with us," she said. "Sometimes the place gets to be a bore. It can be so much the same, sometimes."

"I'm not certain sure I'm a-going to be here with you all," I said. "But Harpe can travel out into the world if he has the fancy. Doesn't he take you with him sometimes?"

"Not me," she shook her ribboned head. "I think that once or twice he took Scylla somewhere, to some big city or other. And he asked her what if she could have any wish she wanted, and she said, 'I'd wish that I could look up the street and everybody would fall dead, and then look down the street and everybody would fall dead.' Ruel tells that on her, and laughs, and says it taught him some kind of lesson."

She nudged a shoulder to me, the way she'd nudged her knee to me at the table. Whatair you might could say about that Tarrah girl, she didn't have much of the bashful in her.

"I'll bet you want to kiss me," she whispered.

"If I did want that, I wouldn't," I said. "Ruel Harpe is likely a-watching us."

"Oh, Ruel." She shrugged her shoulders, and made herself jiggle. "What if he did know I came out here to meet you? He more or less wanted me to meet you."

I frowned about that. "Looky here, Tarrah, aren't you and those others more or less his wives? Or lovers?"

"Ruel has women, but they're all outside." She squinted her eyes to say it. "He goes away to be with those. He doesn't do much with me, never did. Not much, anyway."

"Not much?" I repeated her. "How much?"

"Look, John," she said, "Ruel Harpe doesn't enter this conversation any further. Let's talk about us. You happen to be a mighty big handsome man, and I've been told that I'm a good-looking woman."

"We won't argue that point," I said. "I mean, about you a-being good-looking."

"So why don't we have a kiss for ourselves? If I kissed you, you'd stay kissed."

I told myself that that was likely a true word. "Not just now, Tarrah," I said. "I didn't climb all this twenty-devil way up here to fall in love."

"Aha," she said, "you think you might fall in love with me."

"I'm not about to do that," I said back.

Her eyes squinted again, and they raked me up and down like claws. She tightened her red lips.

"Shakespeare said, hell hath no fury like a woman scorned," she said after a second.

"No, he didn't," I said. "I believe that was said by somebody or other named Congreve."

I swept my guitar strings again, and I sang:

> "Take, o, take those lips away
> That so sweetly were forsworn;
> And those eyes, the break of day,
> Lights that do mislead the morn . . ."

"There's some Shakespeare for you," I said as I quieted the strings again. "I wonder myself why he wrote those words."

"You're impossible," she almost spit at me. "Do you want me to say I love you—is that what you want of me?"

"No, ma'am," I replied her. "And don't say it, for it wouldn't be the truth. You nair saw me in all your born days till about half an hour ago. Folks don't fall in love that quick."

"What makes you so sure?" she said, and her voice shook.

"And another thing," I went on.

She lighted up about that. "Something about you and me?"

"I reckon, about all of us up here on Cry Mountain. Ruel Harpe travels all over the world, and nair takes one of you all with him."

"Except Scylla, the way I told you."

"Hasn't one of you asked to be taken along with him?"

She shook her head so that her hair whipped in the air. "None of us would dare ask him. He never took me, I told you."

"And that talk of his about the Judas book," I said. "If he wants it, why can't he get it? He gets near about air thing he wants."

"You'll have to find out from him," she snapped. "All right, I'm going back to quarters."

"I'll walk you there," I offered her.

She didn't forbid me, so she and I walked together toward where the mouth of the cave opened and the way led down.

"You're so calm about everything," she half-scolded at me. "I just don't understand you."

"Maybe you don't," I granted her.

Because I hadn't truly been calm. Not with as pretty a girl as Tarrah right out a-flinging herself at me. I had to keep a-telling my mind that her a-doing that was more or less Harpe's idea. And if I'd done the natural thing with her, if I'd just only taken her in my arms, I'd be a closer prisoner on Cry Mountain than

with that stockade and all that moved and waited outside its poles, a-daring me to come out.

No, gentlemen, I was in a bad enough fix the way things were, without a-letting some scheming woman make it worse.

VIII

Nair another word did Tarrah speak to me as we went back under those shadowy branches, nor either did I speak one to her. I couldn't have thought of a word to say. Right then, she was mad with me. Hell hath no fury like a woman scorned, that fellow Congreve had spoken the truth. Nor she didn't bump herself against me, not one time.

In that tunnelly passage, our feet slapped on the rock floor, my boots and her sandals. They fitted themselves into a sort of duet. I wondered myself if I could make up a song to them.

When we got into that big room that was a sort of parlor, Harpe and Scylla were at the table. Betwixt them was a bowl that looked to be made of silver, and smoke rose from it in puffs, like as if somebody was a-dragging on a cigar inside. Scylla flung a handful of something into the bowl, and it blazed up in flame. I could smell a sharp tang, like what spice I couldn't rightly guess. That smell sort of sneaked into a man's nose and tingled the side of his head.

Scylla craned her wrinkled face round at us, and put on a mean scowl. But Harpe smiled like a father, one of those fathers who love to make fun of their children.

"Did you have a pleasant time out there?" he asked us.

"We did some talking," Tarrah answered him, with an air that she wished it had been more than talking.

"Good talking, I dare hope," said Harpe, and turned toward Scylla. "That will be all for now," he told her. "The fire didn't

reveal much, but perhaps the time wasn't propitious. We'll try again, later. You may go now."

Scylla got up from where she sat and went out past the green curtain.

"You too, Tarrah," Harpe said, and Tarrah went after Scylla, without a word. Harpe smiled on me. "Sit down here, John. You and I have some talking to do."

I took the chair where Scylla had been. "Whiskey?" he invited me, and reached for the jug.

"No, I thank you. I've had me quite a bit already today, and I don't want to get drunk."

He poured himself a slug. "Drunk," he repeated me. "Do you know, John, I've never been drunk in my life. No matter how much I have, it doesn't take hold of me. How do you explain that?"

"I wouldn't know how to explain it."

"No more than I can explain why you couldn't be more courteous and kindly toward poor young Tarrah, when she offered herself to you out there."

So he'd sure enough seen and heard all about that, had likely given Tarrah her orders about it. He waited for me to speak, and I spoke:

"You spied on us, and you weren't jealous about Tarrah, not the least bit."

"Not the least bit," he repeated the words after me. "I'm not in love with these useful associates of mine, and I won't let them be in love with me. If I want love, and sometimes I do, I go here and there in the world and find it."

"So I've heard tell."

"But getting back to Tarrah," he said. "Don't you think she's attractive?"

"A right much so."

"I understand you, John. There's another girl on your mind."

I just waited for him to go on.

"We'll have to see what can be done about that," he allowed. "You can rely on me for an inducement to keep you happy here. Because by now, you're convinced that you won't be leaving the top of Cry Mountain."

"I still might could do that."

"Not if I don't give you permission. John, you're a reasonable man. I've posted sentinels all around this stockade. Some you've seen, some others you wouldn't want to dream of, even. If you got out there among them, you'd last about as long as a pint of whiskey in a five-handed poker game. When it comes to that, you wouldn't last any time inside here if I didn't want you to. I know twenty or thirty ways to strike you dead. What do you say to that?"

"Why," I said right back, "I reckon you can kill me but you can't scare me about it. Long ago, I more or less got over a-being scared of death. We'll all die some time another, no matter what it is kills us."

He took another sip of his drink, and with his free hand he tweaked the end of his beard-spike.

"Eloquence," he said. "Downright eloquence. I hear you with the utmost admiration. John, I'm your friend. You're going to be my friend. Also my valued ally."

"You mean, in that temple you're a-fixing to set up here? That needs a lot of deciding. I don't decide such things in a hurry."

"Very well," he nodded me, like as if he was a-doing me a big favor. "I won't hurry you, John. I'll give you a week, shall we say? According to the Book of Genesis, a week was time enough to create the world, including Adam and Eve, with a day at the end for rest."

"You sound to me like as if you've done some reading in the Bible."

He nodded me again. "I've read all sixty-six books of it, and the Apocrypha as well. I can quote you long passages."

"I can quote you from the Bible, too," I said. "But there's one book that's not in there, one you keep a-talking about, that Judas Gospel."

He furrowed up his forehead. "That book, yes. There are only reports of it, that help me get closer all the time to where it exists. Judas, it seems, was a deep thinker about the nature and employment of miracles. If we had his work—undoubtedly it would be in Greek—it might take us well beyond even the *Abramelin.*"

"And you can't get hold of it," I said.

"I could if I knew exactly where it was. Just now, I wonder about a place in North Africa, a desert village of sorts, smaller even than Larrowby. What is it interests you on the table?"

"Your silvery bowl," I said. "The fire's gone out in it. What was it for, if you don't mind a-telling me?"

"Why should I mind?" he said back, a-smiling again. "Scylla and I work at various experiments, try to achieve various results. Just now, we tried to see into the future. As I may have said, that's always difficult. A sight of future things is forever cloudy. The only clear way to see into the future is to make things happen in the future."

All the time he probed at me with his eyes, like as if he tried to read my thoughts. I've had that tried on me in the past, and I've learned to think behind a sort of wall in my mind.

"Now then," I said, "what you say is true, if a man can make the things happen."

"Men can make things happen," said Harpe. "Roger Bacon comprehended the future, and invented gunpowder. James Watt comprehended, even when he was only a boy, and devel-

oped the steam engine. Einstein comprehended, spent years comprehending, and split the atom."

"They were a-thinking ahead" was all I had to say.

"Thinking their way into the future," he agreed me. "All of us with any sense can do that. You were doing it when you made up your mind to climb Cry Mountain. And I do it all the time, I think into what the future will be."

"I reckon you do," I said. "Like your temple of magic things up here."

He furrowed his face, and it made him look wise. "That could be only a beginning. Something on which to build."

"Build what?"

"It will take time to explain that, get you ready for it. But I've mentioned a place in the African desert, where Judas's Gospel might be traced and found. Would you care to see that little village? Care to see me go there?"

"That would be a sight to see," I said.

"Then you shall see it. Look over to the window."

I looked at the dark oblong of it. He had his T-shaped amulet in his hand and I heard him as he mumbled, *"Fetegan . . . Gaghagan . . . Beigan . . . Deigan . . . Usagan . . ."*

The window lighted up, foamed like fog, then it cleared. I could see something.

It was an outside place, and it was night there, with a fire a-blazing up in the open, next to a bluff or steep hill full of rocks, with sand in betwixt them. Up above, dark sky with stars in it. Folks were there, dressed in long gowns of brown and blue and gray-white, all of them a-wearing cloths slung over their heads and ears and tied there with a black rope round the temples.

"How come it to be nighttime?" I asked.

"Because it's about five hours away to eastward," said Harpe.

"Greenwich time, or thereabouts. I told you it's in the African desert, the Sahara."

Those folks chattered to one another, in some language I didn't know a word of. I studied things. In the face of that rocky bluff showed dark open places, not too far different from the tunnel that led into that room where we sat.

"They're cave dwellers," I said.

"Yes. We still have cave dwellers in the twentieth century."

I saw a woman a-coming into the picture. She walked straight. Up on her shoulder she carried a great big jar or pitcher, maybe with water in it from some well or spring out of our sight. Another woman came along with an armful of sticks. She put them on the fire, and it blazed brighter.

"Just who are those people?" I asked Harpe.

"Berbers, they're called. Moors, Maghrebi. Of course, the Berber blood is mixed with Saracen blood, but originally it meant a race that had lived in North Africa since Stone Age times. The same, perhaps, as Cro-Magnon man in Europe."

I watched another woman fetch more wood to the fire. "Cave dwellers," I said again.

"Living simply, according to their lights," said Harpe. "I don't see any reason to change that way of life when a certain change comes on the world. They're industrious, they're kindly, they're religious."

"What kind of religion?" I wanted to know.

"Perhaps a fuzzy one," Harpe replied me. "What they do in the way of worship seems to have something of the Jewish, something of the Mohammedan—maybe even a touch or two of very archaic Christianity. But they aren't really literate enough to be orthodox in any of those. Only two or three can read at all well in any holy book."

"Is that where the Judas book is?" I asked next.

"I hope to find out exactly," he said. "Watch, and you'll see me go there."

Again he grabbed onto the charm round his neck, and put the other hand onto his head. He mumbled words, so soft I couldn't catch them. Next instant, just his empty chair. He was gone like a popped bubble.

I looked back to the picture in the window, and there Harpe was in it, a-wearing his fringed buckskin. The beadwork twinkled in the light of the fire. He spoke to a couple of men, and they spoke back and bowed, each with a hand to his forehead. He spoke again, and one of the two trotted into one of the doorways. I watched. The man came out again, and with him another man.

This one's blue gown shimmered, and so did the blue cloth on his head. They must have been silk. His dark face was thin, with a great big white beard all the way down to his waist. He walked up to Harpe, bowed just a little small bow, and lifted a hand to his forehead. This time Harpe bowed and put up his own hand, right polite about it.

The two of them talked in that language I didn't know. It was quiet talk, but it was what you all might call earnest. Harpe seemed to be a-pleading to that old man. He spread out his big hands to do it. But the old man wasn't about to have aught of it. He shook his head one more time and headed back to his cave.

As he did that, there wasn't air a Ruel Harpe in the picture, either. He was gone, the way he'd gone from across the table. The picture died out and went gloomy, and when I looked, Harpe was a-sitting in his chair again.

"You see what I can do?" he inquired me, like as if he wanted to be praised for it. "I go to that cave village from time to time. Somewhere there, or in reach of there, is the book I want."

"That old man must be chief of that bunch," I reckoned.

"He's their chief and their religious head. A rabbi or an imam, more likely something of both. He's spent a long life in becoming wise and learned. He and I have come to know each other well. I still hope to persuade him to show me the book I need. But, though he's courteous, he seems to mistrust me. I don't know why."

I could have given him a heap of reasons for the old man to mistrust him, but all I said was "You reckon that book will help you a right much."

"It very well could do everything for me here, John," he said. "It surely would fill in certain empty places in the structure I've planned."

He poured himself a sup. He seemed like a man who drank near about all the time, but it nair took hold on him, not to matter.

"Even if you did know where the Judas book was," I said. "If you knew that, wouldn't it be a right hard job to get hold of it?"

He shook his head above his drink. "No. If I knew its exact location, could establish that, I could get it by just a pull on my rope yonder. And I'd be in business."

"With your big temple here?"

"That would be only a modest beginning, on just a tiny bit of earth's surface. But back to Judas Iscariot and what he's supposed to have written. I hope you're interested."

"I sure enough am," I said, and I was.

"Judas—that's the Greek for his name, Judah—was someone who understood very well the concept of world dominion, who hoped to see world dominion established by supernatural means. The world was full of faults and infamies back then, and it's fuller of them today. One of the world's many faults is

that there are far too many people in it, most of them not fit to live. Agree?"

"There's lots of folks say that very thing," I said.

"Billions of useless, idle, harmful people everywhere," he went ahead. "Parasites. Just now, they seem to be working themselves up to a third world war, which certainly would be the war to end all wars and to end all mankind as well."

"You're right about that," I said.

"Suppose some useful and dramatic miracle cut down the human race to, say a million apiece for each continent," said Harpe, and he talked faster, talked higher. "A million apiece, and those survivors to be taught their place in the work of reorganizing the world."

"The world," I repeated him. "It would be a world cluttered up with more billions of dead than those few millions could bury."

"Perhaps those useless corpses could be spirited away," he said, like as if it was already fixed up to do that. "Perhaps sent up to the moon, to make a new distant blotch there. Don't look so bleak, John. Neither you nor I would have that happen to us."

I studied over what he was a-saying. At last I spoke up: "With just those few millions left, all the big cities would be empty."

"Empty," he said after me, and grinned at the thought. "Abandoned. People would have to go back to first principles, live like their ancestors."

"Like back in the Stone Age times?" I wondered him.

"No, John, nothing so primitive as that. Perhaps more in the way people lived on the frontier when Micajah Harpe and his brother roamed to and fro. People would make clearings and set up cabins. Work stones for gristmills. Weave wool and flax

and cotton into cloth, sew their own garments. Pick up the old ways and ideals, and be better for it."

I sat quiet and studied that over, too. There was something in what he said. Me, I'd lived the simple way myself. I'd helped build cabins and dig up ground for crops of corn and cabbage and beans and all like that. I could swing an axe or a grubbing hoe with the best man on this earth. But then I spoke up with a problem for him.

"Here on top of Cry Mountain, you can just call for what you want," I pointed out to him. "Whatair of heart's desire you want, you get it for only a tug of your rope yonder. But if the world turned back to what you say, wouldn't you be left to suffer for stuff you like?"

"Delicate food," he sort of crooned. "Splendid clothes, beautiful objects of art and so on. Oh, here and there the cleverest men could produce those for me to take. Or I could get them from the ruins of abandoned cities like London, Tokyo, New York. Meanwhile, those surviving, deserving people would thrive on their own labors, and when they looked to someone to bless for their welfare, they could—"

He broke off for a second. Then: "They could bless," he said, and stopped again.

"I get it," I said. "You want them to bless you."

"You said it, John, I didn't. But since you've said it, they could bless Ruel Harpe. Bless his name, and be thankful."

So he thought of himself as a sort of God Almighty. I read him as plain as print.

"You aim to get all that," I said.

"I aim to get all that, once I have the book I want, I need."

"The Judas book."

"The Judas book, as you call it," he nodded. "And I think I see my way to having it." He sat back in his chair. "But just

now, it's suppertime, or nearly. Let's have the ladies in and see what we'll eat."

"One thing first," I said. "Just where in the name of all that's holy do I fit in?"

"John, don't you know?" he almost howled out. "Don't you know, when I've credited you with all that wisdom? Those surviving peoples would need instruction on how to lead the simple life, and who could teach them better than John?"

"Me?" I said, and well I knew that I sounded stupid. "Me teach them?"

"You," he said me back, a-smiling all the time. "Teach them to build their own homes, plow their own fields, earn their own bread in the sweat of their brows. Yes, maybe to make their own songs. And all the while, to be glad for what they had, to be thankful."

When I said naught, he chuckled at me and swung his big hands together to make three loud claps.

IX

They came in past the green curtain: Scylla first, then, when Harpe told her to call for them, Alka and Tarrah. They talked some about what would be good to eat. Scylla scraped out that she'd like broiled lobster, and Alka seconded the nomination. So Scylla went to the rope in the corner, ran her hand down along it, and came back with a steel platter with a big lobster on it, red as a tomato and a-putting out steam. She put it on the table, went back to the rope, and fetched us more plates and more lobsters. Finally, a dish of shoestring potatoes and another of salad of green leaves, and a littler dish of something sort of buttery yellow.

"Sauce *aioli,*" said Harpe. "Splendid."

"Those lobsters are out of the kitchen of a fancy place in Boston," Scylla squawked to us. "The chefs will be wondering how they vanished away."

We drew up our chairs and ate. That was the first time in all my born days I'd had lobsters. Scylla asked me, the politest she'd spoken to me so far, how I liked it.

"It's prime," I vowed, and she laughed, a crow caw of a laugh. Tarrah laughed too, a-sitting next to me, but she didn't nudge me with her sandal or her knee. She just only looked on me sideways, a sort of a sad tease of a look, like as if she hoped I liked her as much as I liked the lobster.

For our dessert we had some sort of a creamy fruit pudding, fetched to us by more pulls on that rope. It was right good, too.

I said so, and the others acted pleased to hear me. Finally we were done, and the three women hustled the dishes off somewhere and came back again.

"And now," said Harpe, "this has been more or less a busy day, busy with business and its transaction. What do you say to some relaxation this evening? Music, perhaps?"

They all allowed they wanted that. Alka spoke up first, she'd enjoy to hear what must just be a-starting in some place up north, something she called the Boston Pops. Scylla sneered at that; what she'd most like was bound to be a-going on in Salem, a witch thing where they'd sing and dance their witch ways. She and Alka sort of glittered at one another when she said that.

"I'll tell you," spoke up Tarrah. "We've had two different voices, one by Alka, one by Scylla. I'm going to make a choice that John will endorse. Some sort of country music, the traditional music of these parts."

With that, her sandal did nudge me, just a bit, you might could say a little timid bit.

"An interesting choice," said Harpe. "John, what do you say?"

"Miss Tarrah here has already said it for me," I replied him. "She must have read my mind."

Tarrah's sandal nudged me again.

"If she read your mind, she displays a great talent," said Harpe, and I knew he'd tried to read it. "My vote goes with you two, just to make an agreeable majority. Let's see what we can get."

"If you try Haynie's Fork on the Laurel River, there's something due to happen there this evening," I said.

"Haynie's Fork," he repeated me. "Laurel River. I'm aware of the place. I'll try."

He grabbed onto the charm thing that hung on his neck, and he said those same words I was a-getting to know better and better:

"Fetegan . . . Gaghagan . . . Beigan . . . Deigan . . . Usagan . . ."

The dark window churned itself and then cleared out, and I saw a place I'd been so often before. There was a string of rental pole cabins with cement betwixt the poles for chinking, and the poles painted black. It was nighttime, of course, and lights showed there, and folks there too, dozens of them, scores of them, likely better than a hundred men, women, and children.

All of them chattered and laughed together, and they were a-having something to eat. Best I could figure, it was a fish fry. Fish likely new-caught that very day out of the Laurel River, and hot corn bread with the fish, all that.

Up on one of the cabin porches stood the musicians. My old friend Obray Ramsey was there, with his high forehead and his long straight nose, and his banjo that he plays so well. The others with him I didn't make out so plain at first.

"Ladies and gentlemen," Obray was a-saying, and his voice carried over the crowd under the trees, carried across the miles to where we sat, "we'll try to play you a right good old one—'Bonaparte's Retreat.' "

The crowd clapped loud for that, and those musicians slid into it, with Byard Ray and his fiddle a-moving to the front.

"What an interesting tune, and what timing," said Alka. "Do you know it, John?"

"I've picked and sung it a many times," I said.

"Then why not sing it now?" she asked.

"If you say so." And I joined in with my voice, halfway through:

"Oh, the moon
that
night
Seemed to hold us in its light,
And I heard
her
say,
'You must never go away . . .'

Then
I took her in my arms
And told
her of her million charms,
And lis-
tened to the fiddle playing
"Bonaparte's Retreat.' "

Harpe and the women clapped me for that, even mean old Scylla put her skinny hands together. "You're a naturally tuneful singer, John," said Harpe. "I'm planning things for you in that area, too."

The musicians started with an old reliable one, "Arkansas Traveler." The listeners got right into fours and began to dance, and somebody was a-calling the figures.

Tarrah got up and began to buck dance, her sandals swift and slappy. "Dance with me, John."

"Why sure." I got up, too. I don't do much dancing, usually I'm a-picking music, but I can dance along with most. I put my boots into a single clog, whack-whack, then into a double clog, a-facing up to Tarrah. She was a-clogging too, and a-smiling, her hair on the fly and whip all round her face. Her bosom bounced, her skirt rode up from her round, bare thighs. I made me a cut—you all know what that is, you jump high and swing one leg in front of the other, then the first leg in front, and

come down. I heard hand-clapping. That would be Harpe and Alka, and maybe even Scylla, too.

"Again!" Tarrah panted out. "Again!"

High I went, one leg across, then the other, then the first leg again—three cuts—and came down without a-missing a beat of the music.

They stopped with "Arkansas Traveler" and Tarrah moved back to our chairs.

Right away Obray and the musicians slid into another number, slower and sweeter. "Oh," said Tarrah, still a-breathing hard from the dance, "that's another beautiful one. Can you sing it, John?"

"Yes I can," I said, for the song was one I'd known from when I was just little. And I sang it:

> "Must I go bound and you go free,
> Must I love the girl who won't love me?
> Oh, must I act the foolish part
> And love the girl that broke my heart?
>
> Round is the ring that has no end,
> And hard it is to lose a faithful friend;
> If you should find a love that's true,
> Change not the old love for the new . . ."

Yet again they clapped their hands for me, even scowly old Scylla. "Lovely," said Tarrah. "Who were you singing that song for, John?"

"Why, nobody special," I said back. "I just sang it."

"And sung it notably well," put in Harpe. "John, I should think you could be a successful professional entertainer. Why hasn't someone ever suggested it?"

"Two–three have," I told him. "Now and then I do pick and

sing at a folk festival or just a play party, but I'd rather not take it up for a full-time job."

"Now let's change music to what Alka likes," said Harpe.

Right off, the picture in the window was different. A great big stage there, and a great big sight of folks a-sitting on it, all in black suits with white shirt fronts and ties, or, with the ladies, dresses a-showing off their pretty bare arms and shoulders. Fiddles of all sizes, horns, air kind of instrument you might could name and a few I couldn't name. Up on the leader's stand, a chunky fellow a-beating time for them. And their music was, well all I can say is, it was sort of like a dream. I sat quiet, like all the others, to hark at it to the last sweet note.

"What was that piece?" I inquired them.

" 'Afternoon of a Faun,' " said Alka.

"A fawn?" I repeated after her. "A little baby fawn deer, maybe, out in the woods with its mammy?"

Harpe droned a laugh. "A different sort of faun, John. Spelled with a *u.*"

"Oh, that kind," I said. I'd been told what that kind of faun was. Sort of like a man shape, but with a goat's legs and hoofs, and little goat horns a-sprouting out through his hair. Mostly up to some sort of pranky doings. I could reckon that such things might could be right there, right up on Cry Mountain.

"Can't we hear some of the music I want?" snapped Scylla.

"But of course, my dear Scylla," Harpe granted her. "We'll look in and listen in on that coven of yours."

A change in the window, one more time. Trees all round in a dark night, and a fire blazing up red and smokey, and folks a-dancing round it. Men and women, and none of them with enough clothes on to wad a shotgun. Round and round they danced, on a swing with their backs to one another, then face to face, and all the time they sang:

"Cummer, go ye before, cummer, go ye,
Gif ye won't go before, cummer, let me . . ."

And all of a sudden they stopped and quick ran together from the fire and fell down on their bare knees where somebody showed in the shadows. Hard to see rightly, but the somebody sat in a big chair, and seemed to be all wrapped in black, with big bull horns on the head. Ruel Harpe touched the thing he wore on his neck, said his words, and the window went all dark.

Scylla scowled at me. "John, do you know that song, perhaps?"

"I know it," I replied her. "I've heard it sung in my time. But I don't sing it myself, nor air other witch thing."

"Oh, you who know so much," she sniffed. "Well, if I may be excused, I'll seek my room."

She got up, and so did Alka and Tarrah. They said their good nights too and followed Scylla past their green curtain. Harpe sat where he was, his eyes on me.

"Your singing and dancing impressed me all the more," he said, so friendly I could near about believe him, but not quite. "You're the one who can teach the survivors of a new earth. Teach them to rejoice along with the work they'll have to do."

"You figure to do away with the world we have and a-setting up the new one," I said.

"I've told you I did," he said, and quoted something:

". . . To grasp this sorry scheme of things entire,
Would not we shatter it to bits—and then
Remold it nearer to the heart's desire!"

He grinned me over those lines. "Omar Khayyám," he said, like as if I'd nair heard of the fellow. "What Omar would have

done I don't know, but I know what I'll do, with you to help me. What do you say?"

"I say I'm a-getting too tired to figure that out," I answered. "I've had me a plumb hard time a-swarving up Cry Mountain, and for two–three days before that I spent most of my time on my feet. Right now, I'd admire to know where I'll lay my head down."

"I'm afraid I've been remiss in my duties as a host," said Harpe. "Come along and bring your gear with you."

I picked up my things, guitar and all. Harpe led the way to the door with the red curtain, the one the women hadn't used. I followed him into a long, lean hall, lighted from somewhere up above. The walls were cut out of rock, a sort of pale tan color. At the end of the hall we came to a door that looked to be made of dark iron. Harpe pushed a button on it, and it opened before us and we went in.

The room, too, had those walls of pale tan rock, cut right out of some place inside Cry Mountain. The ceiling showed glassy pale, but it was clouded, you couldn't see through it. A light of some kind filtered through, a soft light, but you'd be able to read by it. That room might could have been fourteen feet square. There was an iron bed, single size, with pillows and a spread on it as fluffy white as a new fall of snow on a winter's morning. There were a couple of chairs and a chest of drawers. On one wall a picture, an oil painting of two men a-leading horses amongst dark, watching trees. I looked at it and wondered myself if those two men were supposed to be the old Harpe brothers, Micajah and Wiley Harpe. On another wall another picture, this time of a town with a run of water instead of a street and men a-pushing boats along with poles. And at the far end, across from where we'd come in, a door of iron painted red, that stood half open. I dumped my stuff in a corner and went to that door and inside.

It was dark in there, but I groped my hand inside the jamb and found a soft place and pushed. Light came on overhead. It was a bathroom with the rock walls colored gray, and all modern fixings, the sort you'd find in a good hotel. I came out again. Harpe was a-sitting in one of the chairs, with his grin on.

I yawned, and he grinned me wider.

"That's a comforting sign, John," he said. "You're tired. You're sleepy, ready to lie down and drift off. Which means you're getting around to trusting me. You're dismissing the idea that I might slip in here while you're dead to the world and perhaps kill you."

"If you did that," I returned to him, "I'd just be dead, and that would be the end. I've said before, I've looked death betwixt the eyes too often to be bad scared of a-dying." I looked him betwixt his own eyes. "As life is to the living, so death is to the dead," I quoted to him.

"Mary Mapes Dodge wrote that," Harpe said, "as well as *Hans Brinker and the Silver Skates*, which I remember as a more or less silly novel. But all right for that. You're the healthy sort that doesn't expect to die right away. I judge that you're a truly strong man."

"Yes, sir, I've always been powerful for strength, all the way up from a boy. Most times, whatair bunch I'm with, I can reckon to be the strongest one."

"Ah," he said, "and you must have proved your strength."

"Why, as to that," I said, "three–four years back, I was up at what they call the Highland Games in the mountains, a good way off from here. They bantered me, some of them, to get into what they called a-throwing the caber."

"I know what the caber is," nodded Harpe. "A big, heavy length of a tree trunk. Something an ordinary man couldn't even lift. So you threw the caber. How well?"

"I won," I said. "They were all of them right much sur-

prised. The other throwers were big beefy men, and you see what I am, rangy more than aught else. But I watched them hike it up and fling it, and figured I saw what knack it took, and when it was my turn, I won."

He studied me up and down. "No doubt you think you could beat me in a fair fight."

"Not for me to say air such thing, since I'm your guest here."

"But could you? Could you even get hold of me? Try it, just in a friendly way."

A-standing across the floor from me, he reached his right hand at me, like as if to shake. His other hand was on the amulet round his neck.

I put out my own hand to take his, and, gentlemen, I couldn't.

It was like as if there was a pane of glass betwixt us, such pure-made glass it couldn't be seen. I slid my fingers here and there, and whatair was in the way stayed there. Kept me from him.

His grin stretched wide, to show his lean white teeth.

"No good to try, is it? You must trust me, and you can. But come, let's relax. Let's play a little game."

He reached inside his fringed shirt and fetched out a pair of dice, white with green spots. "Do you know how to roll these?" he asked me.

"I flung dice when I was a boy, and some in the army," I said. "But I don't have money enough with me for a game, and I won't gamble for aught else."

"No, no, I said we'll relax. Just have fun. Here, this rug will be as good as a blanket to roll on. Kneel down, John."

We both knelt. He handed me the dice. I shook them and sent them out on a roll. Two single-spot faces came up.

"Snake eyes," said Harpe. "Craps. But I'll give you another chance. Go ahead."

I rolled them again, and they came up a one and a two.

"Craps again," he said, a-chuckling. "The saddest story ever told. Now let me try." He took the dice into his hand. "How about a nice fresh seven?"

He sent them a-tumbling out. They came up a three and a four.

"See there?" he laughed. "I don't even have to talk to them." He had them in his hand again. "How about elevens this time?"

They rolled away and stopped, with a five and a six up. If we'd have been a-shooting for money, I'd have been broke by then.

"But let's not be monotonous," Harpe was a-saying. "Give me something to be a point, and see me make it."

The dice came up a three and a one. Harpe winked down at them.

"Four," he said. "Little Joe, so called. The hardest point of all to make, except for Big Dick, the ten."

He rolled them, and they quit with both twos up.

"There you are," he said, "and I made it the hard way." He shoved the dice back inside his shirt and got up, and so did I.

"You see," he said, "I can make money by gambling. No need to pull that rope out there and fetch it to me from a bank or a safe. Now and then I visit gambling centers of the world. Some of those, like Las Vegas, know me and discourage me from getting into a game, but I go to other towns—up and down the California coast, towns in Texas and Florida, up to Chicago and New York." He smiled about that. "And overseas, sometimes I play at Monte Carlo or in London or Rome or Paris. I have plenty of money in a safe place here for when I might need it. And seldom do I need it very much."

"You gamble for lots," I guessed.

"Yes, the stakes are in the thousands, even in the millions, in those gambling centers. I gamble for lots, as you say, and I always win."

"You can even control chance," I said.

"You're right, I can even control chance. Have a good night's rest, John, and I'll see you in the morning."

With that, he went to the door and through it and shut it behind him. The room seemed quieter, easier, with Ruel Harpe gone out of it. After a second, I went and tried the door. It wasn't locked, he hadn't shut me in. Likely he reckoned he didn't have to.

Because he was sure of me in his mind. He'd shown me that I couldn't touch him, then that business with the dice, because he wanted me to know that he had command over a whole hobby of circumstances. Up here, inside his fenced-in top of Cry Mountain, he figured he was winner over all things in reach, and that he could be winner over all the world besides. He was dead certain sure about that.

He was like those Tories on Kings Mountain I'd sung to him about, earlier on: *because they rule the mountain, they think they rule the land.* But how dead wrong those Tories had been, and might could Ruel Harpe be wrong, too?

He had command over things like those dice, but I swore to myself that he didn't have command over me. Not by a long shot with a bush in the way.

I yawned again. A-sitting on the bed, I shucked off my clothes. In the bathroom I turned me on a shower, got into it with a square chunk of blue soap and sudsed myself all over from my head to my heels, and built up a lather in my hair and rinsed it out. Afterward, I rubbed down with a shuck towel that had the name of a hotel on it, and I felt some better after the

trying, busy day I'd had. I lay down on the bed, all stripped as I was, and pulled the sheet and blanket over me.

I thought and thought about all I'd been through lately. I wondered myself if Tombs McDonald had a worry about me. Likely he had, by now. And likewise I wondered myself what tomorrow's talk with Ruel Harpe would be like.

About then, I went off to sleep. Like always, I dreamed. It was a dream about some big city I'd never been in, on a street where folks walked in crowds, dressed up in strange clothes, and cars ran back and forth, strange cars of makes I'd nair seen in my wakeaday life. And the air of that city was so clear, so pure, that far off and off, miles away, I could see tall buildings as plain as you can see tall mountains far off away from the smoke and fog of towns.

It was a right good dream. Naught happened to me in it. It might could have been a sign of good things to come, if truly there is something to be told to you in your dreams.

X

I woke up easy, but I woke up quick. As likely I've said before this, I can do that. Nobody has to yell me or shake me or blow the bugle over me; I wake up right off and know who I am and where I am.

Who I was, was John. Where I was, was in this comfortable bedroom I'd been given by Ruel Harpe, betwixt the times when he'd showed me the other side of the world or fetched his wants by a-tugging a rope or just a-shooting dice, to prove to me how big he was, how all-powerful.

I hopped out of the bed and into the bathroom and had me a good wash, face and hands and neck and ears. I scrubbed my teeth. I soaped the stubble on my face and shaved it off close, and looked better. I tried to comb my hair I'd washed the night before. It was still wavy over my ears, and pale threads showed in the dark of it, silvery-white as the strings on my guitar. Finally I dressed myself and went out along the narrow hallway and into the main room.

They were all at the table together, Harpe and the three women. They looked round and hailed me, the whole bunch. Harpe put up a hand, a-grinning the way I'd come to know he did. He wore a good-cut white jacket and a white shirt and a blue neck scarf. Scylla shone her eyes and sort of smiled, but it was a smile as tight as a snake's. Alka nodded, and the light shifted on her big wide glasses. Tarrah downright beamed on

me. She'd made up her face and her hair was combed down at the sides, with a red ribbon round her temples.

"Just in time, John, we're having breakfast," said Harpe, in a purely welcoming voice. "Sit down, and choose what you'd like to eat."

I took a chair, and there was a plate and knife and fork set for me there, and a coffee cup. Midways of the table stood a big china platter with a whole heap of scrambled eggs and a stack of slices of home-smoked ham, and beside that a dish of grits and another of hot biscuits and another with a round chunk of butter. Likewise a jar of honey. I helped myself well, for I was hungry. Tarrah leant across me, a-shoving herself to me as she leant, and poured me out coffee from a silver pot. I started in to eat, and it was as fine a breakfast as a man could wish. I wondered where they'd got it by just a pull on their rope.

Scylla squinted at me. She knew what was on my mind.

"That happens to come from Buck's Tavern, outside Asheville," she told me, and, as usual, she spoke to me in words edged with acid. For some reason, she truly hated me. It showed in all she did and said with me like as if she had a knife in her hand.

I tried not to rile her. "I've eaten at Buck's in my time," I said. "They give you the best of rations there. They know what they're doing."

"At this moment, they must wonder what they're doing, or who's doing," said Alka, a-taking a forkful of scrambled eggs. "They wonder what made a big breakfast for a party of hungry customers vanish into the thinnest air."

With that, we sort of chatted back and forth like a bunch of choice friends at breakfast. All of them wanted to know if I'd had a good night's sleep, even Scylla asked me that, not so harsh in the voice as a moment or so back. I ate well and had me another cup of coffee.

When we'd all finished, Harpe leant back in his chair. "Ladies," he said, "I want to talk to John in private."

"Talk to John," Scylla repeated him. "Talk about what—the Judas Gospel? You've been harping on that ever since John came here."

"Just about how he fits in here," replied Harpe. "In private, I said."

"And I'm not to hear?" she squeaked at him, at me, at the other two.

"Wherever you'll be, probably you'll hear something of what we say to each other, Scylla. You're good at eavesdropping. But you won't take part in the conversation."

"Well, I swear!" she squalled out, and Harpe laughed, the loudest I'd heard him laugh so far.

"Don't swear, Scylla," he teased her. "You mustn't swear. Somebody somewhere might hear you, and not like it, and punish you for it. The preachers say you can go to hell for swearing."

She got up, a-glowering. "The preachers," she echoed. "They all ought to go to hell themselves. Well, you others, come on."

The three of them picked up the dishes. Harpe watched them trail off, one behind the other, past their green curtain. Then his eyes came round and fixed me.

"By now, you realize that you're established here," he said. "I won't say caught here, that sounds too much like prison. Established here, with everything set to your advantage."

"I don't rightly see what the advantage would be to me," I said, and he grinned broader and harder yet.

"Wealth," he said. "Isn't wealth worth having?"

From the inside pocket of his white coat he fetched out a roll of bills, big enough to choke a cow.

"I told you how easily I can get this," he drawled. "Here and

there in those gambling places. Not only at dice. At black jack and chemin de fer, games like that. I could give you half of this and never miss it. Isn't wealth good?"

"Don't give me aught of your money," I said. "Sure enough, wealth can be good, if it so happens you can buy some good thing with it for yourself."

"Of course, John, of course." He tucked his big roll away again. "Wealth can buy luxury to an extent you've never known."

"Luxury," I repeated him. "I haven't known air great much of that in my time. I keep on a-settling for comfort now and then, but I haven't known air great much of that, either."

"Rule over people in time to come," he said. "Over peoples."

I shook my head. "Nair in this world have I wanted rule over air soul, and I sure God haven't wanted air soul to have rule over me."

He gazed at me, and shook his own head. "If these things don't have a pleasant sound to you, how about sweet love?"

I reckon I just only gopped at him on that, and he snickered.

"I said love," he repeated me. "The love of the woman you most truly desire. Perhaps I've read you pretty clearly on that subject. I see a response in you."

I studied his grinning face, his squinted eyes, those bannery eyebrows that turned up. It came to my mind that he not only looked like Satan, the old boy himself, but that he wanted to look like him a-making his promises. *All these will I give thee, if thou wilt fall down and worship me,* Satan had said one time, to what Son of Man you all know. I'm not about to compare myself to one so high, but I said naught to Harpe. If I said naught, that should be enough for him and me and all the world.

"But just at present," he went on, "I need your help on a

very, very important matter. Remember the troglodyte settlement we saw on the Sahara yesterday—those cave dwellers? Let's just call them up to look at again, there at the window."

His Satan-face grinned as his hand went to the T-shaped amulet he dangled at his neck. He spoke the words I recollected, *"Fetegan . . . Gaghagan . . . Beigan . . . Deigan . . . Usagan . . ."*

The window lighted up and cleared itself to us. I saw what he'd showed me before, the cave places in the face of the bluff, those folks in their long gowns and robes and head-scarfs, on the move back and forth. It was daytime, and air thing in sight was burnt to a blaze in the sun.

"It's only a little after nine o'clock here," said Harpe, "and over there, five hours later in the east, just past two. That's the heat of the day in that African desert. Go get your hat, John, or the heat will strike you flat as a pancake."

"What you a-talking about?" I asked.

"Go get your hat," he said again, "and bring along your guitar, too. I'm going to take you with me."

"Take him there with you?" rattled out the shrill voice of Scylla, and she came a-scurrying in. "I heard that, Ruel, I heard you say—"

"Of course you heard," Harpe cut her off, his own voice gone sharp as steel.

"Yes, I did hear, and you said—"

"You have your own shrewd ways of hearing at a distance," he broke in again. "I've known you to do that in the past. A useful sort of magic," and now he sneered at her, "to hear at a distance. But this time I don't approve."

"Neither do I approve," she said, a-coming to the table to stand and face him.

He got up from his chair. I saw that he wore tan shorts and knee-high boots of tawny leather, beautifully cobbled.

"You think," Scylla yammered, "that John can be of some special use more than I'd be."

"That's exactly what I think," allowed Harpe. "He will be accepted, trusted, where you would never be. Where I'm not quite trusted. And I'll put him to use."

"And leave me here?"

"And leave you here," he nodded her. "Scylla, you'd be of no help where we're going, and John will." His eyes were on her, like the muzzles of two pistols. "Go and leave us alone."

"Leave you alone!" she howled. "I'll leave you alone, all right —I'll leave everybody alone!"

She hustled herself away, back of the green curtain. Harpe shrugged at me.

"She'll sulk now," he said. "She was the first I chose to help me, and it's hard for her to recognize the fact that she's not my equal here. She'll be ugly about things for a day or so, maybe for several days. But just now, you and I are going to travel."

He went to a side shelf and picked up a white cork helmet and set it on his head.

"Come here close to me, John," he bade me. "We have to make our journey almost as one. Here, put your arm around my shoulders."

I did that, a-slinging my guitar behind me. He grabbed me tight round the waist. His free hand hoisted up the T-amulet on its chain and laid itself flat on his helmet. He said words, so slurred together and muttered I couldn't make them out.

I felt a windy whirl all round me, I saw a moving whiteness like a storm of snow, and my feet rested nowhere, on naught. My eyes went blind, my ears sang. And then, all of a sudden, brightness. I stood on solidness. Sight came back to my eyes. I looked down.

Sand at my feet, all glittery with the hot sun on it.

I lifted my eyes and saw the caves in the bluff, saw people in

their robes and head-veils, all a-standing and a-gopping at us. Farther off beyond them, beyond what the window on Cry Mountain had shown, grew trees, fluffy-topped palms and orchards of leafy, smaller trees.

"You see date palms," said Harpe beside me. "Almond trees. And over there beyond, fields of beans. There you have the diet of these tribesmen—dates and almonds and beans. They have barley bread, too, and that makes a balanced ration."

"No meat?" I asked.

"On special occasions. One sheep, slaughtered and cut into kebabs, can feed this whole village."

Harpe stepped from beside me and hailed a tall thin man, who bowed to him with a hand to his forehead. Harpe touched his helmet and said something in that language I didn't know, and the thin man trotted away into one of the caves. He came back with somebody I'd seen before in Harpe's window, the white-bearded one in the blue silk gown.

He and Harpe bowed and touched their foreheads and talked for a moment. Then Harpe made a beckon sign to me, and I walked over to join them, my guitar under my arm.

"John," said Harpe, "let me introduce my friend, Yakouba. You can call him Imam or Rabbi, whichever you like. He is eager to meet you. I've told him that you are a *haham*—a traveling holy man from beyond the oceans."

Yakouba smiled on me, with stained teeth a-showing through his white whiskers. He bowed and touched his forehead. I bowed and put out my hand to him, and he stared at it and then he took it in his own brown fingers, thin as twigs. He smiled again.

"*Ya haham,*" he said in a thin old voice. "*Ya haham. Kehm.*"

He rattled out a big chunk of his language to Harpe, who replied him in the same language, then turned to me.

"He says he likes you, John. He says you have the blood of

kings—he can tell by how you stand, by how you look and speak. That he knows you for an honest man—he's never quite accepted me for that. And he wants to talk to you."

"I can't speak air word of his language," I had to say.

"He has a little English, and maybe the two of you can manage with that. But I can't stay and interpret. He hasn't invited me."

With that, Harpe touched the amulet on his neck and muttered, and he was gone from sight like as if he hadn't been there. The folks round about blinked, but they weren't upset to no great much of an extent. Likely they'd seen him disappear a good few times before that.

The old man named Yakouba touched my arm and pointed to my guitar. "Sing?" he said.

I did my best to be calm. Harpe had gone off and left me, only God knew where the place was or how to get away from it. But I smiled the best I could and I put my left hand to the neck of the guitar and my right to the strings. I hit one or two chords, and all those folks stood round and stared and harked, and I decided I'd try something with sweet, slow music.

Into my mind came a hymn, a right lonesome-tuned hymn with the words drawn out one place another to fit the music. I'd heard it all my life in church houses, and I reckon others before me had heard it all their lives, too. I touched the silver strings, and I sang:

> "By cool Siloam's sha-ady rill
> How fa-air the li-ily grows,
> How swe-et the breath, beneath the hill,
> Of Sharon's dewy rose . . ."

I put my palm to the strings and stopped then. But they wouldn't let me stop. They hollered me, they waved at me, so I picked and sang the thing again. And that time a little beardy

man played it with me on a sort of flute cut out of a cane twig, the sort you blow into the end instead of the side. He followed me right well. We finished a-playing, and again yells.

"Shiloah," some one of them said. *"Sharawn."*

So they knew some of the words, and what they meant. Old Yakouba looked at me, long and quiet and friendly, and stroked down his blizzardy white beard with his skinny right hand. Then he reached out and took my arm.

"You come," he said.

I slung my guitar behind me. He led me to a cave, and inside.

There was a square room chopped out in there, lit by lamps in notches in the rock walls. It was more or less fifteen feet to a side, with a high ceiling woven of some kind of reeds and, all the way round it, a shelf of mortared rocks with rugs and cushions on them. In a far corner a woman in a white robe, with black braids of hair, cooked something on an iron plate over a pot of coals. Yakouba pointed to a place on a shelf, and motioned for me to sit down. I did that, and he sat on a little wooden stool in front of me.

Then he spoke to the woman, who took a wooden spoon and hiked two chunks of something from the plate onto a baked clay dish. She dripped something on them from a kind of pitcher, and fetched them to us.

He took one chunk and I took the other. It looked to be made of the little bittiest spaghetti in the world, all shiny wet with what the woman had put on it.

"Kanufah," he said, and took him a bite, so I took me one. I reckoned the thing had been fried in butter and soaked in honey. "Good," I said to Yakouba, and we went ahead and ate the things up. I recollected from somewhere that if you ate with these desert folks, that made you friends somehow.

Trusted friends. And Yakouba had told Harpe that I was one to be trusted.

He wiped his beardy mouth. "*Ya haham,*" he said, as he'd said before. "Good man," he managed in his deep-throated English. "Good. You good. I show."

"Thank you," I said.

"Thank you," he said after me. "Now I show."

He stooped down beside his stool and dragged away a worn-out mat that looked to be woven of brown bark strips. Underneath was a slab of slatey gray rock, set into the floor. It looked to be a yard long and half that wide. Yakouba fumbled out a straight knife from somewhere. It was of old dark steel, and it had writing of some kind on the blade—maybe Arabic, maybe Hebrew, how could I know? With the point he pried at the edge of the gray rock slab, got it up to where his thin fingers could grab hold, and hoisted it up and away.

"See," he said to me. He was a-doing his possible best to talk in a language I knew.

He had opened up a hole in his stone floor. Amongst the shadows inside it lay some kind of bundle, a hairy-looking bundle, brown and white. Yakouba bent lower and hoisted it out, sat on his stool, and held the thing in his arms. He cuddled it to him, like a precious treasure.

He spoke to me in his language that I could by no way understand, and I shook my head, and he smiled in his beard at my ignorance.

"Book," he smiled. "Yahouda book." And I could understand that.

"Judas," I said.

"Judas," he repeated me, and nodded and smiled again, proud as proud could be.

I looked at the bundle. It was near about as big as a ham. Its hairy cover seemed like as if it was goatskin, old goatskin,

cracked here and there. I saw where it was stitched shut, with a thick twisted thread of something. I put out my hand to feel. With a wider smile, he reached it out to me, put it into my arms.

"See," he said.

He'd done that thing to show he trusted me. He'd told Harpe that he knew I was a good man. I'd had people to trust me before that, turn to me, believe in me. I don't know what causes them to trust in me, I only know I should ought to do my best to deserve it.

"Thank you," I told him, proud for his trust.

As I spoke, my head swam, my ears rang like gongs. Again it was that white swirl all round me, like a blinding storm of snow. A moment later, things cleared from my mind and my eyes and ears, and there I stood, in Harpe's big main room on Cry Mountain.

I was a-standing in the corner where the rope hung down. And with me, just then a-letting the rope go, was Ruel Harpe, with a happy, toothy grin that showed all the way across his face. And I was a-holding something to me with both arms. I looked. Sure enough, it was the goatskin bundle Yakouba had trusted me to touch. I must have had a blank stare on my face, for Harpe laughed loud and long.

"It worked," he said, near about choked with his laughing. "Worked—it worked."

"What happened?" I asked him.

He reached to take the bundle from my arms, and hugged it hard to him. "It worked," he said one more time. "You got it for me."

"Me?"

"I told you that Yakouba never quite trusted me. He wouldn't show me this. But he believed in you, John—people

do believe in you, and so did Yakouba—let you have the book—"

"He just let me touch it," I cut him off, for I'd heard enough to be mad with what happened. "He nair thought I'd steal it. You tricked him and you tricked me. That's a natural fact, and I don't like it one bit."

He walked to the table in the middle of the room and put the bundle down on it, and stood with one hand on the bundle.

"You're angry, John," he said. "I see the veins stand out on your temples. But don't try anything foolish now, and don't try anything foolish later. Yes, I admit I watched you and Yakouba at the window yonder. When the exact second arrived, I just tugged the rope to bring you and the book, the way I'd bring a ham or a sack of meal or anything else. And if you didn't understand, you helped. Now—"

Behind the green curtain that led to where the women had their places rose a scream and another scream, loud enough to jangle your ears. Next instant, Alka came a-dashing into sight, and Tarrah a-dashing behind her.

"Scylla!" screamed Alka, her eyes a-bugging out behind her glasses. "She's dead—she's killed herself!"

XI

"Killed herself?" roared out Harpe, so loud that the curtains moved.

And he was off at a dead run for the door where Alka and Tarrah had come out. I ran after him, and the two women followed us, both of them a-moaning and a-sobbing.

Another long, rock-walled hallway there, like the one to my room, with some sort of light in it. Harpe headed straight for a swung-open door at the far end. In he went, and so did I.

The room in there was as bare as a cell in a jailhouse. Tan rock walls with naught on their blankness, and a tan rock floor with no carpet. A wooden chair, the kind you call a kitchen chair, a wooden table, a cot bed with a blanket of a dead gray color, and on that lay Scylla, lay Scylla as absolutely quiet as a rag doll, her sharp face squinched up with the wrinkles a-showing like scars, her eyes clamped tight shut.

"We saw her take something and swallow it," Tarrah chattered behind us.

"So she did," said Harpe, beside the bed. He stooped down and picked up a little bottle as long as your thumb. "So she did," he said again. "This was a poison I developed. It had certain plant juices in it—never mind what plants. It can kill you quicker than prussic acid, than the bite of a black mamba."

He was as calm in his voice as a lecturer. I looked at Scylla. No doubt she was stone dead. I'd seen enough dead folks in my time to know death when I saw it.

"She took that bottle from a shelf in my room," Harpe said, and tucked the bottle into a pocket of his white jacket. "She wanted to die—die instantly."

"Wh-why?" stuttered one of the two women, I couldn't rightly say which. Harpe swung round to look at each of us in turn. His face was as calm and steady as a stone face.

"She hated you, John," he said to me. "Thought you were getting in her way, here. That's why she killed herself."

"Is that aught of a reason for suicide?" I asked him.

"A good proportion of suicides are committed to make people sorry you're dead," he allowed, still calm, still off-hand. "Don't say that's a silly reason, we all know it's silly. But that's what happens. And Scylla hated you so much, she couldn't stand it another minute to be in the same world with you."

Back at the bed, he drew the two edges of the blanket up and clear over Scylla, so that she was cloaked and swaddled where she lay, from her head to her toes. When he turned back to us again, he still didn't seem to care a shuck.

"So you two ladies saw her do it?" he inquired them.

"Yes, we saw," Tarrah quavered out. "She called us in here to see. She said that she'd been forsaken—been snubbed."

"She said it was John's fault," Alka added on. "And she swallowed whatever was in that bottle, and she shouted out a curse on John."

Tarrah shuddered her shoulders. "It was the most terrible curse I ever heard. What she said was—"

"Shut up, Tarrah!" Harpe pure down blared at her, and flung up his hand. "Don't repeat a word of that curse, it will double it. Did she curse me, too?"

"No, sir," said Tarrah. "It was only John she spoke against, she wanted to hurt him. That goes back to the first hour John was here."

"That's right," Alka put in. "The first time you talked to

him, we were all back in here together, the three of us. Scylla had some dried leaves. She crumbled them and blew them in the air and said a spell. It was to call John to come to her and hear what she had to say."

"Hear what she had to say?" Harpe repeated her. "Here in her room, is that right? John was to come to her, not me?"

"I can't tell what her thought was, but John didn't come," said Alka. "Scylla was furious. She spit on the floor because he didn't obey her. That's when she began to hate him."

Maybe she'd begun before that, I told myself. While Alka talked on, I recollected something into my mind. I started in to whisper it to myself, under my breath. Harpe stared at me.

"What's that you say, John?" he asked. "Speak up."

I said the rest of the business out loud: ". . . I do charge you upon pain and peril of your present and everlasting damnation that you, neither air other wicked witch, do at air time hereafter to the end of the world, meddle or make any more, but you let be this man John in peace and quiet."

Harpe nodded his head at me. "Those words should protect you," he said. "I know that spell for warding off the curse of a witch. It's in *The Nine Tomes of Magic.* I have that with the books in there on my shelf."

Where I'd seen it was in Thompson's book *The Mysteries and Secrets of Magic,* but I didn't see why I'd need to mention that. All I said was, "I reckoned it was a good enough one to commit to memory."

He gazed down to where Scylla lay like a log, all wrapped up in her gray blanket.

"Well, so I've lost her." He said it with no more bother in his voice than he'd have shown if he'd lost a quarter dollar. "She shouldn't have been so hasty."

"She must have been crazy," I said.

"Scylla was always a little crazy," he returned. "Alka and

Tarrah have been more or less sane, but not Scylla." He drew him a long breath. "Now," he said, "we have to bury her."

"Don't we have to report this thing to the courthouse?" I asked.

"No, we certainly don't." He shook his head hard, from side to side. "That law doesn't come up here on Cry Mountain. Alka, Tarrah, will you go to the storehouse and bring out the spade and mattock? John, you come along with me."

All of us went out of that room where Scylla lay so dead, and along the hall and out through the main room and the tunnel to the outside. Harpe led me to pace round under the dark, shadowy trees.

"No grave near the stockade anywhere," he said. "I don't know what effect a grave close there might have on those outside. Here, John, this way."

He didn't speak air word more till he'd led me right close to the big gash where Cry Mountain's voice waited to be heard. He studied the ground next to some laurel.

"Here," he said, "this place will do."

Yonder came Alka and Tarrah to join us. One had a big spade, the other a mattock with two good grubbing blades on it. Harpe took the spade and laid it to the mossy ground and measured with it, measured again. He drove in the edge of the blade all round an oblong in the ground.

"Six feet long, I judge, and two wide," he said to us. "Big enough for Scylla and to spare. John, would you use the mattock?"

The mattock—Tarrah held it out to me. I took it in my both hands, a good grip on it, and set my feet the right way. Up I swung it and brought it down, swoop! and slammed it deep into the earth. I heard the pop of a root I'd cut through. I upped it and swung it again. Again. It loosened the ground for Scylla's grave. As I moved along the side of the oblong Harpe had

marked out, to loosen more, he was behind me with the spade. He brought up dark, pebbly earth in big chunky jobs. I looked at his big, bunchy forearms in the short sleeves of his bush jacket. He'd be a right strong man, you could judge. I wondered myself for about the sixth time, how he'd be to fight with.

We cleared out that six-by-two stretch, a shovelful deep. I picked away again, beneath where we'd worked the one time. Alka and Tarrah just stood and looked on, eyes stretched wide in their faces. Deeper I drove the mattock, to make more loosening for Harpe to shovel out. He was a-sweating at his work, and so was I, a little bit. We kept on, and kept on a-keeping on. We deepened Scylla's grave. Finally, it was near about three feet deep. Harpe stood up and stuck his shovel in the big heap of dirt and wiped his face with a big white handkerchief.

"That will do," he decided. "Room enough for her."

And you could be dead certain sure in your mind that not a damn did Ruel Harpe care for what Scylla had done to herself.

"Come on, John," he said to me. "Let's fetch her out."

He and I went back in and along the hall to where Scylla lay a-waiting to be fetched out. I slid an arm under her shoulders where she was all wrapped up, and Harpe took hold of her by the ankles. We lifted her. She wasn't stiffened for all that time we'd taken to dig her grave; that thing doctors call rigor mortis hadn't truly set in as yet. We carried her out, all the way into the shadowed open and to the side of the grave. Alka and Tarrah sort of moaned as we lowered her down to the damp, dark bottom.

I smoothed the blanket over her the best I could. Harpe was a-going over to get his shovel.

"Wait," I said. "Wouldn't it be all right to say some words over her?"

"Words?" he repeated me, still a-holding the shovel in his

big hands. And he grinned me, like as if we were at a play-party. Plainer than plain, you could know that he nair thought of this as a funeral, he only thought of it as a burying, what you might could do for a dead dog or dead mule.

"What sort of words do you mean, John?" he asked.

"Air man or woman who dies should ought to have some words said at the grave," I said to him, and looked him betwixt the eyes to say it. "I meant some words of comfort for Scylla here."

He wagged his head, and grinned betwixt his mustache and his knife of a beard. "Why," he said, "she hated you, and you know it."

"Sure I know it," I admitted to him, "but I didn't hate her. Sometimes she pestered me, how she looked on me, how she talked, but nair once did I hate her. She's dead now and I hope she can have peace, and maybe a chance to think on what's truly right and wrong."

"Of course, of course. You believe in a life after death. You believe in heaven and hell."

"Sure I believe in heaven and hell, the both of them. And I'm here to say, either which of the two you go to, you're a-going to be right surprised at who you meet there."

At that he laughed, laughed a hearty laugh, as at a big joke. "Come now, John, don't be sardonic. It doesn't become you, when you wish to be the man of good will in this world." He looked past me. "What's your thought on the subject, you two ladies?"

"I agree with John," said Alka, so soft you could barely hear her, and "Yes," said Tarrah, no louder than Alka.

Harpe snickered all over. "Well, all right," he said. "Go ahead with your burial service, John. But I warn you as the personal friend I want to be, be careful of what names you use."

I reckoned I'd do well to hark at his warning. What he meant was, leave out the name of God. I set down the mattock and thought for a second of time.

I knew the burial service, I knew it well. A couple of times in my life, I'd even said it myself for somebody, there a-being there was no preacher handy to do it. I thought over the thing, and then I moved to the edge of the grave and spoke:

"We bring nothing into this world, and it is certain we carry nothing out," I said the words and searched my mind for what to say next. Harpe and Alka and Tarrah stood still and harked at me.

"I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills; from whence cometh my help?" I said another bit I remembered. Where we were right then, no hill was higher up than Cry Mountain. I studied on through what the service should ought to be, and came up with another bit of it:

"We commit her body to the ground," I said then. "Earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust."

I stooped down and took up a handful of the loose dark dirt we'd dug away there. I looked down into the grave, at Scylla wrapped up in her blanket. She looked so little, so little, down in that hole. It struck me that dead folks always look littler than when they're alive. I trickled the dirt in on her. I straightened up.

"I hope that's enough," I said. "It's all I'm a-going to say."

"I rejoice to hear it," said Harpe, and stooped for his shovel.

"Wait, wait," called out Alka. "Wait just a little moment."

"Why?" asked Harpe, the shovel in his hand.

"Tarrah and I want to do something, too," said Alka. "Come on, Tarrah."

The two of them came to the edge of the grave. "Here," said Alka. She held in her hand something that looked like a little

silver heart on a ribbon. "You admired this once, Scylla," she said. "I give it to you."

She tossed it down on the old gray blanket. It shimmered there.

"And here," said Tarrah. Her hands were at her neck, a-working to unfasten the necklace she wore. I saw the strange little images on it. She flung it down into the grave.

"Yours, Scylla," she said. "Maybe to help you."

"Are you both done?" asked Harpe.

"No," said Alka, and shook her head. "No, not quite."

She started to dance there. She moved off along the edge of the open grave, along to her right. Counterclockwise, what I've heard named widdershins, the witch direction. Tarrah danced after her. They single-footed it on the rough ground, with a twinkle to their feet. They began to whisper some kind of song, so low I couldn't make it out. Away they went, widdershins.

For a second, just a little bitty second, I thought of falling in behind Tarrah and dancing with them. But I did no such thing. It's a known fact that if you join in with witches, you get to be a witch yourself. And that was sure enough a witch dance, a witch song. I wasn't about to take up air part of it.

They rounded the grave, Alka with Tarrah behind her, a-muttering the song. Once or twice they made a turn so that they danced back to back, do-si-do as the dance callers say. Then they danced round again. And then a third time, till they came back to the place where they'd started, and stood still. Tarrah was a-shedding tears. I couldn't tell about Alka, with those big glasses. Harpe had watched them, all the three times round, while he leant on his shovel.

"All finished?" he inquired them. "Then let's put her under."

He bent down and scooped him up a big high spadeful of

earth and flung it in. I heard the damp clods plop. He bent to spade up more.

"Wait a second," I said. "Reach me that shovel." And I put out my hand for it.

"What's the idea?" he asked, but he gave me the shovel. I hiked up my own load of dirt.

"Just mountain-style doings," I told him. "At a burying, the folks all take turn and turn about."

I flung my own bunch in, and held out the shovel to Alka. She stared, but she dug in and threw in what she dug. "Now Tarrah?" she asked me.

"Now Tarrah," I replied her, and Tarrah took her turn. "Give it back to him," I said to Tarrah, and nodded at Harpe.

He shoveled some in and passed it to me and I did likewise, and round and round the four of us the shovel went. The hole filled up fast, until it was to the top. It looked as dark and moist as a new flower bed. Harpe patted the dirt with the flat of the blade.

"A mountain custom, you called it," he said to me. "It's a sensible custom. Many hands make light work. Nobody does the biggest share of it and gets tired while others watch. What are you looking for, John?"

I stepped here and yonder amongst the trees, till I saw a rock, smoothed out by time. A sort of gray in color, like Scylla's blanket. It looked sort of like a pillow.

"This," I said.

I bent and grabbed it. That was a considerable weight to lift, but I muscled it up and wagged it to where I could chunk it down just above where Scylla's head would be underground.

"That was good of you, John," breathed Tarrah.

"Very good of you," Harpe seconded her, not with a sneer this time. "My friends, perhaps you feel that I've been matter-of-fact about Scylla."

Matter-of-fact, he'd said. Sure enough, we all felt that about him.

"If that's true, it's been my way of doing things, all the years of my life," he said. "You make me feel embarrassed."

But he nair looked nor talked like as if he was embarrassed. He sighed.

"I'll miss Scylla, but she's dead," he said. "And the dead don't care."

"I beg to differ with you," I said. "The dead care a heap, or why do they rise up and talk to people, time and time again?"

"I won't offer you an argument there," he drawled. "But now, since all of you have contributed to Scylla's funeral, I'll do something to tell her a long goodbye."

He went to the hollow tree beside the cleft in the top of Cry Mountain, put in his hand, and fetched out that carved ivory horn.

"Let this be like the bugler's call of Taps for her," he said, and set the horn to his mouth and blew.

The peal rang out, clear and long, and I felt the ground tremble and shake under my feet, saw the trees round about as they tossed and pitched. Their leaves snarled in the air, like as if a high wind blew.

Harpe sounded him another blast. Another heave of the ground, and I staggered like as if a blanket was a-being pulled under me. He blew a third time. All the top of Cry Mountain moved and staggered with it, then went quiet again. Harpe slid the horn back into its hollow.

"I should say that we've done our best with these obsequies," he allowed. "Let's go back inside. All my blowing may have stirred up a storm overhead."

XII

On the way back to the headquarters room down in the cave, Harpe began to talk, and sounded right cheerful. It was some way like a military funeral, where they play you to the burying ground with "The Dead March," and then after the firing squad and the bugle, they play you away again with the liveliest march music they know. Harpe looked up through the cloak of tree branches and allowed that if rain came, it was needed right then. Then he said, "Let the dead past bury its dead." I knew the poem he quoted from, but I didn't remind him that another line says, "Trust no future, howair pleasant." For he seemed like as if he trusted the future to be pleasant.

When we got into the main room, he picked up that Judas book bundle from the table. He held it and felt it over and over.

"It's been sewed up in skins and maybe fabrics, layers of them to protect it," he said. "Probably nobody has looked at it for centuries. Now, my friends, it's nearly time for lunch, but you'll excuse me if I eat alone while I work."

To the braided hide rope he went, and tugged. Into his hand came a big sandwich of some sort, and I wondered myself where it came from. He tucked the goatskin bundle under his elbow and pulled the rope again. There, he had a bottle of beer. It looked shiny dark in the bottle.

"You'll excuse me for a time," he said again, and went to the red curtain and in past it and out of our sight.

I followed him in, and went past his shut door to my own room at the end of the hall. I was dirty and sweaty, and I washed my hands and arms and face with lots of soap. Then I came out again into the main room. Alka and Tarrah stood there. They hadn't moved from where they'd stood before.

"I suppose we should eat, too," said Alka tiredly. "Will you bring a tray, Tarrah?"

Both of them went to the rope. Alka tugged on it, put something on Tarrah's tray, tugged again, put on something else, tugged the third time. Tarrah brought the tray to the table, with three big sandwiches. Alka went in past the green curtain and fetched out a half-full bottle with a cork in it. In her other hand she fetched three clay cups.

"This is a good Chablis, a very good Chablis," she said, a-setting the things on the table. "I've enjoyed part of it, and I'd like to share it with you."

We all sat down. I picked up my sandwich and took me a bite of it. It was smoked tongue and lettuce and some sort of dressing on buttered white bread. I took me another mouthful. Likely that was a right good sandwich, but at the time I didn't know. We'd all had us a rough morning to bury Scylla.

Alka poured us out her wine in the clay cups. Tarrah tasted hers. "It's delicious," she said, though she was sad-faced to say it. We went ahead and ate and drank, and we talked.

"Scylla could be so difficult," said Alka. "She could be short and sharp, and she thought that she was better than Tarrah or me, because she was here first. But I did like her. I truly did."

"So did I," Tarrah put in. "Truly. And, John, you said you were sorry for her. You spoke so beautifully beside her grave."

"She hated my guts and the marrow in my bones," I said, as I took the last bite of the sandwich. "I reckon she couldn't help being thataway."

"She resented you," said Tarrah. "Maybe she resented Ruel, too."

"That's probably true," said Alka. "She wanted her own way, and who of us ever gets our own way about anything?"

"She sure enough didn't seem happy to me, not the least bit," I said, a-sipping that good Chablis wine. "I wondered myself if she air was happy in her whole life."

"Now that you speak of it, I don't suppose she was," said Alka, and toyed with her cup. "Oh, Scylla could be harsh. But not truly harsh to Ruel. She was afraid of him. I suppose we all are."

"I'm not," I said, because it was there for me to say. "Hark at me, ladies, I climbed up here to find out why Cry Mountain cried. I'm here now because I reckon a man would be a plumb country fool to go out the gate yonder, amongst what waits for him. Harpe reckons I'll be of some use to him, but me, I don't reckon to be."

"Hush, John," Tarrah begged to me. "He's in there, but he can hear what you say if he wants to."

"Let him hear what I say, I've got to say it."

"What if he should come out here and punish you?" Alka sort of whined, in a way that wondered me if she'd air been punished for something that Harpe didn't like.

"If that should happen," I said to her, "I'd do the best I can. My best might just to turn out to be good enough."

The moment I said that, in came Harpe. He grinned at me, a dry grin. It might could be that he had heard what I'd said, but if so he did naught about it, maybe he would save up for later.

"I've been busy," he said. "Scholar's work is hard. I've been sweating over Judas's writing in there, as I sweated digging the grave for Scylla. Suppose we have a little taste of liquor."

He sat down with us. He'd fetched along his jug of blockade,

and he poured in our cups for us, and poured one for himself. "Cheers," he said, the way I've heard Englishmen say, and drank. I tasted at mine. It was sharp and it bit, but it bit just right. I realized I was glad for the bite, for that burying had made me feel right gloomy.

"I've always felt that making excuses was a confession of guilt," Harpe went on in his smooth, easy way. "And maybe I do feel something of guilt about how I behaved at the funeral we gave Scylla. But remember, her death was her own idea. She used a very special poison she stole from me, and she died with a curse on her lips. Yet, when John spoke his words of peace over her, I found myself hoping that she'd have peace. I even felt peace within myself, and it was a happy feeling. I've thought it over, and I say again, let the dead past bury its dead. What do you say to that?"

None of us said aught. We only just looked at him.

"Silence gives consent, Oliver Goldsmith tells us," he said at last. "I hoped for that, looked for it. I begged the question, so to speak, but I wasn't really abject in my begging. Let's change the subject."

He drank again, a good pull at his cup.

"The Gospel According to Judas is in Greek," he said then. "Not very good Greek, I'm afraid—Judas must have had a hit-or-miss education. But from the very first sentence, it's an arresting document, a priceless one."

"What does it say?" I inquired him, but he waved that away.

"I'd hesitate to tell anyone that," he allowed. "But, as I say, the Greek is slipshod. We must remember that Judas wrote it in a hurry, in a matter of hours, and then went and hanged himself because things had gone wrong for him. And that old, old parchment is faded and cracked and brittle. I'm steaming it slightly—I have a Bunsen burner in my room, to heat water for

the steam. And I can use a preservative I have here somewhere."

He knocked back the rest of his drink and got up and went to his shelves. For the first time I saw that there was a drawer at the bottom. He pulled that open and pawed round in it and fetched out a little corked-up bottle.

"This is what I need," he said, and off he went back of behind the red curtain again. He went in a quick hurry, like somebody who's got behind in the work he must do. Alka and Tarrah both looked on me. Alka's eyes behind her glasses were puzzled. Tarrah looked more or less scared.

"I never knew him so busy before," said Alka, deep and soft within herself. "He's finding out something in there."

"Did he air tell you ladies about the Gospel According to Judas?" I asked of them.

"I heard him mention it once or twice, but that's all," said Tarrah. "Mentioned it once or twice before you came. He has a great gift of silence when he wants to use it. That's when he's at his most frightening."

"I take it he frightens the both of you," I said. "Yet you let him fetch you here."

"I was in trouble, up there when I was in the library," said Alka. "The law was beginning to notice me. I was glad to get away at the time."

"So was I in trouble where I was," Tarrah put in. "Big trouble. People wanted to kill me. If Ruel Harpe hadn't come when he did, I wouldn't have lived to tell the tale."

"He brought you here to be his helpers," I summed it up for them. "Was that his only reason?"

Alka smiled, but it was a smile as tight as a guitar string. "What you mean is, did he want us for love, for sex," she said. "No, John. He found that when he went out into the world. I

doubt if I ever expected it, but there was none. Maybe Scylla expected it. Maybe that drove her to killing herself."

"Love," Tarrah spoke the word out. "I don't think I ever expected it from him, either. John, I can speak honestly to you. When you came here, I thought you'd been brought for me. It hasn't been like that, though."

"No, ma'am," I agreed her, without a-seeing air point in a-telling her why I'd been able to back away from her.

She leant toward me, her hands clasped together on the table. "I don't hold that against you, John," she said. "I'm not going to hate you, and I promise I won't kill myself to make you sorry."

"I do purely hope not," I said, and meant it.

"Why should Ruel Harpe need either of us women?" said Alka. "He can go to any country on earth whenever he chooses, take whatever woman pleases him. He roams the world, John, he's been in far places."

"Well," I said, "so have I. That was on a sort of government-sponsored tour—the Army. I've been in some far places myself."

"What was it like?" Tarrah asked me.

"It happened to be a war," I replied. "A thousand fell at my side, and ten thousand at my right hand, but it didn't come nigh me. Somebody or other said one time, war is expensive and in bad taste. I'll just add onto that, war is terrible. When Sherman said war was hell, he didn't know enough swear words."

"Were you afraid in the war?" Tarrah wanted to know. "I can't imagine you being afraid."

"Well then, just stretch your imagination, Tarrah," I told her. "Sure enough I was afraid. If a man in a war isn't afraid, he doesn't have much sense. I was afraid a big sight of times."

"What about those times?" she kept after me. "The times you were afraid?"

"In those times, I just kept on a-fighting, though I well knew how crazy-headed war is. I fought on. Afraid or not, a man's got to be a man."

They were both quiet to listen, a couple or three breaths of time, and both of them looked on me with their wide eyes.

"And as for Ruel Harpe," I went ahead, "there's not much of a future in a-being afraid of him. I take it that you ladies fear him, but I don't and I won't."

"Not so loud, John, not so loud," Alka begged to me. "If he should hear—"

"I say nair word I wouldn't say to his face," I interrupted her, not at all politely. "But this time, I do hope that he and I understand one another. He knows by now that I don't fear him, and he knows that I'm not without help. I have two–three powers of my own."

"Oh yes," breathed Tarrah. "That's true. You've fought other fights in your time, and won, and that gives you strength."

"And method," said Alka.

"So I've heard tell. I go ahead in the faith that it's true."

"You're right that Ruel recognizes this in you," said Alka, and took a taste from her cup. "He wants to persuade you, not destroy you. He counts on you as an ally."

Tarrah shuddered her shoulders at that, and I looked at her. "Now I know for sure you don't love him," I said.

"No, it's not love," she said back. "It's fear, John, what you've been talking about. Fear is stronger than love. He told us both that, Alka and me both, when he brought us here."

"There might could be a lot in what he said about that," I said, "but I don't know for sure, I just don't know. I've seen

love come in stronger than fear in my time. Likely it depends on who loves and who fears."

"That sounds like the truth," whispered Tarrah. Her chair was close to mine, but she didn't nudge me with her foot or her knee. "A real human being can afford to love deeply, but mustn't fear deeply," she said.

"Or must whip fear somehow," I said. "Must whip fear right down to its socks." I thought that over. "We have nothing to fear but fear itself," I said then.

"Roosevelt said the same thing," said Tarrah. "Franklin D. Roosevelt."

"And Henry David Thoreau said something like it, before Roosevelt," said Alka.

"Whoever said it was right," spoke Harpe, a-coming in past the red curtain. "I'm glad you're all here, because reading that villainous Greek writing of Judas can make a man lonely."

He sat down with us, picked up the jug, and poured himself another of his shots of blockade.

"What does Judas say?" I asked as I'd asked before, but Harpe shook his head to me.

"That's something I can't impart just yet, but he says terrifying and wonderful things, in what I take to be only a preface to what follows," Harpe replied me. He studied me. "John, you're sullen, you're surly. Whatever you seem to hold against me, you shouldn't. You have no reason. So why not be happy?"

"Why must I be happy?" I returned to him. "That old man Yakouba trusted me, and you made me thieve from him."

"I did nothing of the kind," he smiled. "Yakouba is one of the wise men of the desert people, and he knew that he couldn't quite trust me. But when he saw you, he felt that you were trustworthy, and you were—you are. It was I who did the thieving, if you insist on calling it that. I transported you bodily

across the sand and the sea back to Cry Mountain, complete with the book."

"Which you should ought to give back to that poor old man."

"Never that," Harpe said. "What would he ever do with it except hide it? It's in the proper hands now, and in those hands it will do wonders. So let's be friends, John. Take a drink with me."

"No, I thank you," I said.

He narrowed his eyes. "That might be an insult, but I won't accept it as such. You're too valuable to me and I'm too valuable to you, whether you admit it or not. A highly interesting future is coming to us both, an amazing one."

"There may be a lot in what you say," I said.

"Surly again," he crooned at me. "But I daresay I know of something that will cheer you up." He finished his drink. "Now, back to work. Wish me luck."

"Luck," said Alka, and she was the only one of us who spoke. Nor did she say "Good luck." Just "Luck."

"Thank you, my dear."

He tramped away to the red curtain and past it.

"He always thanks you," said Alka. "He's good at thanking. He has a gentleman's manners."

"Yes, he has," I agreed her. "You can't take that away from him."

"You can't take anything away from him," said Tarrah, flat in her voice, and got up. She headed for the tunnel to the outside. She went fast, almost she ran. Her hair fluttered.

"Where's she a-going?" I wondered Alka.

"Why don't you go and find out?"

"Sure enough," I said. "I'll just do that thing. It feels kind of indoorsy in here just now."

For the air did feel close. Maybe Harpe did that to it, a-studying so hard. I got up and followed Tarrah out of there.

I came into the open amongst the trees, those big, quiet trees with their leafy branches that shaded all the top of Cry Mountain from heaven's sight. I looked on the stockade. There was a move out there, amongst more secret trees. It was something dark and tall itself, something a man wouldn't much care to study. I looked another way, and there I saw Tarrah over toward the cleft in Cry Mountain's rock. She knelt down there, her knee and thighs a-showing from under her short skirt. I made out that she was by Scylla's grave.

I ambled over there to her. She was a-putting flowers on the fresh dark earth we'd dug up and then shoveled back in. The flowers were broad white ones, sort of like dogwood flowers, but they weren't—they didn't make a cross shape, didn't have that little dark bunch like nails you see on dogwood. And their stems looked like vine stems, not like twigs off a tree. I didn't know air such a flower, nowhere in the mountains. Maybe it was something that just only grew up there.

Tarrah was a-laying out a pattern of them, like a five-pointed star. She looked up at me from where she knelt.

"I thought I'd do this for Scylla," she said.

"You mourn for her," I guessed. "Maybe she was your friend, after all."

She got to her feet, and slowly shook her head no.

"Scylla wasn't my friend," she said. "She wasn't anybody's friend—didn't know how to be—not even how to be her own friend. She was raised a witch up north, the way I was out in the West, but it must have been a harder raising than mine. I doubt if there was much love in her witch society. At least, she didn't show any."

"How did she truly feel about Harpe?" I inquired her.

"Well," said Tarrah, "she'd snap at him, almost rebel against

him. But she was afraid of him, and showed it. When she died, she didn't curse him, she cursed you."

"It doesn't seem like to me that her curse hurt me," I said.

"You're able to fend it off," said Tarrah. "John, that was an awful curse—frightening. I don't dare repeat one word of it to you. But, as I say, she was afraid of Ruel Harpe. Like all of us. We're all afraid of him."

"Not me, I'm not," I felt I had to say. "And well he knows it by now. He shows that he knows it, he'll make a joke about it now and again."

She looked hard at me. I saw her eyes shift in her head as they looked at one of my eyes, then the other. Then she turned her face down to study Scylla's grave.

"You prayed peace for her," she said. "I hope it works."

I walked off where the stockade ran, and she came with me. Out there amongst the treetops, we heard the humming song of that swarm of big bees. On the ground, across the crumpled root of a tree, something black and fuzzy seemed to slip, like the biggest caterpillar you air saw in your dreams. The Flat, that was. I'd seen one one time, on Yandro Mountain. Up high somewhere, I heard something I couldn't make out to see. It went *gong-gong, gong-gong.* That had to be a Toller, what you hear tell is the biggest thing that flies; though I don't know what it looks like exactly. And big and little shadows deep in amongst the trunks and brush, all a-looking where I stood almost against the weathered poles of Harpe's stockade. You could look right, you could look left, you could look back yonder, and things skulked in the trees, behind the trunks, and some up in the branches. They seemed like as if they slipped out of sight just before you had a clear look. Inside there, we were hemmed in with them, besieged by them; Harpe's sentinels that he'd brought there by magic, to guard his fortress.

"It's like being in jail here," said Tarrah at my side. "Like

being held prisoner. Sometimes I feel so cramped inside these walls. Ruel Harpe doesn't care—he goes where he pleases, anywhere in the world—but he never lets us go. Perhaps he's afraid that we'd run away from him."

"Scylla sort of hinted something like that," I recollected.

"It can get tiresome," Tarrah sort of muttered.

"Yes," I agreed her, and headed back to those caves where we lived. She came along behind me, and inside, and into the big main room with its table and chairs, with the window to see away from Cry Mountain, the braided rope in the corner, the curtains over the doors to the passages. Alka sat where we'd left her, a-gazing at that clouded window glass across the room.

"I've been trying something," she said as we came to the table. "I tried to make a picture come from the outside, the way Ruel can. But nothing happens for me."

"When he does that, he holds onto that amulet he wears," said Tarrah. "That must help to make his window work."

"To make all his enterprises work," Alka added on. "Now he's going to make more tremendous things—unthinkable things—work with that book by Judas he's translating."

"How right you are, Alka," said Harpe cheerfully as he came in. "But you don't seem completely happy to say it. Aren't you happy, Alka? Aren't you, Tarrah?"

"No, I'm unhappy," Tarrah dared to say to him. "Scylla's death bothers me."

"How about you, John?" asked Harpe, a-turning his eyes on me. "You needn't bother to answer that, I know you're not happy."

"Can you give me air good reason why I should be?" I said back to him.

"You feel lonesome here," he said, a-spreading out that grin of his. "That isn't complimentary, you know. Here you have me to learn from, you have Alka to question, and you have

Tarrah." He beamed toward her. "And Tarrah truly likes you. She's such a pretty girl, I think. Isn't she pretty enough for your discriminating taste?"

Tarrah turned her face away, a-blushing. Nobody could expect her to relish that teasy sneering.

"That's because you have another girl on your mind," Harpe went ahead. "Here, suppose I show you."

His hand went to the T-thing on the chain. He muttered the words I'd learned, the words Alka had tried to use for the window:

"Fetegan . . . Gaghagan . . . Beigan . . . Deigan . . . Usagan . . ."

And the pane in the window lighted up and the foggy darkness cleared away from it. We saw Mr. Larrowby's store, with customers in the place, and behind the counter pretty Myrrh Larrowby, a-making change for somebody.

"So lovely, isn't she?" said Harpe. "I think I see your eyes light up, John. Isn't she just the sort of companion you need in this lonesomeness of yours?"

He made quick steps across the floor, and tugged at the rope in the corner.

I heard a sort of little shriek.

And there in the corner with Harpe stood Myrrh Larrowby.

XIII

Myrrh Larrowby just stood and stared. Her blue eyes looked as big as Easter eggs. Her yellow hair fluffed air whichaway. She wore a white cotton dress with red and blue flowers on it, and on her feet blue-and-white tennis shoes. She drew herself up. She had a fine-shaped body. And she stared.

"Here's my present to you, John," said Harpe, a-smiling and a-smiling.

"Present?" I repeated him. "What you a-talking about?"

Myrrh found her voice. "What you a-talking about?" she said after me, she said high and shaky with fear. "What is this place? How did I get here—what am I doing here?"

"I daresay you'll find much to do here, my dear child," Harpe smiled to her. "I brought you here in an interesting way —call it magical teleportation. I brought you because John wants you."

"John!" she cried to me. She didn't understand, and how could she?

"Let me tell you quick, Myrrh, I hadn't air thing to do with it," I said.

Her eyes bugged at me. Her shoulders and knees trembled and shook. Her red mouth sort of chittered. She was bad scared, gentlemen, and that was a natural fact. Her scare sort of filled the room.

"Please let me explain, my dear young lady," Harpe was a-purring to her. "I brought you here because John so admires

you, and certainly you must admire him. I'd judge that any normal woman would find him admirable."

"What is this place?" she stammered out again.

"This place?" Harpe said after her. "Why, it's the top of Cry Mountain."

"I won't stay here!"

With that, she fairly flew across the floor to where the tunnel was. She ran into that. I saw her blue-and-white shoes twinkle as she ran.

"You'd better follow her, John," said Harpe, calm as calm. "Follow her and explain things."

I headed after her, and out into the open.

There she was, amongst the trees, a-running here and yonder. She must have made out where the gate was, she headed thataway. She ran fast, but I ran faster and caught her up just as she started to fumble at the catch. I grabbed her shoulder and pulled her back away.

She looked at me, still bug-eyed. She panted for breath. "Let me go," she managed to say. "I want to get out of here, I want to go home—"

"You can't go out that gate," I warned her. "Look out there."

For outside the stockade, things had gathered. In amongst the trees loomed up something tall and sooty-dark and shagged with hair, it had to be the Bigfoot. The Flat squirmed along betwixt tree roots. Overhead flew the Toller, a-saying its *gong-gong*. And the bees swarmed there, a whole fluttering nation of them, a-buzzing and big and deadly.

"One step outside that gate," I said, "and you'd be a goner."

She stood and looked. "I'd rather be dead than shut up here."

"You don't know the kind of death you'd have, Miss Myrrh.

Come on, get back away from the gate, and let me tell you things."

She came along with me, quiet but not yet a-trusting me. I took her to where we could stand out of sight of all the things had come to the gate, and I narrated what I'd been through.

I told of how I'd somehow got myself set on a-finding Cry Mountain and a-going up it. She'd heard some talk about that, for the preacher-man and the doctor had mentioned it. And I said how Ruel Harpe had let me in at his gate, and had shut the gate on what waited outside it, and how he could do all sorts and kinds of magic, and how he figured on a-doing things that would pure down change this world. I named Alka and Tarrah to her, how they were Harpe's helpers, and told her about Scylla a-poisoning herself. How Harpe and the others got whatair they wished for just by a-tugging on a rope, and how Harpe had tugged that rope to fetch Myrrh to us.

"He didn't bring you with the rope?" she asked.

"No," I said. "He somehow knew I was a-making the climb and let me do it. He let Zeb Plattenburg come part way."

"Part way?"

"Then he had him killed. If you'd looked up above the gate, you'd have seen Zeb Plattenburg's skull."

She shivered. I went ahead about Harpe's window that showed far places of far lands, and about how Harpe had learned from magic books how to travel to what land he wished. He was a master of magic. She harked at me all through.

"Zeb Plattenburg," she said then. "I knew him, back when I was a little girl." She said it like as if somehow that would fetch Zeb back to life.

"He's gone now," I said.

"But I want to get out of here, John."

"So do I," I said. "I'm a-studying on how to manage that. It'll take a right considerable of study."

She stared off at the stockade. "That man—Harpe, you name him. He thinks that you and I are to love one another." Her voice sort of choked. "But—do you know who it is I love?"

"I can make a guess," I said, a-trying to help her get calm. "I'd say, Tombs McDonald."

Her cheeks that had been pale, they reddened in a blush. I waited a second. Then: "I do know for sure that Tombs loves you."

"Tombs? But he's nair said a word of such a thing, not one word."

"He said it right plain and honest to me," I said. "Said it out loud, said it strong. Maybe he's scared to speak up to you, but he's not scared to know he loves you and tell it to somebody he counts on to be his friend."

"Tombs!" she cried out again. "I wish I was with him right now."

"You'll be with him later," I promised. "I'll swear to that, my kiss-the-Bible oath. Look, Myrrh, whatair place you get into, you can some way get out again. We'll do it. But right now, let's go back to where the others are."

She didn't like those others, nair a one of them, said she didn't trust them. But she did come along back with me, and through the tunnel and into that main room.

They all of them sat there, Harpe and Alka and Tarrah. Myrrh stopped in the middle of the floor to look at them. Tarrah got up from her chair and came to us.

"Your name's Myrrh," said Tarrah, a-taking her by the hand. "That's such a pretty name, I think. If you're going to be with us—"

"I won't," Myrrh said at that.

"If you're going to be with us," said Tarrah again, "start

counting on me as your friend. We'll have some good times together."

"Count me a friend, too," said Alka from where she sat, and Harpe grinned all across his face.

"Come sit down, Myrrh," he invited, and she came to the table and so did I, and we both took seats. "John, I hope that you were able to convince her of the sensible viewpoint."

"I won't stay here," said Myrrh again.

"My dear Myrrh, I venture to assure you of the contrary," said Harpe in his silkiest way. "You are going to stay here, and, what's more, you are going to like it here. John will help you to like it. You see that he's a tall, fine man, not bad-looking, and he can play the guitar and sing fit for royalty to hear. And he loves you—"

"Just hold on there a damned second," I cut in. "I nair said I loved Myrrh."

She looked on me like as if she thanked me for that. And Harpe, for once, had a puzzled face on him.

"Why," he crooned, like as if he was disappointed in me, "you said, and said again, that Myrrh was a beauty to delight the world."

"I said it, that she was beautiful," I came back at him, "and I'll keep a-saying it. But Myrrh is in love with another. He's a choice friend of mine, he more or less saved my life a few days back. Even if I thought I wanted Myrrh, I'd nair get betwixt her and the man she loves and wants with all her heart."

Again she gave me a grateful look for my words, she even smiled just a least trifle. "Harpe," I said, "you made a mistake."

He hiked up his brows and muttered a laugh.

"I'm not a man who makes mistakes," he said.

"You've made one this time," I said.

"That's what you say now, John, but love will come to you," he promised me, and he talked like as if things always came

when he said they would. "Myrrh—yes, what a beautiful name, as beautiful as the girl who bears it. John will come to realize that he prefers Myrrh to either gold or frankincense. As for you, Myrrh, you'll find that a change of mind is almost always a change for the better."

A-hearing that, I wondered myself if he'd air changed his mind about aught. He got up from his chair, and smoothed his white bush jacket.

"This has been a most entertaining discussion," he said, "but I'm driven back to my work. It may be the most important work of my whole career. All of you will come to share in what I do—profit by it. Now, please excuse me."

He was off to the red curtain, past it and behind it. We watched him go, then we looked back on one another.

"What important work did he mean?" inquired Myrrh.

"He's translating the Gospel According to Judas," said Alka.

"Judas?" Myrrh repeated her. "Did Judas write a book?"

It was my turn to talk. I told Myrrh about what Judas was thought to think he could do for power all over this earth, and how he'd written it down before he went out and hung himself. I told her how Harpe had tricked me into a-helping thieve the book from poor old trustful Yakouba far off away in the African desert. And how Harpe reckoned that the Judas book, along with other writings he already had, would turn the world round into something he figured he wanted and could command.

"Terrible," said Myrrh. "Terrible. Can't somebody stop him?"

"Nobody that I know of," said Tarrah. "But let's change the subject. We want to be your friends, Myrrh."

"You're not my friends," Myrrh said.

"But we want to be," Tarrah near about begged her. "Talk to us, at least. Tell us what you do."

That softened Myrrh down a tad. At least she did tell about

herself, about how she lived in Larrowby, how she helped her daddy in his store there. Alka listened and asked some questions. Tarrah seemed like she pure down loved to hear about Larrowby and the store.

"You make it sound nice, Myrrh," she said. "Your job sounds like a good one—interesting. You have people to talk to all day long in that store. I'll bet that nice men come around to shop with you, don't they?"

"Well, yes," Myrrh replied her. "And the nicest is Tombs McDonald." It was a friendly thing for her to name him to Tarrah.

I joined in and told them the tale of Tombs's life, how he'd been found on top of a tombstone and got his name from that. I told how he'd gladly helped me and tended me when I was bad off and needed help the worst way, and how in the days we'd been together we'd come to count on one another as friends.

"That's good to hear," said Alka when I'd done. "Count on us as your friends, Myrrh."

"What kind of friends could you be?" Myrrh inquired her, but not so fierce about it now.

They told her their own life stories as I've already told you all, Alka first and Tarrah second. They went on to talk about Ruel Harpe and what he could do air time he wanted, and pointed out his window that could show you what he might choose to show you. Myrrh looked toward that window, and it was clouded and gloomy as a stormy day.

"I don't see aught in it," she said.

"I tried to see in it a while ago," said Alka. "But I don't really know the right words."

"I know the right words," I said. "I've heard Harpe say them time after time, and I've got them in my mind."

Alka looked on me, with hope in her eyes behind her glasses. "Could you do that, John? Show us something?"

"Show us the store Myrrh works in," said Tarrah.

"I'll see what I can do," I agreed them. "Myrrh, keep that store in your mind while I try."

They all turned their heads to look on the window. I said what I'd learnt from Harpe:

"Fetegan . . . Gaghagan . . . Beigan . . . Deigan . . . Usagan . . ."

We kept a-looking, all of us, but naught happened. There was just a gloomy foggy window in the wall yonder.

"I didn't make it work," I said, though I didn't need to say that.

"He uses that amulet of his," said Alka. "He always holds it when he brings a scene into that window for us."

"He uses his amulet for everything," Tarrah added on. "Uses it in all he does."

"Amulet?" said Myrrh.

"That thing he wears on a chain around his neck," said Alka. "It looks like a T."

"Is it magic?" Myrrh asked. "Where did it come from?"

"Yes," said Alka, "it's magic—strong magic. Where it first came from he never told me, but once it belonged to Ruel Harpe's ancestor, Micajah—Big Harpe, the outlaw. He had a woman who kept the thing when Big Harpe died, and passed it on to their son, and it came down to present times as an heirloom." A-thinking about that, she bit her lip. "A black arts heirloom."

"Whatair that thing may be," said Myrrh, "he won't be able to use it to make me love where he wants me to love." She looked at me, blue-eyed. "John," she said, "heaps of women could love you. You're such a good man."

"Yes," Tarrah said, not a-speaking to us, maybe just only to herself.

"You know my feelings about Tombs," Myrrh went on. "You tell me that's the way he feels about me."

"I've sworn to you that you and Tombs will meet again," I reminded her.

"And if you swear it, I feel purely certain that it will happen," she said.

Just then, in came Harpe to sit down at the table with us. He beamed all round, he looked to be in a good humor.

"I've puzzled out a highly troublesome passage in Judas, but it proves to be invaluable in the structure of his plan for the world," he said. "Even though the world Judas knew was only the world of the Roman Empire, plainly he deduced—he comprehended—other lands and other cultures. Well, it was a tiring task. I felt like having a breather." He turned his smile on Myrrh. "You seem to have made friends with Alka and Tarrah, somewhat."

"We think she's lovely," said Alka.

"Wonderful," said Tarrah. "So good to talk to."

"I see," Harpe nodded. "And how about you, John? Is Myrrh lovely? Wonderful?"

"She's both those things," I replied him, "but I tell you again, you've gone about this thing all wrong. Myrrh loves another man, with all her heart."

"Indeed?" he said. "Who might that be?"

"Nair you mind who, I don't want you a-messing him up, too."

He frowned then, a deep line betwixt his brows. "You don't seem to realize that what I say goes on Cry Mountain."

"You're dead right about that," I said. "I sure enough don't realize that, I don't realize it a hooter."

"You'll just have to be taken in hand," he said to me. "You'll

have to be taught things, shown true values. But now," and he stretched out his thick arms, "time's gone along until we ought to have some supper. Would you like to choose our supper, Alka?"

Alka went to the rope and pulled, and brought us back a tray with saucers and spoons on it, and gave them round. "Fruit soup" she called what was in the saucers.

I tucked into mine, and I relished it. It wasn't my notion of soup, it was cold and it was made of cherries with the seeds out. I figured there was cinnamon in it, and the juice of lemons.

"This is delicious," said Harpe, spoon in hand. "You aren't eating yours, Myrrh."

"I won't eat aught here," she half-snapped at him.

"Then you're missing a treat," Harpe said. "Look, John's eating his. Do you like it, John?"

"Yes," I replied him. "I like it a right much."

"John's full of ungrateful, rebellious feelings toward me, but he doesn't refuse to eat," said Harpe to Myrrh, who said nair a word back.

After the fruit soup, Alka went back to the rope and fetched us steaks. They were big steaks, about the size of a shoe sole, but another sight better eating. Mine was how I liked it, steamy brown outside and rare red inside. It was so thick I near about had to stand up to cut it, but it was so tender it next to melted in my mouth. I ate all of mine, and Harpe finished his, and Alka and Tarrah did away with the most part of theirs. We had glasses of red wine, bright as rubies, along with the food. Myrrh just sat and looked at her plate, and didn't touch it or either the wine.

Meanwhile, Harpe talked to us. He was a right good talker. He said that he was near about done with writing out the English of that Judas book, and that it showed how to fix this world over into what he thought would be a better world.

"Myrrh, you and John are going to help make a golden age for us," he sort of lectured. "People can learn from you the proper values of life, the things they've forgotten that make life good."

"Whatair you want, I'll not help you do it," she told him back. She looked round at us as we finished our steaks. "I won't eat this food or drink this wine; but could I ask for a glass of water?"

Tarrah jumped up, ran off somewhere, and fetched her back what she wanted. The water was in a pretty silver cup. Harpe watched Myrrh as she drank.

"That's a step in the right direction," he said when she'd emptied the cup. "Tomorrow, at breakfast time, you may feel more like eating. But right now, back to my work. You may stay here, and I'll bring some entertainment for you."

He looked toward the window and grabbed hold of his T-amulet and spoke his string of words. The window cleared, and voices sounded and figures moved in it.

"I tapped into a theater, with a film you may enjoy," he said, and went off away to where he was a-working.

We others sat and watched the show he'd fetched into the window. There were men in bright armor, and horses, and trumpet music a-blowing, and a lady with long black hair and pretty white shoulders that rose bare above her dress. The show was a-telling how one or other of two men in armor would have that lady. We watched, for it had something a-doing all the time. The two men fought with long shiny swords and at last one killed the other, and the bare-shouldered lady came and kissed the winner. I watched it through, and Tarrah watched it through, and Myrrh didn't seem to mind a-watching. Alka sniffed and said it was unconvincing.

Then in came Harpe again. He said some words that stopped the show in the window. His jug of blockade was on the table,

and he poured himself a slug and drank it. He stood over us where we sat there. I thought he looked tired round his eyes.

"I'm almost done with what has turned out to be a formidable task," he said. "I may be within short minutes of finishing the translation. Then, everyone everywhere can look for masterpieces of wonder."

He fixed his eyes on me, and they burnt like torches of lightwood. "You and I will get up early tomorrow, John. I want to talk to you alone before breakfast. I have a few home truths to say to you. So why don't we all turn in fairly early?"

It was like a father a-giving orders for his children to go to bed. Nobody replied him so much as a word. I got up and went past the curtain and down the hallway to my room at the end. I washed my face and lay down on the bed without so much as a-taking off boots.

Truths to tell me, Harpe had said. Home truths—more likely a pack of damned lies, meant to scare me at last, into a-doing whatair he wanted from me. That's what I might could expect. And it would be time for me to tell him a truth myself, make it plain I wasn't to be ruled by his magic.

I thought my best of how to get that done, and finally I did come up with an idea of what I could possibly say and do.

But I'd better have me some rest before morning, and I relaxed my bones all over and finally I made myself go to sleep.

XIV

I waked myself in what must be about the dawn of the day, and got up and headed out along the hallway to the main room.

Harpe was there at the table, all alone. He wore the hunting shirt with the fringes and beads, the one he'd worn when first we'd met at his gate. He had his blockade jug and his clay cup, and likewise a china coffeepot and two china cups. He looked up and nodded me, but he didn't smile. He looked all business.

In front of him on the table, as I came to it, was a stack of written paper pages, and he had him a ballpoint pen in his hand to finish a-writing on one last page. Also spread out there was a bunch of crackly, crumbly strips of what looked like dried-out tanned skin, aged to a brown color. On the skins showed faint letters that I took to be Greek.

"Have a cup of coffee before we talk, John," he said, a-pouring it out for me. "Will you have a bit of whiskey in it? Whiskey and coffee go good together."

"No, I thank you," I said. "Give me just the naked black coffee."

I drank my cupful, and he drank his. The coffee was hot and strong. We finished and Harpe got up.

"Will you step outside with me, where we can be private?" he asked.

"Aren't you a-going to put your writings away first?"

"No, just leave it here." He flung his pen down on the pa-

pers. "I won't have to warn our ladies not to touch it. None of them would dare do that. Come on."

We went out together. It was airish in the open, a mite chilly, with the sun just come up to the west and a-trickling its rays to us, but fog hung here and yonder amongst the trees, inside the stockade and out. Harpe led me off, toward the gash in Cry Mountain, toward the grave where we'd put Scylla away. He stopped next the grave and wheeled round to face me. His eyes were glittery.

"I don't suppose you want to die, John," he said, a-drawing it out so slow and so cold.

"Why, no," I replied, "not particularly. Why? Did you fetch me out here to kill me?"

"To talk to you," he said. "To talk sense to you. I'll start by saying that there are no impossibilities if you know what to do to make them possible. Then the possibilities can become realities."

"I don't know what you're a-driving at," I confessed to him.

"While I waited for you this morning, I finished with my translation of the Judas Gospel," he said. "It's an amazing fabric of what to do in the world. It fills in some things only hinted in *The Book of Abramelin* and other works I've studied. I propose to put it in operation this very day."

A-standing with him, I watched him close as I could, for I didn't know what he might could start with me. "You talked that notion to me before this," I said. "You've been a-fixing to do something to the whole world. Do away with millions of folks you decide you don't like. And then be on the top throne of all, with what folks are left a-looking up to you, folks a-doing honor to the name of Ruel Harpe."

"Maybe I'll change my name," and his voice went sort of dreamy. "Maybe they can call me Pachacuti."

"Call you what?"

"Pachacuti," he repeated it. "That's the title they gave the Inca Yupanqui, long ago in Peru before the Spaniards came. It means 'he who changes the world.'" Dreamy again. "I'll change the world."

"And where do you fit me in?" I asked him.

"I'll fit you in just as I've told you. After great hosts of unprofitable people are swept away, those who remain must be taught a new way of life that is really old, forgotten. They'll have to be taught how to build sensible houses, raise their food sensibly, gain a sensible outlook. That's where you come in. You're a natural man, the most natural man I've ever known. And Myrrh is a natural woman, and with her as your helpmeet —oh, you'll take her as a helpmeet—the two of you can teach people, and they can teach others—"

"Yes, yes," I broke in on him. "You've talked this to me before. And you think I've got to do your bidding. But I don't think air such a thing." I heard my voice rise. "You can just count me out."

He walked close at me, so close I could smell the liquor on his breath. "Listen—" he started to say.

"You're smart," I said, a-cutting him off again. "But no way as smart as you think you are. You misjudged Myrrh Larrowby, look how bad you misjudged her. Just because you tell her to love me isn't enough. You misjudged her."

"And I fear I misjudged you, too," he said, with the icy chill back in his voice. "I took you for a sensible, reasonable man."

"Thanks for that compliment," I said.

"A sensible, reasonable man," he repeated himself. "A man who could have big, rich rewards shown to him and who could accept them. This world will change, this whole world. You can go along with it and thrive with it, or you can perish with the perishing."

"I already told you, count me out."

He shoved his face almost against mine. He scowled so deep, the lines in his face looked to be cut with plowshares. His eyes shone on me like coals of fire. His mustache bristled like a bobcat's.

"You'd better do what I tell you if you want to stay alive another minute," he said, from in betwixt his gritted teeth. "I want your help, but I can do without it if I have to. I could just wish it, and you'd fall dead at my feet."

His scowly face was within inches. I saw his amulet a-swinging inside his collar. *He uses his amulet for airthing,* Tarrah had said.

That's when I did what I'd figured the night before I'd have to do.

I shot out my right hand and grabbed the amulet where it showed. With one hard yank I broke its chain, and quick I danced away from him backward, maybe a good half dozen steps clear of him. As I moved, I shoved the thing down deep into the hip pocket of my jeans.

"Now what?" I inquired him.

His mad-looking face had gone blank. His eyes flickered back and forth in it.

"You give me that back," he snarled, and ran at me, but I dodged to the side, clear of him again. I grinned.

"I'll do no such a thing," I told him. "That's your power. I've seen it be your power. What are you without it?"

"Give it back," he said again, and charged. I slipped away from him as before.

"Now it's just you and me," I said, and kept a-grinning him. "Which of us do you reckon is best?"

He hunched his shoulders up to his ears. It made him look thicker and tougher than he'd looked already.

"I'm the best," he said. "Of course."

He reached his right hand under the tail of his fringed shirt.

He brought it out with a big knife. It looked to be more than a foot long, wide across and straight, made of dull-shiny dark steel. I saw that its both edges were whetted sharp.

"I'm through with you, John," he growled.

"Not yet, you're not through with me," I said, from where I stood away from him. I moved my feet and jiggled my knees, to make sure I was loose and ready for a quick move.

"Give me back that amulet or I'll kill you," he mouthed out.

"Come try it on," I invited, a-taking big deep breaths.

He moved in on me, a-walking slow and heavy this time. He held that big, mean-looking knife out at me, a-jiggling its point. Gentlemen, he looked like an advance agent for Judgment Day, with his knife and his face with its crumpled scowl and all his teeth a-shining out. His arms looked thick with muscle, his legs were like chunks of a tree. But he came at me sort of flat-footed, and I saw that his toes pointed out, like a-walking in three directions at once. He was big and strong and murder bent, but I didn't reckon he was in air sort of good shape, not as good as I was at least.

I quartered right and left so he'd have his troubles if he made another running charge.

"You haven't got a chance, John," he said, and that long steel blade flipped up and down like a pump handle in a wind-storm. "Recognize that and say you surrender, and we'll go back together and have a hearty breakfast."

"There's no such a thing as no chance," I told him back, "and I do have this."

I scooped out my pocket knife and yanked it open with a snap that sounded like a pistol a-being cocked. "You a-going to try some action?" I dared him. "Or will you just stand there and try to talk me to death?"

He ran dead at me, a-darting out his point as swift as the head of a snake. He ran heavy but he ran fast, his feet a-hitting

flat on the ground like a bear up on its hind legs, and he was right on me before I could dodge. I flung up my own knife and beat his blade aside, but his point snagged the back of my hand. We were almost up against one another for a second, and with my free fist, my left, I drove a good belt into his thick belly. I heard him grunt with it, and again we both fell back, half a dozen steps apart from one another again. Harpe's mustache twitched with his grin.

"First blood," he said, happy over it, but a-panting a little to say it.

I replied him nair a word, and I sidled to his left, away from a straight stab from his big weapon. He closed in again, slower this time, always a-flicking his point up and down, and that tongue of steel looked as sharp as a razor.

"I'll cut you open," he sort of gurgled, but I saved my own breath. He was big, he had muscle on his bones, but he wasn't in the best of shape. He hadn't roamed and climbed and exercised the way I had, and I'd seen how much liquor he drank, day in and day out. He was a-getting winded some.

But in on me he came again, and I slipped aside and inside from his thrust, and our bodies pure down slammed against one another. I dropped my knife and shot him another in his guts, then two quick half-arm punches to his face, and again down below. He staggered, and he dropped that great big old hog-sticking knife, and as it hit the ground I gave it a kick away from us into some bushes.

What he called me then I won't repeat in this polite company. He went a-scrambling off after his weapon, but I was right there after him. I came up alongside and landed him a set of knuckles right under his ear. He staggered again, but stayed on his feet. He turned and grabbed for me with both hands.

If air he should get those two big paws on me, he'd sure enough have him an advantage. I forked my own hands on his

both biceps and shoved him hard away from air sort of grapple. Nair fight a man his way, says the wise old advice; if he boxes you, wrestle him—if he wrestles you, box him. So, as I flung him clear, I sent my left into the middle of his red-flushed face, and out of his nose popped blood that was redder still. He stood a moment and mopped it away with his fringed sleeve. I circled to where I could stand betwixt him and those bushes where I'd kicked his knife.

He looked on me with eyes strained wide open and full of murder, then he turned and ran a few steps and was down on hands and knees, a-hunting for something. I started toward him, then I stopped. For he was up again, and he had my open pocket knife that I'd dropped to hit him.

He held it in his hand, point toward me, his forefinger along the back like somebody about to cut him off a slice of meat.

"Maybe this has some of your power in it," he said, a-wasting more of his breath to say it. "It makes up any difference between us."

"You'll need another sight of more difference than that," I wasted some of my own breath. "You didn't do well so far with the big knife."

"Throw me that amulet, and we'll call it quits."

He sounded like somebody a-wanting to stop the fight, but "No," I said, and nair a word more. I bucked my knees again to keep them loose, and this time it was I who moved in to get close.

He drew himself up to face me, and made a jab with my knife. I got my left hand on his right wrist—that wrist was as big as a mule's ankle—and pulled him hard into me, and my right fist went a straightaway smash at his jaw. His head snapped back and he stumbled away, a-pulling his knife hand loose from me. I hit him half a dozen times, quick as I could throw my fists, left, right, head, body, and head again. Down he

went like a sack of grain off the tail of a wagon. He hit the ground so hard that I thought all Cry Mountain pitched.

I slammed my boot hard on his right hand and the knife fell from it and rolled away. I gave that knife a kick, too, into the bushes to find the big one where it had fallen and lost itself. Harpe rolled all the way over to get clear of me and struggled up on his feet again, with dirt and bits of moss all over that beaded hunting shirt. He wagged his head to clear it, and glared on me. He was still full of fight.

"This means I have the untidy job of killing you with my bare hands," he gulped.

"That would take a better man than you," I said.

He tried it on. He rushed me with both fists a-flying. I ducked and blocked them off, and flung my own fists. I hit him three times to his one, but he was powerful for strength even if he'd lost the edge of it. One solid punch of his fist might could come close to a-counting for three of mine. Gamely he came back to where the shooting was. It was like a bull in a fight against a mountain lion. He was a-getting tireder yet. Finally he pulled away a good dozen paces, and let his arms hang down, to get strength back into them.

"John," he sort of groaned, "you're pretty good."

"Thanks for the compliment," I said again. "Want to keep on with this? We've had a patch of fun so far."

He gave me his bloody-mouthed grin, and it was a right weary grin.

"Maybe I'll just wander away," he said. "Think about things."

With those words, he suddenly headed off amongst the trees, toward where the stockade was put up.

I watched him run for a second, but just a second. I followed on, and I came to him as he reached the stockade. Some laurel grew there on the inside, and outside I saw pines and locusts.

Harpe was at a big post of the stockade. With his big strength, he dragged that post aside to the left, and then the post next to it to the right. He made a gap where something big could come through.

Outside, beyond the stockade, things waited.

It was like as if that all his sentinels had gathered to hark at him. I saw the Bigfoot a-towering up yonder, taller than air giant man, even than Goliath; black hairy all over, a head on high as big as a bushel basket, with glaring eyes set in it. And near to him, across his great big toes stole the Flat, black and fuzzy as a bearskin rug come to life. Over farther off, a-sneaking a look from behind a tree, was the Behinder. Gentlemen, you all be glad you nair saw air such a thing as that.

And other things. The swarm of big bees was there, a-hanging in the air like a blanket and a-putting out a hum that boomed, but naught came in. It was like as if they harked at what Harpe called to them, but not one of them did what he bade:

"Come!" was what he yammered to them. "Come help me!"

I walked in behind him, but not in reach of him.

"What's the matter, Mr. Harpe?" I asked, a-making it sound cheerful. "Won't your friends jump to your word when you need them?"

He paid me no mind. Again he yelled, "Come get him!"

And no move from those things amongst the trees outside the stockade. They stayed right where they were, all of them.

Somehow, I found out that I could laugh. "You're in a right poor way for stumps," I said. "Whatair gets done to me, it's you who's got to do it, all by yourself without your amulet to give orders for help."

He spun round to me, so fast that the fringes of his sleeves whipped in the air. Then he bent himself down quick and came up with a big, jagged rock in each hand. He flung them at me,

one rock and then the other. Both of them missed, by the grace of the good Lord Almighty, or he might could have had me right there. I backed away quick and then I ran, and I'm not ashamed to tell it, for he was a-stooping for more rocks.

He got two and flung them both at me while he ran after me, and that's always a mistake. Stand still to fling something or you'll miss, the way he did then. He came after me with slapping feet, and I stopped to face him, almost beside the fresh dirt of Scylla's grave, a few steps from the big cleft from which Cry Mountain wailed. He closed in.

"So you dare make a stand," he spit out, and came a-reaching for me with his two big hands. He wanted to get hold of me.

I let him have my left, speared it into his face as he bored in, then I laid my right on him, just at the side of his jaw. He shammocked a couple of steps away, but he didn't go down. He was right hard to hurt, and that was a natural fact. Back he came, arms out to hug me, and this time he got them round my body and dragged me to him. As he did that, I dug my right fist into his belly and felt the air go out of it. I put my left there and my right again, and that knocked him clear of his hold on me. I went to work then, the hardest and fastest I could, to his head, his body, his head and body again and again, ten times or more.

It hurt him bad to get hit like that, and he couldn't hit me back but one time. He landed that one high on my head and I shook it off as I worked my own hands into him, all over. I'd nair punched thataway in all my days on this earth, and well I knew I had to, for I was a-fighting for my life.

Harpe's knees buckled under that storm of blows. His feet stumbled under him to keep him from a-falling. He went on the whirl away, and then he was at the rocky lip of the cleft.

I saw his feet move fast, like as if he did a dance. Next

second, he lost air balance he had, and down he tumbled into Cry Mountain's open mouth.

He screamed as he fell, long and wavery. I went to the edge of the thing, close as I dared, and looked down past the blackness to the red glow of the fire down there, so far it looked like the burning heart of the earth itself.

His cry drifted up to me, up, I couldn't say you how long it came. It grew fainter and fainter as he fell that everlasting deep way, until all of a sudden it stopped.

Ruel Harpe had struck bottom, struck it for good.

I was dizzy and I drew back away so that I wouldn't fall after him. I sweated and breathed hard. I swabbed my face with my sleeve. My knuckles were cut open with the blows I'd struck, and my right hand was gashed on the back with that knife.

At last I took a look all round me.

That's when I saw the three women, Myrrh and Alka and Tarrah, saw them where they'd come out in the open to watch the fight. After a moment, they started to walk slowly toward where I was.

I had the time at last to realize how tired out I was, from a-fighting Ruel Harpe for something like fifteen–twenty minutes.

XV

What now?

That was the thought in me while those three women came a-walking, side by side, to come to where I was. Skinny, careful Alka. Curvy Tarrah. Beautiful Myrrh. They came close and looked on me, and all their faces were pale.

"We saw what happened," said Alka to me, in a dull, hushed voice. "You killed him, John."

It wasn't quite an accusation, but it was near about one.

"I did no such a thing," I told her back. "I whipped him, and I can say I whipped him good. But he got there to the edge of that place, and he fell down into it without me a-touching him."

We all looked there, to that rocky gash where he'd fallen. Nair sound came from it. The air was quiet all round us. I made myself go back over and look down, and it made me feel dizzy to look. Blackness, deep blackness like to the center of the world, all down to the red glow like fire.

"What now?" said Myrrh, the very words I'd thought to myself.

"I'll go see what now," I said to her, and headed off to where the nearest stretch of the stockade was.

But I'd better say, where the stockade had been.

As I came to it amongst the trees, it was down, like as if it had been rotted away. Those poles that had been strong and high, they sagged, they drooped, they tumbled air whichaway.

They looked like pieces of old rotten wood, abandoned and let go to ruin. You could see how they yielded down from where they'd stood so high and strong. But now, a hog could have come through, if there'd been a hog there.

Ruel Harpe had conjured up that stockade. But he was gone, and his conjure tricks were gone, and so was his stockade.

I studied the trees beyond, where they'd been fenced off. The sun was higher up and the mist was a-fading out. Naught was there, not a motion, none of the things Harpe had fetched there to be his sentinels, his guards. I looked and listened. All of a sudden, I heard a crow overhead somewhere, *caw caw.* A crow? How long since I'd harked at a crow? A mountain boomer squirrel answered it, answered it grumpy-voiced, *chittery-chattery.*

Things were changed a right much round there since Harpe had taken his long fall. With him had vanished all that slew of unchancey things beyond the stockade that had crumpled on itself.

I turned and went back to where I'd left the women. And they were a-gabbling about something. They stood all round Scylla's grave. I came there, and what I saw was that the grave was busted open and something wrapped in a gray blanket sat up in it.

"She's risen from the dead!" screamed Tarrah at me.

The gray, grubby blanket stirred and fell open to both sides. Scylla's wrinkled face and Scylla's glittery eyes showed themselves to us.

"No," she grated. "I wasn't dead, but I might as well have been—deader than hell. Somebody give me a hand, I want to get up from here."

I put down my own hand. Her clawlike fingers grabbed tight to it, and I heaved her to her feet. She stepped out clear of the blanket, clear of the grave.

"Thank you, John," she said, the first kind word she'd air said to me. She looked round at all the others. "No, I wasn't dead," she repeated. "I just lay there and thought, or maybe I dreamed."

"Scylla, who'd have thought?" stammered Alka, and put her hand on Scylla's shoulder. "How did you breathe?"

"I don't think I breathed," said Scylla. "But I wasn't dead."

All of us stood together and puzzled in silence. Then I said, "I get it. The poison you took was Harpe's magic-mixed poison. Harpe's finished—gone down there." I pointed at the cleft. "He's gone, down there. And so's all his magic gone, and I reckon that means your poison went."

"John fought him," said Myrrh in a hushed voice, "and he fell down into that hole."

Scylla squinted at Myrrh. "Who's this pretty girl? Where's she from, anyway?"

"Harpe fetched her here," I said, "for something that didn't work out."

"You can tell me all about it at breakfast," allowed Scylla. "I can use some breakfast."

"Breakfast's on the table," said Alka. "We got it there, and came out to call Ruel and John. Maybe things are a trifle cold by now, but—"

"Let's go see." Scylla led the way to the passage. She moved sort of stiff at first, but then better. I reckoned her joints loosened up. She came to the entry and craned her neck to peer.

"No lights in there," she said. "Dark as where I lay underground."

Alka came and took her own look. "Those were Ruel's lights, remember," she said. "He had an enchantment to make them shine. Now he's gone, and they're gone, too."

"I have candles in my room," Scylla said. "I can get in there

and find them. I've often moved around in the dark, I know how."

She headed in. Tarrah and Myrrh stood where they were. I followed Scylla, with a hand on the rock wall to guide me. It seemed a mile-long way in yonder.

When we got to the main room, it was so dark, charcoal would have left a white mark on it. I got out my box of matches and lit one. I saw the table, with dishes of breakfast laid out on it, and at one end Harpe's pile of papers and the crumbly old Judas book he'd translated. Scylla headed for the curtained hallway, a-moving like as if she knew her way. My match went out. I stood in the dark, a long wait of time, till I heard her come back. Then I struck another match. I saw her, and she had two great big candles, one in each hand. She came close and held one out.

"Light it," she bade me, and I held the match to the twisty wick. The candle gave us a right much more light. I saw that it was a black candle and the other was black, too. Likely they were for use in witch doings. She dripped wax on a corner of the table top and stuck the candle in it, and its flame rose high and bright, like the petal of a lemony-yellow flower. She lit the other candle from the first.

We walked back through the outer passage. "John," she said, "I've turned you over and over in my mind as I lay so long underground, and I think that you may have the right on your side here and there. Let's bury the hatchet."

"Just so long as you don't bury it in my back," I said, and Scylla laughed, and it was what you might could call a friendly laugh.

Outside, we called the others to follow us in, and the candle showed us where to set our feet. We got to the table where the one candle burnt and Scylla stuck up the other beside it, and we sat down. The breakfast was eggs and bacon and toasted

muffins, and they'd gone cold, and so had the coffee. Scylla went to the rope and tugged, and came back.

"We can't get anything more that way," she reported. "Let's make out with what's here." She drank some cold coffee. "John and I think we can be friends," she said.

"Yes," I said, and had me a bite of muffin.

Scylla questioned Myrrh about herself, and shook her tumbly gray head over what Myrrh replied her.

"Ruel was wrong about what he tried with you," she said. "He was wrong about everything." She looked at the Judas book and the translation pages. "About that, too," she said. "Now that he's gone, it's up to us to decide things for ourselves."

"Myrrh and I will start down the mountain, directly we're through eating," I said.

"We'll all have to go down," said Alka. "Back into the world." She said it with a happy voice. She wanted to go back.

Scylla turned a look on her, with the candlelight a-flickering on her wrinkly face. "What do you propose to do, Alka?"

"I was a librarian," Alka answered her. "A very good one. I begin to wonder if Ruel got me here by exaggerating the trouble I was in. I can work in a library again, do some research and writing again. After all, research and writing was what I did here. Yes, I can do it. I can find old friends who'll help me to get a job."

Scylla brooded. "As for me, why don't I stay a witch?" she inquired us. "Not a black witch, though. I've had my game with that, and the best I can say for it is, no black witch is ever happy. But there are white witches who help people, cure their sicknesses, make their crops and their trades flourish. I've heard of such, in the Ozarks. I could go there and live."

"And prosper," said Tarrah. "I've been in the Ozarks. The name of Scylla could become famous."

"I might not go as Scylla, that was just my coven name." She smiled. "My real name in the public records is Mary Ann Dobinson."

"Old Mr. Vance Randolph in the Ozarks would be glad to talk to you," said Tarrah. "Help you know the Ozark people."

"Vance Randolph," said Scylla, a-committing the name to memory. "What will you do, Tarrah?"

"Well, no more witchcraft," said Tarrah, quick off. "I wish I could do what Myrrh talks about, work in some store or shop. Meet people there, maybe meet some nice young man."

"Why not come to Larrowby?" Myrrh invited her. "I don't think I'll be long at my job in my father's store. I'll be a-getting married."

You couldn't rightly tell by the candlelight, but I'd swear she blushed to think on Tombs McDonald.

"Come with me to Larrowby," she invited Tarrah again.

We talked about a-getting down Cry Mountain. I allowed it was a right much of a trip down, and then another good long trudge before you came to air sort of house. I took one of the candles, found my way back to the room where I'd stayed those two nights, and fetched back my guitar and other stuff. The women were at the table, a-making sandwiches.

"The way you talk, we'll need a lunch on the trip," said Tarrah.

They'd fetched out the big steak Myrrh hadn't touched the night before, and sliced it up thin. Somebody, Alka I think, had brought a can of sardines and another of potted ham. They likewise had a package of big crackers, and they spread ham on those, or put steak slices or sardines betwixt them. They made up five packages of them, with pieces of the newspapers Harpe and I had read. I put two of the packages, for Myrrh and me, into my sack. Then I picked up Harpe's writing and the crumbly pages of the Judas book.

We all went out. I laid my gear down at the door of the entry.

"What do you propose to do, John?" Scylla inquired me.

"Come and see," I said.

They all trailed behind me as I walked back to the grave where Scylla had lain and dreamt betwixt life and death. It was a gouged-open hole the size of Scylla when she got up from it, with the dark, damp dirt flung up on all sides. I stooped and pushed the Judas book and the written translation down on the blanket she'd left there. Then, from my back pocket, I fetched the amulet I'd ripped off of Harpe's neck, to take his magic power away.

For a second I looked at the cleft where he'd fallen, but just for a second. No point in a-flinging his amulet down there to whereair he was, no point at all. I put the amulet down amongst the wadded papers. The women watched me and said naught.

I went to the hollow tree and fetched out the ivory horn Harpe had blown to make Cry Mountain reply him back. I brought it to the grave and put it in, too.

"That horn is a valuable prehistoric artifact," said Scylla.

"That horn's a big troublemaker," I said, and draped the blanket over all I'd set in there. A-kneeling down, I raked and scooped with my hands to pile in the dirt Scylla had shoved up when she'd waked. I filled the place and stood up again.

There lay Harpe's magic, all buried, but how to keep it there? I recollected what I'd heard tell of the *Grand Albert* book, how you couldn't get shed of it if you burnt it or flung it in the water; you must bury it and say a funeral over it. So I stood by the covered-in grave, and I repeated some of the words I'd said when I'd preached what I'd thought was Scylla's funeral. I stooped again and moved the headstone I'd put there, this time to lie right on the middle of the grave. Nearby

lay a big flake of rock, broken and sharp. I gouged a cross into the headstone, deep as I could. Again I straightened up.

"Nobody air better try to dig that up again," I said. "There's been enough digging at that place."

"Amen," said Myrrh, like as if she was in church. And "Amen," said Scylla after her.

I sought out the stream. That ran all clear and happy, it was a natural thing. I washed the caked dirt off my hands and arms. Then I went and picked up my sack and slung my guitar behind me.

"You ready for the start down, Myrrh?" I said.

She came to my side and we headed for the gate.

XVI

The gate. Gentlemen, it wasn't aught to call a gate when we got to it.

The gate had been part of the whole conjure stockade that Ruel Harpe had raised up. Now it was all fallen down. Its rails and stakes were come apart and lay like a bundle of lumber logs that waited for somebody to come and stack them. I looked amongst the rails, and there lay something round and dull white. I picked it up.

"Ohh!" Myrrh wailed.

"This is Zeb Plattenburg's head," I said. "I'm a-going to carry it down to put with his other bones. He deserves that much. He had the sand in his craw to come up here and see what was what. Come on, we head down thisaway."

I helped her along ledge after ledge I'd come up. I steadied her to climb down from one to another. The water flowed with us as we went down. And Cry Mountain was silent no more. A towhee slid over us, a-singing its name, *towhee towhee.* Off amongst some trees on one ledge, a chickadee said *tsee-tsoo.* I recollected how no birds had spoken when I was a-climbing up.

Myrrh was hushed and careful as she came along with me, but we were a-going faster on the way down than I'd been a-making the journey up. Once Myrrh looked below, where the face of Cry Mountain fell like a wall, and again she moaned, "Ohh!"

"Just don't look down there, Myrrh," I said. "Let me be

honest to tell you, there's no future in a-looking down from a mountain height. Edgar Allan Poe says that, somewhere in his tales."

"Poe?" she repeated the name. "I read a poem of his one time, about a raven. Said the raven, nairmore."

"Nairmore do we have to come up Cry Mountain," I said, to comfort her.

We worked along and along, and there was the weedy place where Zeb Plattenburg's skeleton lay strung out. I put his skull down at the head of it.

"Shouldn't he be fetched down and buried?" Myrrh asked me.

"I don't rightly know how to answer that," I had to confess. "Maybe right here is the place for him. He came up where he wanted to come."

"Yes," she said, so softly I could barely hear.

Then:

"HEY!" sounded a voice from below, loud as the blast of a railroad engine, and we looked down.

Somebody was a-coming up, a-coming on a run. I flung down my guitar and my gear, and stood a-waiting. No telling who it might could be, what he might figure to do to us. But then we could both see who it was.

"TOMBS!" cried out Myrrh, as loud in the voice as he'd been.

That's who it was, Tombs McDonald, a-scrambling ledges there below us. We waited as he came along and got to where we were, got there a-heaving and a-sweating and a-puffing. His beard was wet from the climb. He put out a hand to us.

"John," he said. "And—why, Myrrh."

"Yes, Tombs, yes."

042 And they were in one another's arms, shoved against one

another from knee to face, and they were a-kissing one another and a-telling one another "Oh, oh, oh."

Tombs dropped a sort of satchel he'd fetched up with him.

"How come you come to be up here, too?" he asked Myrrh finally, and he put his eyes on me as he asked.

"I was witched here, but John got me out," she said against the shoulder of his sweaty shirt. "I'll tell you about it, but it's a long story," and then she kissed him again. "I love you," she said, with all the meaning a woman could put into it.

"I love you, Myrrh," he said, and looked past her at me. "John, I be damned but I figured I'd better come see why you nair come back."

That was a friend a-talking to me, but I didn't know what to say, so I said nair word.

"I reckoned you to be in trouble, a-climbing yonder," he said. "I got two–three fellows to come with me. We're camped down at the foot of this here mountain, we fetched along a box of rations and all like that. Let's go back down. Myrrh, you can tell me about a-being here."

"I'll tell you," she promised him, and his arms went round her again. Then he looked up the way we'd come.

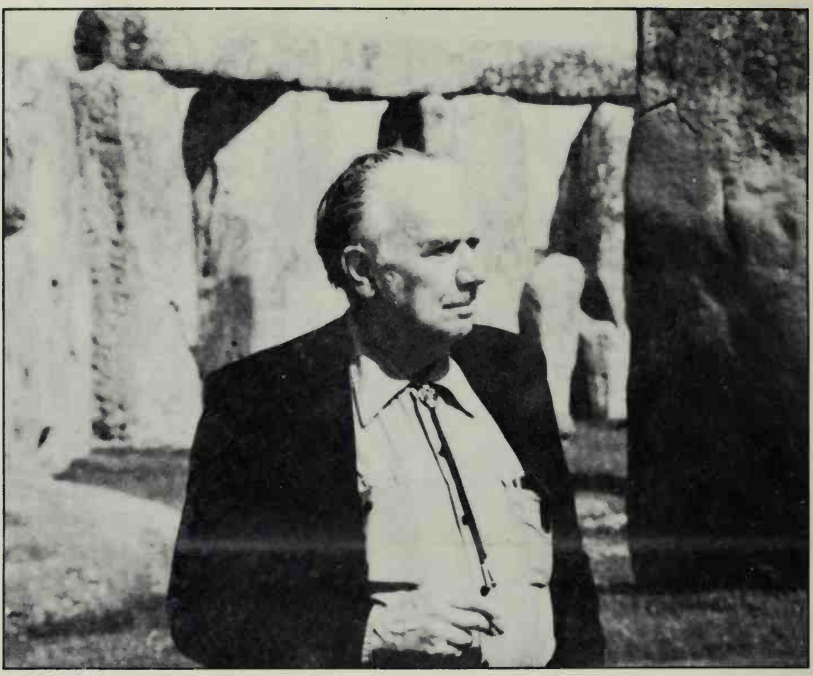
"Who's them?" he asked. "Them folks there, a-heading down to us."

Myrrh and I looked, too. There they came, far away, but we could tell who they were. Scylla and Alka and Tarrah.

"They're all right, Tombs," said Myrrh. "They're friends of mine."

About the Author

Manly Wade Wellman has been writing award-winning tales of fantasy, horror, and science fiction since 1931. In addition to his highly acclaimed series of novels about Silver John—*The Hanging Stones, The Lost and the Lurking, After Dark,* and *The Old Gods Waken*—he is also the author of two novels featuring the adventurer John Thunstone, *What Dreams May Come* and the forthcoming *The School of Darkness.* He has won the Gandalf Award for Lifetime Achievement from the World Fantasy Convention. Mr. Wellman lives in Chapel Hill, North Carolina.



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