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By H. H. HARMON

SWAMP GIRL of VENUS

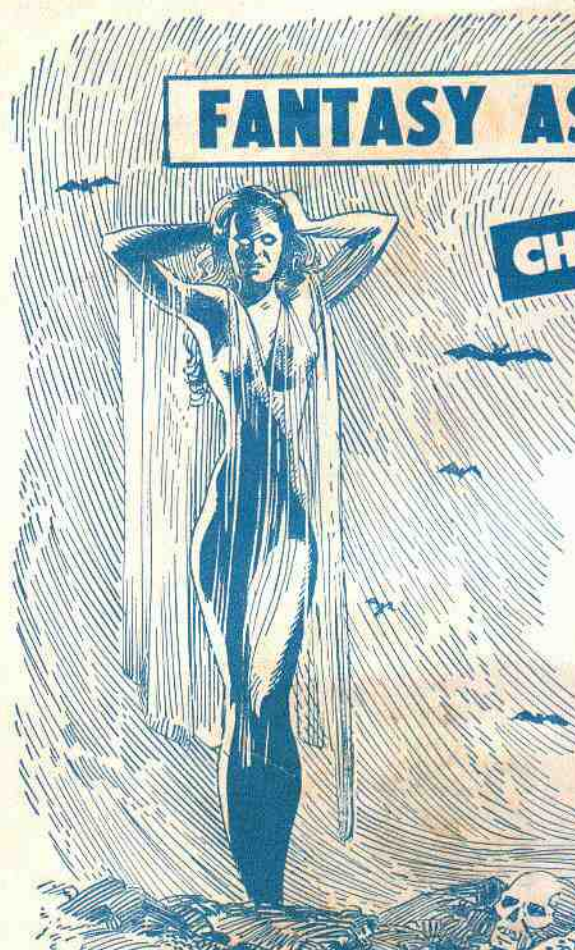
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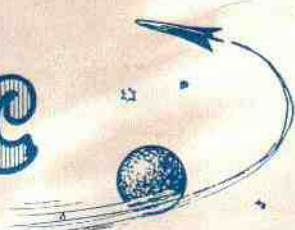
Eerie and haunting, the voice calls out of the mist—shockingly, suddenly, a rocket ship blazes across the skies—menacingly the cloaked figure advances, blazing red eyes staring hypnotically—beautiful, clad in filmy draperies that accentuate her haunting loveliness, the mysterious Moon Goddess beckons from the moonbeams—stark, terrible, crimson with the color of blood, the corpse rises from its freshly open grave.

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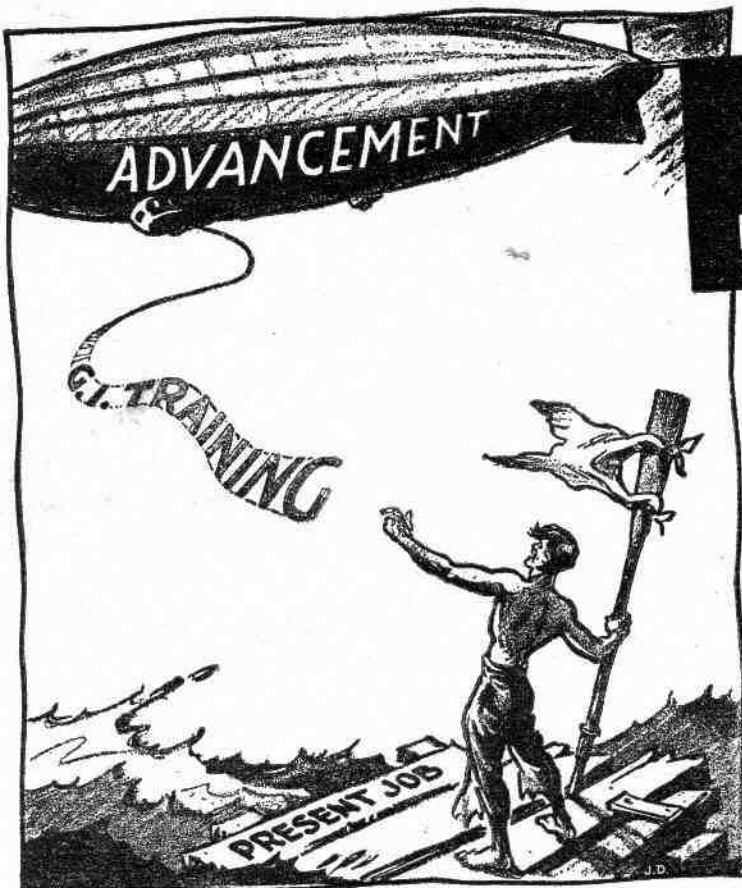
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— *All* STORIES *Complete* —

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THE GIRL WHO READ MINDS (Novelet—20,000)by Robert Moore Williams .. 8

Illustrated by Bill Terry

The ability to read minds sounds like a good idea—but how would it actually work out?

SWAMP GIRL OF VENUS (Short—9,000)by H. H. Harmon 44

Illustrated by Richard Loehle

Nowhere on Venus was there a more fearsome area than these swamps. Yet a girl was there . . .

ERDIS CLIFF (Short Novel—30,000)by Richard S. Shaver 62

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The Devil, it seems, was just a superman of the dawn of history, and not so bad after all.

A JOKE FOR HARRY (Short—1,500) by Richard Ashby 116

Illustrated by Robert Keys

What marvelous advantages there would be to invisibility . . . Worth murdering to attain!

VON HULCKMAN'S PETS (Short—7,200)by George D. Lewis 120

Illustrated by Bill Terry

Out of space came the mysterious sphere, and when it was opened terror rode the veldt.

Cover painting by Richard Loehle illustrating a scene from "Swamp Girl Of Venus"

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The

OBSERVATORY

..... *by the Editor*

GIVE OUT with cheers! Why? Well, Robert Moore Williams is back with us again with one of his superior stories. You'll find "The Girl Who Read Minds" well off the beaten track, and a really logical science fiction story. What would really happen if you could read minds? You can get the answer in Bob's story, and get a great big dash of entertainment into the bargain. Bob's done it again!

THE COVER story this month is by a newcomer, H. H. Harmon, who got the nod to do his yarn around the cover, which was painted, also, by a new cover artist, Richard Loehle. It's about an area on Venus that is just about the wildest and most terrifying (to Earthmen) place you could imagine. Not exactly the place you'd expect to find a beautiful Earth girl, but there she was—and, of all things—riding on the back of a monster winged lizard. What she was doing there, and how she got there—and best of all, how she got out, makes a story that contains all the ingredients for smash action ever invented by fiction writers.

RICHARD S. Shaver, continuing his new policy of writing the best fiction he can produce, comes up with another of the tales of the Red Dwarf. This one might shock you, since it makes the Devil look like a gentlemen, and at the same time, an old roue, but if you can throw aside your scruples for a few hours, you'll have to admit it's pretty good entertainment, and it's all in fun. Of course, if you like lovely ladies, where in h--- would you expect to find them? You don't think the Devil surrounds himself with austerity, do you?

REMEMBER "The Invisible Man"? Well, here's a short story about a man who found out how to make himself invisible. We thought it was a clever little thing, and it's about time the whole matter of invisible men was debunked. You'll enjoy "A Joke For Harry" by another newcomer to the field, Richard Ashby.

SOME TIME ago a gentlemen walked into our office and laid a manuscript on our desk. It seems he'd never sold before,

and he was convinced he never would. In fact, he talked just like Don Wilcox did the day he walked into our office, twelve years ago. Well, we read the manuscript, and he had imagination. So we asked him to do another story, and he complied. So, we are presenting, in this issue, the first acceptable story of George D. Lewis, whom, we predict, we'll be buying again very soon. This story is no great shucks, but you will find that it has promise. It will entertain you, and it will take an old idea and make it seem new. But what we want to stress is the fact that we are going to make a writer of this fellow. Let's just watch George D. Lewis grow! Let's just watch every story he writes, and note the 100% improvement in each one. Let's, as readers and editor, take him under our wing and develop him. You see, it's because we have that hunch that here's a lad who can go somewhere, if we show him where to go. How about it, readers, want to get in on this little prediction? Read his "Von Hulekman's Pets" and if you think he's a craftsman who can be made into an artisan, put your money down! See if you can pick out the things in his first rather ordinary story which foretell the things he's going to do? See if you're as much of an editor as your editor has always thought you readers were. It should be interesting.

THIS ISSUE we have a couple of articles which you'll find at variance with science. We are printing them because they are. We are trying to start an argument. And we bet we will. But if you get into the argument, better know what you are talking about, because these subjects are very "hot" right at the present time. Take, for instance, "Inertia Is Gravity Plus" by B. T. Stevens, Jr. It does away with light speed, space travel, etc. Oh, you'll scream—or maybe you'll begin to think he's got something. Anyway, think it over. Then, there's "The Tides And Gravity" which does away with the moon (as a cause of tides) and with gravity itself. You'll be mad as a march hare, but you'll find yourself beginning to think you *are* mad. What is this thing called science? Can it be that we are living in a fool's paradise? Let's tear these upstarts apart. And if you can't take it, it's all in fun—and if you call it fiction, who are we to argue? —Rap

INERTIA IS GRAVITY PLUS

By B. T. STEVENS, SR.

INERTIA IS the pull of gravity plus that resistance to motion of the medium in which the object moves, that and nothing more. Inertia of rest and of motion are precisely the same thing observed under different aspect, ie. the same thing from different viewpoints.

Any moving object will cease to move when the combined pull of gravity and the resistance to motion of the medium in which the motion is taking place total the exact amount of energy expended in producing the motion.

Since science says that out in space there is nothing, which means no medium to offer resistance, and since they also say that gravity is a negligible factor at best, then by all means let R. Shaver give his ships any speed he desires, it being quite logical to do so.

It being no theory, but fact that a rocket exhaust gains power in a vacuum while resistance to motion vanishes, the speed of a vessel or space craft is theoretically infinite as is its maneuverability once it has reached supposedly empty space; the existence of which I for one doubt.

Light speed? How are we to exceed that which does not exist? There being no light as such outside the atmosphere, it follows that so-called light speed is the measure of polarization of the atmosphere and has no bearing on possible space speeds at all. Outside of the atmosphere it is as black as the inside of a tar bucket at midnight.

Lorenz-Fitzgerald notwithstanding, there is no contraction in line of flight, this concept being only in the

nature of a pup chasing its tail in a welter of mathematical theorems. There is a lengthening of effective length of any object in motion relative to the observer, but decidedly no contraction. In Two Way Stretch at Light Speed, Goble says that the effect on the person entering the vibrating tube would be permanent. If he lived through it, he would be quite normal after escaping from the tube, as would the tube. I have experimented with vibration enough to know this. The sole effect of vibration is relative to the observer and not to the object vibrated providing said object can stand the stresses set up in it by said vibration.

Time being not an effect of speed or of matter, how can speed of matter relative to other matter have any effect on time? Time being only a method of measure in duration, it follows that all motion is relative to an object that the observer considers as not moving or stationary, therefore no true measure of motion or speed is possible, as the object upon which the observer bases his calculations may have various speeds of its own which do not enter into his calculations.

Since science has chosen to measure light motion by time and states that light travels through all mediums at approximately one hundred eighty-six thousand miles per second, how and where does science also reverse itself and say that at precisely that speed time ceases to elapse? That is equivalent to saying that light has no speed relative to time. If time doesn't exist at light speed neither does light speed exist.

The GIRL WHO READ MINDS

By ROBERT MOORE WILLIAMS

It's nice to have a girl friend, but is it quite so nice when she can read minds? That could prove to be rather embarrassing . . .



LIGHTNING from the boiling thunderhead split the darkness with a lance of living flame. Ken Hayden gunned his battered coupe through the entrance of the sprawling Long Island estate, catching a glimpse, in the lightning flash, of the huge mansion half-hidden by wind-tossed trees. Then thunder, like some monstrous invader from outer space knocking clamorously at the doors of earth, roared in the night. And Ken Hayden swore, "Why would there have to be a thunderstorm tonight of all nights?" he thought.

Under his breath, he cursed the storm. He cursed millionaire Sam Crawley, who owned this sprawling Long Island estate, and he almost swore at Nardia Barclay. Almost, but not quite. Gravel scoured the drive under the wheels as he slid the coupe to a halt in front of the stone steps of the mansion Sam Crawley had in-

herited, along with his millions, from his grandfather. Ken Hayden jerked open the front door and stepped inside.

The place, he saw, was crawling with guests. It was a party and when Sam Crawley threw a party, he liked to have lots of people, any kind of people, all kinds of people, but mostly pretty girls. There had been six Mrs. Sam Crawleys. Rumor had it that Crawley was looking for the seventh.

Ken Hayden, pausing inside the door, got a glimpse of men wearing tails and holding glasses, of women



wearing strapless evening gowns and holding glasses, of two servants hurrying out with trays of empty glasses, of two more hurrying in with trays of full glasses, and of girls, girls, girls everywhere; blondes, brunettes, redheads, but he didn't see Nardia Barclay and he didn't see Sam Crawley.

To his right a frantic social secretary seated behind a desk was trying to remember whether or not she had ever seen him and was his name on the guest list. Mostly she was looking at the rumpled business suit he was wearing and at the battered gray felt hat he hadn't bothered to remove. Her face said that people who came to these parties usually dressed, and they always took off their hats.

"Don't let it worry you," Ken said. "Where's Sam?"

"Do you mean Mr. Crawley?" the astonished social secretary gasped.

"You can call him mister if you want to, you work for him. To me, he's Sam. He's also a rat, to me, and a louse, and a plain good-for-nothing —" He broke off as a voice called, "Ken! Ken Hayden!" And Sam Crawley came weaving through the crowd toward him.

SAM CRAWLEY was getting fat around the middle and his hair was getting thin and the pouches under his eyes were getting bigger and baggier. He had a glass in one hand and his eyes were already showing a glassy cast. His right hand was outstretched. "Ken! You finally decided to come to one of my parties."

"Hello, Sam," Ken Hayden shook hands. "I was just telling your social secretary about you."

"Not the truth, I hope," Crawley answered, laughing. "It's hard enough to keep secretaries when they don't know the truth. Boy! A drink here for this gentleman. And another one for

me. Make it a double one."

Ken Hayden took the glass from the tray the servant was carrying, tasted it. It was good whiskey, the best. Sam Crawley was slapping him on the back and telling him how glad he was to see him. "I got something I want you to see," Crawley said.

"The seventh Mrs. Crawley." Ken Hayden questioned. And Crawley laughed. "No, although she may be here, at that, I've got a gag fixed up for tonight. It's the damndest gag anybody ever pulled. You'll die laughing."

"Don't tell me, let me guess," Ken said. "You've got a mind reader here tonight."

Crawley's face showed amazement. "How did you know?"

"And you plan to embarrass your guests, or some of them, by revealing intimate details of their private lives, or having the mind reader do it."

The amazement grew on Crawley's face. "Ken! How'd you know all this?"

"Maybe I'm a mind reader myself," Hayden answered. "You plan to increase the embarrassment of your guests by telling them that I'm a reporter and that I'm going to print everything the mind reader reveals about them. And that's why you asked me to the party."

Crawley seemed hurt. "I always ask you to my parties," he complained. "Our grandfathers were in business together and we've known each other all our lives. I ask you to my parties because we're friends. But you never come."

"I've come to this one. Sam, I want you to call off this gag."

"What!" The hurt expression of a child gorged on candy and still wanting more candy but having the sack taken away from him by an adult showed on the millionaire's face. All his life Sam Crawley had done what

he wanted, had had everything he wanted. "How can you ask such a thing, Ken? I've got to put on some entertainment. My guests expect it."

"Some of them may not be expecting what they may get here if you put this gag on, and they may not find it entertaining either. Sam, you can't do this. Believe me, I know."

"Do you know this mind reader?" Crawley asked suspiciously.

Ken Hayden hesitated. "Yes," he said at last. "I know her. Her name is Nardia Barclay. As a matter of fact, I had a date with her tonight, and when I went to her apartment, I found that you had hired her to come here and put on a stunt. Her sister said she had tried to get in touch with me and tell me about it but hadn't been able to reach me."

Crawley's suspicions vanished. He began to laugh. "So *that's* it!" he said. "What do you mean?"

Crawley, laughing, slapped him on the shoulder. "You've gone on the girl, Ken, and you think this stunt may backfire and get her into trouble. Don't give it a thought. I've got a whole firm of lawyers working for me. If anybody kicks up a fuss about anything she says tonight, I'll have them defend her." He leered, dug Ken Hayden in the ribs. "I'll say this for you, you can pick 'em."

"Sam! Listen to me! I don't want you to go on with this gag."

"Huh? Why not? Just because you've gone overboard about the girl—"

"My feelings don't enter into the situation," Hayden said. In spite of his efforts to keep it out he could feel anger rising in the tones of his voice. "I know this girl. I know her ability. *Under certain conditions, her ability to read minds isn't an act, it's a reality.*"

"What?" Crawley said. "You're kidding."

"I am not kidding!" Ken Hayden said. "You're putting on an entertainment that can backfire and burn hell out of you. I'm not saying it will backfire, I'm saying it *can* backfire. You've got a houseful of guests here tonight. I know this bunch you run with. They're the lunatic fringe of high society, the newly rich, people trying to crash the gates of real society, girls on the prowl—"

"They're my guests," Crawley said.

"They're the guests of a man who has had six wives," Hayden said. "They're the guest of a psychopath, if I ever saw one, and they're psychopathic themselves, a lot of them, or they wouldn't have come to one of your parties. And they're hiding, some of them, everything from love nests to murder."

LIGHTNING WALKED across the sky outside. Hayden shivered at the sight of the flash. "And you're about to turn a mind reader loose who can, under certain conditions, actually read minds. Sam, I tell you, you can't do it. What are you laughing at?"

Crawley was shouting with laughter. "This is rich, this is really rich. What are you trying to do, Ken, keep Nardia from becoming the seventh Mrs. Crawley?"

"What?" Ken Hayden gasped.

Crawley nodded, leered at him. "That's what's she's going to be, if I have anything to say about it."

"You—"

Crawley backed hastily away from him. "Don't shake your fists at me, Ken. It won't get you anywhere, except thrown out on your can."

Hayden fought the impulse to knock this millionaire into the middle of next week. Fist weren't the way to fight here, and he knew it. Crawley had enough servants to throw him out. "You can't do this, Sam," he

argued. "You can't keep it harmless."

"I can try," Crawley answered. "And if you can keep your temper, you can come into the drawing room and watch the show she is going to put on. It's just ready to start."

Thunder roared in the sky outside. Hayden heard the rattle of rain on the windows. He wiped perspiration from his forehead, spoke desperately.

"You're going to put this act on, Sam?"

"I'm the master of ceremonies, Ken. Come on in and watch it. But don't you try to stop it just because you're jealous."

"Jealous, hell. You hopeless damned fool—" But Crawley, snickering, had pushed his way through the people moving into the room on the right, and was gone.

Ken Hayden knew he was helpless to stop the act. If he could get to Nardia Barclay and talk to her... But if he tried to talk to her, Crawley would probably have him thrown out. And that would get him nowhere. All he could do was sweat it out and hope that Nardia Barclay's strange ability to actually read minds under certain circumstances would not come into existence tonight. She couldn't control that ability, couldn't turn it on and off at will. It came, it went, without her conscious direction, a wild talent that came, no one knew from where, when conditions were right.

Thunder rolled in the night, reminding Ken Hayden again of what those conditions actually were. Hayden had studied the subject extensively but he didn't pretend to understand the ins and outs of it. All he knew for certain was that Nardia Barclay could sometimes read minds *during or just before a thunderstorm!*

What thunderstorms had to do with her ability to read minds Hayden didn't know. It just happened that way. He thought the tremendous ac-

cumulation of static electricity in the air before and during a thunderstorm released the wild talent of this strange and unusual woman, that the electrical potential built up when a thunderstorm was raging broke down the barriers of space and time, allowing her to reach and make contact with other minds. She didn't understand what happened any more than he understood it but both of them knew that *sometimes* when a thunderstorm was coming up, she could actually read minds.

He took two fast drinks, to settle his jumpy nerves. Then Sam Crawley's voice came over the loudspeaker system that had been installed for this occasion, "Ladies and gentlemen—"

The show was starting.

Ken Hayden shoved his way into the drawing room to watch.

THE DRAWING room was jammed with people. Women in low-cut evening dresses, men in tails. A sprinkling of FFF descendants—Famous First Families—were present. Some of them he recognized, most he didn't. He almost stepped on a peroxide blonde. "Ken!" she said. He had to look twice at her before he remembered she was the fifth Mrs. Crawley. "Hello, Rose," he said, "Everybody here including the ex-wives, eh?"

"Sure. Why not?" she answered. She was half-stewed, he saw, and she slipped away before he could talk to her. He tried to push his way to a position where he could see what was going on in the middle of the room. A little paunchy bald-headed man whom he vaguely recalled as being Marcus Woster kept getting in his way. Woster looked uncomfortable in tails, as did many of the men, and Hayden thought they would have liked to exchange the stiff shirts for plain business garb. He also thought

some of the women looked as if they would have liked to exchange their low-cut dresses for no dresses. Or was this merely his opinion of them? He didn't know and didn't care. As a newspaper reporter, he knew it takes all kinds to make up a world. Most kinds seemed to be present here tonight. Then he found a place from which he could see the center of the room. Nardia Barclay was there. His heart jumped at the sight of her.

She was sitting in a big chair in the center of the room. A mass of hair that was neither quite red nor quite blond but seemed to be both, depending on how you looked at it, white skin, a small serious face that had the touch of a madonna on it, a simple evening gown, this was Nardia Barclay. Joan of Arc might have looked like this, or a vestal virgin tending the fires in the temple of Jupiter in ancient Rome, or the poetess Sappho of the Grecian Isles when the world was young. Every eye in the room was fixed on her, the men with frank admiration, the women with veiled hostility and envy. There were women in this room wearing a fortune in jewels, whose gowns were made by the most expensive Fifth Avenue tailors, but none of them looked half as beautiful as Nardia Barclay, who wore no jewels at all and the simplest of all simple gowns.

Standing beside her, Sam Crawley was adjusting a microphone. Seeing him there, Ken Hayden was reminded again that if fate had been different *he* instead of Sam Crawley might have been standing there, *he* instead of Crawley might have owned this magnificent mansion house. Years before, Ken Hayden's grandfather and the grandfather of Sam Crawley had been partners in the new but rapidly growing automobile business. The articles of partnership had been drawn in such a manner that the

death of either partner left the survivor in complete control of the automobile manufacturing company they had developed. Ken Hayden's grandfather had died in a smashup demonstrating one of their automobiles and control of the business had passed to the grandfather of Sam Crawley, and a fortune had passed with it. The result had been, a generation later, that Sam Crawley was a millionaire and Ken Hayden had to scratch for a living.

SAM CRAWLEY'S family had got the money, and Sam was a worthless playboy, not worth the powder and lead it would take to blow him to hell, a man who collected wives he couldn't keep, a psychopathic who threw money around like water in a vain and endless effort to prove he was something he, and everybody else, knew he wasn't. Ken Hayden's family had lost the fortune Crawley had gotten, and Ken was a first-class reporter, well-regarded in his profession, and an honest man.

Fate has its compensating mechanisms.

Watching Sam Crawley's drunken efforts to adjust the microphone, Ken Hayden did not envy the man the fortune he possessed. Nor did he have anything but kind words for fate. Of course, it was nice to be rich. But it was a damned sight nicer to be other things.

Crawley finally got the microphone adjusted. He leered at his audience.

"Friends, I have arranged a special treat for you tonight," Crawley's voice came over the loudspeakers. "As many of you know, I like to present some unusual form of entertainment at my parties. Something new, something different, that's my motto." A titter of laughter ran over the crowd as the group thought of

the six Mrs. Crawleys. Something new, something different, a new wife as soon as possible, had been Crawley's motto in women too.

"Tonight I have something that is really different," Crawley's voice continued. "I would like you all to meet Miss Nardia Barclay."

In the chair, the golden girl smiled and nodded at the assembled group.

"Who reads minds," Crawley finished.

A little stir of sound ran through the group, a polite ripple of amused interest.

"She reads minds! How droll!" Ken Hayden heard a woman say.

"Do you think she can read my mind?" the man standing next to her said, glancing at her.

"I can do that and I'm no mind reader," she answered. The man laughed.

"I've seen these mind reading acts." Hayden heard another man say. "They're tricks. Why, anybody who could really read minds could make a fortune in the market." The speaker licked thin greedy lips at the thought.

"If you could read minds, what a killing you would make!" Hayden thought. He didn't like these people. He didn't like their air of polite amusement. Sure, mind reading was a trick. He knew the intricate set of signals that Nardia Barclay used when she was putting on an act. She was a professional at it, she was on the stage, making private appearances like this for a flat fee. That part of mind reading he understood and didn't mind. What he did mind was the fact that sometimes, under certain conditions, she could actually read minds. He was afraid this might be one of those times.

The thunder bulldog growled again in the night outside. Rain rattled on the windows. In her chair, Nardia Barclay looked nervously around at

the sound. She cleared her throat.

"I must ask all of you to be as quiet as possible," Sam Crawley spoke again. "Now here are the rules. I will blindfold Miss Barclay. Then you may give me an object or show me an object and I will ask her to tell you, over the loudspeaker, what it is. Is that clear?"

It was clear. Very clear. Crawley tied a strip of black velvet over the girl's eyes, adjusted the microphone to the proper height, gave it to her. She took the stand in one hand.

"Are you ready?" Crawley asked her.

Her lips moved. "Ready," the loudspeakers whispered.

Crawley moved into the group. "Now if someone will give me something—Ah, this gentleman, has something. What does the gentleman have, Miss Barclay?"

A tall man was holding something hidden in his hand.

"A key," the loudspeaker said.

THE MAN looked a little surprised. There was no way Nardia Barclay could see the object that he was holding concealed in his hand and Crawley had given her no obvious hint as to its identity. But she had gotten the answer right.

Crawley grinned. "A key. Very good." He held it up for everyone to see. The grin on his face grew. "Now a key means a door, doesn't it, Miss Barclay?"

"Yes," the loudspeaker said.

"And this key fits a door?"

"Yes."

"Hey!" the owner of the key yelled, snatching at it. Crawley held it away from him.

"What door does this key fit?"

"An apartment door," the loudspeaker said.

The face of the owner of the key was growing red. He was making

frantic efforts to regain possession of the key. Crawley was keeping it away from him. "Where is this apartment located?" Crawley yelled.

"On 51st Street," the loudspeaker answered.

A little gust of laughter ran through the crowd as the guests sensed where this line of questioning was leading.

"Who lives in the apartment that this key opens?" Crawley shouted.

"A blonde," the loudspeaker promptly answered.

Laughter rolled through the room. Crawley, grinning like a drunken satyr, handed the key back to its red-faced and very angry owner. "I got a notion to poke you in the eye," the owner of the key said.

"Just a gag," Crawley said. "Can't you go along with a gag? Who's next?" He looked around the room.

In spite of his misgivings, Ken Hayden almost grinned. If it was a gag, it was a good one. It convulsed the crowd. The explanation was simple. Crawley knew the owner of the key was keeping a blonde and he had coached Nardia Barclay in advance on what to say, telling her that it was only a gag. Crawley looked around the crowd for his next victim, found it in the person of a woman, a strong-featured brunette. "Lydia!" he greeted her. Almost against her will he removed something from a finger of her left hand. "What do I have here?" he asked.

The loudspeaker hesitated. The answer was slow in coming. Crawley impatiently repeated his question. "A ring," the loudspeaker finally said.

Crawley beamed. He was enjoying this. He held the ring up for all to see. Fire flashed from the facets of a large diamond solitaire. "What is the stone?" Crawley said.

"Sam, give me that ring," the own-

er demanded, reaching for it.

"A diamond," the loudspeaker whispered. Ken Hayden looked sharply at Nardia Barclay. Her voice had changed, a tenseness had crept into it, and it had died to a whisper.

"How much did it cost?" Sam Crawley shouted.

"It—it was bought in a pawnshop," the loudspeaker whispered. "It—it cost forty-eight dollars."

Laughter roared through the room. Echoing it from outside, came a burst of thunder, then another. Lightning was flashing out there, flashing almost continually.

The threatened storm had broken. Wind shook the house. Rain and gusts of hail pounded on the windowpanes. The laughter died out as faces turned uneasily toward the windows. Water was pouring from the sky in a flood.

"It's a hurricane," someone whispered uneasily.

The woman who owned the forty-eight dollar ring threw it at the man who had given it to her and no one noticed her action.

"Money—money—money—" the loudspeaker whispered, and no one noticed that either.

"Someone here is thinking about money," the whispering voice continued. "He is always thinking about it. When he is awake, he thinks about it. When he is asleep, he dreams about it."

FACES TURNED uneasily from the storm rattling the windowpanes to the girl in the center of the room. The blindfold still covered her eyes. She was lying limp in the chair, clutching the mike support with both hands.

"Why is this man always thinking about money?" the loudspeaker whispered.

Silence in the room, silence broken by the sound of water on the windows and the roll of thunder outside.

Lightning was pounding the defenseless earth and thunder was rolling in the night.

"Because he has stolen it and is afraid," the loudspeaker continued. "He has stolen it, he has embezzled, and he is afraid he will be found out. That is why he is always thinking about it."

Fear, like a monstrous carrion bird with taloned feet and a hooked bill, came into the room in a power dive. These people were rich, most of them. Money they had, more money they wanted, and the fear of losing what they had was always with them. Embezzler was the ugliest word they knew because an embezzler took their money away from them.

Men looked at each other and wives looked at their husbands and girls on the make looked at men in sudden swift suspicion. They had heard an ugly word.

This is a trick, they told themselves. This is another of Sam's gags. There isn't anything to it.

But they couldn't forget the ugly word they had heard.

Ken Hayden listened, wondering. Was this a gag? There was sweat on his palms.

"Name—" the loudspeaker whispered. "I get it and then it goes before I can say it. Now! I have it. Rog—No, it's gone again."

A thin-faced man with pale, tired eyes suddenly blanched.

"I know the kind of work he does," the loudspeaker continued, in a whisper. "He's an accountant, or an auditor. He works with figures on pieces of paper. Yes, he's an accountant. And the company he works for—"

Ken Hayden wiped sweat from his forehead. If this wasn't a gag, the words coming over the loudspeaker were pointing a knife at the heart of somebody in the room. He began to shove his way through the crowd. Sam

Crawley somehow or other got in his way. "Keep out of this," Crawley said.

"You idiot—"

Crack! went the lightning.

Boom! went the thunder.

Splash! went the rain.

"The Riverside Development Corporation," the loudspeaker said, as Nardia Barclay's lips moved. "This embezzler works for that company. And his name starts with Rog—"

"What?" Marcus Woster screamed a single word.

The Riverside Development Corporation was his company. He owned it, lock, stock, and barrel, he manipulated it, used it for his own devious purposes.

"Three hundred thousand he has stolen," the loudspeaker said.

In that moment, Ken Hayden knew the mind-reading gag had turned into reality. He started fighting his way toward Nardia Barclay, to jerk the mike away from her, to get her out of the trance she was in.

Sam Crawley swung a fist at him and yelled to the servants for help.

TWO MEN grabbed Ken Hayden from behind, held him. "You damed fool—"

"This is wonderful," Crawley answered. "I don't know what's happening but it's too good to be stopped. Look at Marcus puffing. He's going to bust a blood vessel any minute." He grinned. Dirt was being dished out out and he loved dirt.

"Three hundred thousand dollars stolen from my company!" Woster shouted. His gaze was centered on the thin-faced man with the pale, tired eyes. The man was trying not to look at him.

"I still don't get his name," the loudspeaker continued. "But I know why he took the money. His wife. She drove him to take it, so she could

make a big splash in society! Society! That's what she lives for. Parties and evening gowns and jewels!"

An over-dressed woman wearing diamond ear rings and a matching diamond necklace suddenly seemed to stop breathing.

"His name still eludes me," the loudspeaker whispered.

"It doesn't elude me," Marcus Woster yelled. "It's Roger Bishop, treasurer of my company. You've described him all right and his wife too. *Bishop!*" His gaze lanced at the tall thin man and he started across the room.

"That's right," the loudspeaker continued. "That's his name. And your name is Marcus Woster."

If Woster had run into a brick wall, he could not have stopped more suddenly. He stared at the girl. "What's that?" he said. "How do you know my name? I haven't met you?"

Nardia Barclay sat limp and unmoving and apparently not alive. "Of course I know your name," her voice whispered. "It's in your mind. You're president of the Riverside Development Corporation."

It was a statement, not a question. But Woster seemed to feel it was more than a statement.

"You made millions during the war and you're afraid of something," the loudspeaker continued. "And you're afraid. What are you afraid of?"

Paunchy little Marcus Woster seemed turned into a stone statue.

"I see why you are afraid," the damning whisper came. "The black market. You were head of a big black market syndicate, weren't you? But that's not what you're afraid of, is it?"

"Stop!" Woster screamed.

"You're afraid of the income tax law, aren't you? You're afraid the income tax people will find out about you and put you in the penitentiary

for filing false income tax returns, aren't you?"

The speaker went into silence.

"My God!" a man whispered.

"It's a lie!" Woster screamed. "I didn't do it. Crawley, I demand that you stop this slander or I'll sue you for every dollar you've got to your name."

Crawley blinked. "Well, what daya know?" he mimicked. "Marcus Woster holding out on Uncle Sam."

The threat to sue him awed him not at all. Although obviously surprised and startled, he was enjoying the situation. "The black market!" he said, clicking his tongue. "Tch, tch, tch. So that's how you got so rich so fast, huh, Marcus?"

"It's a damned lie!" Woster shouted.

The loudspeaker came on again. As though entirely unaware of the violent argument going on in the room, Nardia Barclay continued talking.

"There is a woman here," her voice whispered. "A woman who is thinking about money. She has a definite figure in mind. One hundred thousand dollars. She wants this sum of money from someone present here tonight."

There was sudden silence.

"This is blackmail," the loudspeaker whispered.

DRUMHEAD tension thickened in the room. In the silence the only sound was the frightened breathing of men and women. Blackmail! Here was another ugly word, a word they understood and hated.

Outside the lightning flared. Inside the room the storm was completely forgotten. There was another, a different kind of storm raging on the inside of the house, a storm potentially as violent as a hurricane.

"Her name is Rose," Nardia Barclay said.

Sam Crawley looked startled.

A slender peroxide blonde gasped, tried to slip from the room. It was the fifth Mrs. Crawley, whom Ken Hayden had spoken to. Crawley saw her trying to slip out. "Rose!" he said.

She turned, faced him. The rouge on her cheeks showed as red blotches on colorless flesh. Her face was a hard, tight papier mache mask. All eyes were on her.

"So that's why you wanted to see me!" Sam Crawley said. "You were going to try to blackmail me!"

She faced him without flinching. "I wouldn't call it blackmail, Sam. I just thought you might be interested in financing a little business venture of mine, especially—" Her voice trailed off.

"Especially what?" Crawley grunted. He was under no compulsion to be pleasant to one of his former wives.

"Especially since I know what happened to Lucy," the hard-faced blonde said.

In all that roomful of people probably only two persons knew who Lucy was. Sam Crawley knew. His face sagged and the bags under his eyes seemed to grow bigger.

"Lucy!" Ken Hayden said. "Your second wife, wasn't she, Sam?"

Crawley's eyes turned toward him.

"She fell off your yacht on a Caribbean cruise, and was drowned, if I remember correctly."

"Murder!" the loudspeaker gasped.

The tension in the room was tighter than any drumhead that ever existed on this planet.

"She didn't fall off his yacht, he pushed her off," the loudspeaker said. "It wasn't an accident. It was murder!"

In that moment Sam Crawley must have known that his mind-reading act, that gag that he had planned for

entertainment, had gone completely and hopelessly sour on him.

Nardia Barclay was actually reading minds!

Embezzlement had been in the mind of one man. She had revealed it. Income tax fraud had been in the mind of another man, a secret fear eating at his heart. She had revealed his fear and the source of it. Blackmail had been in the mind of the fifth Mrs. Crawley and the loudspeaker had whispered this fact for all to hear.

Sam Crawley had thought it was fun when Roger Bishop's embezzlement had been revealed. It had been even funnier when Marcus Woster's black market operations and income tax frauds had been brought to light. It had been somewhat less amusing when the designs of the fifth Mrs. Crawley had been announced. It had become the unfunniest gag on earth when the loudspeaker had whispered the single word, "Murder!" in connection with the death of the second Mrs. Crawley.

THE LOUDSPEAKER went into silence. Crawley stood without moving. His face was blank, his jaw slack, his eyes pools of grinning, gaping fear.

Then Nardia Barclay's voice came again.

"There is another murder," she whispered. "It's so old, so far away in time, I can barely sense it. An accident, a racing car accident in which a man was killed. An accident that happened forty, maybe fifty years ago. I see a man driving a strange, old style racing car. I see the steering gear break. I see the car go off the track, go through the fence, explode. I see them carry the man away. He's dead, dead, burned.

"It wasn't an accident. Somebody—his friend, his partner—I can't get

his name—had tampered with the steering gear, had fixed it so it would break down during the race—”

Ken Hayden heard the words but he didn't have time to think about them, not then. He jerked himself free from the slacked grip of the servants holding his arms and slugged toward Nardia Barclay.

Crawley sprawled full length in the laps of several guests and Ken Hayden fought his way to the center of the room. Nardia Barclay was still slumped in her chair. He almost had to use force to get the mike stand out of her fingers. Gently, oblivious of the pressure of people around him, he removed the black strip of velvet from her face. Her eyes were closed, and if she was breathing, he could not detect it. He recognized her condition as the deep sleep trance, felt for her pulse. “Nardia!” he said sharply. “Wake up.”

Turmoil was around him.

“Telling lies like that, she ought to be whipped!” he heard an outraged woman say.

“How did she know these things?” someone asked.

“Was she telling the truth?” a man spoke.

“You lying little wretch!” Mrs. Roger Bishop raged, fighting her way through the crowd toward the girl. “Saying I drove my husband to embezzlement! I did no such thing. I never asked for more than any woman ought to have! I'll tear your eyes out.”

“If you touch her, I'll knock you loose from your diamond earrings!” Ken Hayden said. The woman recoiled and glared at him. “Who are you, sir?” He didn't answer.

“Nardia, wake up,” he whispered. She didn't stir.

“Every word she said was a lie!” Marcus Woster yelled. The paunchy little man was waving his hands and

bleating, like a sheep, Hayden thought.

Crawley was sitting on the floor and shaking his head from the effect of the reporter's fist. A voluptuous brunette, apparently working hard at the job of trying to become the seventh Mrs. Crawley, was trying to take his head in her lap. He was shoving her away and looking at Ken Hayden and Nardia Barclay. The glitter in his eyes was not a pleasant sight.

There is no statute of limitations on murder.

Ken Hayden rubbed the girl's wrists and shouted for her to wake up. Her hands were cold, her pulse barely perceptible. Her lips moved. “There is a woman here who is trying to marry for money,” she whispered. She was still reading minds. The brunette trying to hold Crawley's head let out a startled yip and glared at her.

Smack! Hayden's fingers left red marks on the girl's face as he slapped her. She had to wake up. Had to! She also had to stop reading minds. She had already revealed enough dirt to serve three times over as a motive for murder.

She had to wake up so he could get her out of here. One of these women would scratch her eyes out if he didn't.

“Wake up!” Hayden yelled at the top of his lungs.

THE PULSE quickened in her throat. Her eye lids fluttered. She opened her eyes, stared at him without seeing him. Consciousness slowly swam into existence in their dark depths, returned from some distance, from some dimensional infinity of mind.

“Ken!” she whispered. “You here!”

“Are you able to walk?”

“Of course.” She tried to stand up, sagged back into the chair. “In just

a minute, I'll be able to walk. What's all the rush?"

"We've got to get away from here. We've got to move, fast."

She didn't understand. "Why—"

"We'll talk about it later." He helped her from the chair. She became aware of the people around her, of the tense, hot silence in the room, of the faces turned toward her, of the anger on those faces.

"What's wrong?" she whispered.

"Don't you know anything that has happened?" Ken asked.

She shook her head.

"Like hell she doesn't know!" Mrs. Roger Bishop shrieked. "You accused my husband of embezzlement, you lying little fraud."

"But I didn't!" the startled girl gasped.

"That's a lie, like all the rest of the lies you told." Mrs. Bishop again started toward the girl.

"Stand back," Hayden said. "Nardia, you went into a trance and actually began reading minds."

"Oh!" The single sound was a gasp of pure dismay as Nardia Barclay understood what had happened. "But I never know what I do when I'm in a trance."

"I know that. But these people don't. Come on."

He started to lead her away. Sam Crawley got to his feet. "Wait a minute," Crawley said.

Ken Hayden didn't wait. "Gangway!" he yelled. A path reluctantly opened through the crowd. He led the girl to the door, opened it. Rain was pouring outside. He ducked his head into the flood of water, pulling the girl after him, ran for his car.

"Hey!" Crawley yelled from the door. Hayden shoved the girl into the car, slammed the door, ran around to the other side, splashing through water inches deep running down the drive.

"What did I say?" Nardia asked.

"You let forty cats out of forty bags," Hayden answered. Crawley was sticking his head out the front door and looking toward them. The reporter stepped on the starter, gunned the motor when it caught, spun the car in the drive, snapped on the windshield wipers and the headlights.

"Why in the name of heaven did you come here?" Hayden demanded.

"A thousand dollars, was one reason," Nardia Barclay answered.

"He paid you that much?"

"Yes. And he told me he was planning a big gag, for entertainment."

"And he told you what to say?"

She nodded.

"And you went ahead with it, with that business about the key to the blonde's apartment?"

"I was a little worried about that but he said everything would be all right, that the man and the girl were both friends of his, and that the man was divorced from his wife."

"I see," Hayden said. "He lied to you but you didn't know it. But why did you go ahead when a thunderstorm was coming up? You knew what might happen!"

"I didn't think it *would* happen," she answered. "Ken, did I do something terribly wrong? I needed that thousand dollars—"

"And you need to stay alive too." Hayden gunned the car out of the drive. He wanted this girl in New York as quickly as he could get her there. She would be comparatively safe there but she was anything but safe here. He knew the statement that she had gone into a trance and had read minds while in that trance would not be accepted as evidence in any court of law, nor would her revelations be accepted as evidence. The law does not recognize mind reading. But a clever detective could use her

revelations as a starting point in unravelling everything from embezzlement to murder!

THAT WAS the catch in the whole affair. What she had said was not legal evidence but it could be used to uncover facts that were evidence that a court would accept. Marcus Woster, now that he had reason to suspect the treasurer of his company was guilty of embezzlement, would have reason to start a firm of accountants working on the books of the Riverside Development Corporation. If Bishop had actually stolen money, the accountants would find proof of the embezzlement! Embezzlement couldn't be hidden if the accountants had reason to suspect it existed.

She had given them reason to suspect it might exist.

Of course, Woster, in view of his own devious deals, might not want to start accountants looking for shortages for fear they might discover information that he preferred to keep hidden. In that case, Bishop might be safe from prosecution. But Marcus Woster himself was not safe, not by a couple of country miles. If the Internal Revenue Department was tipped off that he *might* not have paid all the income taxes he should have paid, they could start an investigation of their own that *might* put Woster in jail as surely as Al Capone had been put in Alcatraz on the same charge.

Woster, if the paunchy little man had the courage, would like nothing better than to put her out of the way before she revealed further information about his income taxes.

Sam Crawley was even more dangerous than Woster. His hidden secret had no connection with fraud or embezzlement. He was hiding murder! And the trail of murder never

grows cold. If he had killed his second wife, had shoved her off his yacht and pretended it was an accident—and Hayden remembered only too well that her death had been reported as an accident—Sam Crawley was in one hell of a spot. Members of the crew of his yacht could be found, questioned. Detectives who knew they were looking for murder could know what questions to ask and how to ask them.

Nardia Barclay's mind-reading revelations might send the playboy millionaire to the electric chair.

And the fifth Mrs. Crawley, Rose, Hayden knew that hard-faced peroxide blonde would not relish the thought of losing the hundred thousand dollars she was planning to blackmail out of Crawley. In this situation, she could be as treacherous and as dangerous as a cornered leopard.

"Don't let it worry you, Nardia," Hayden said to the girl sitting beside him. "We're away from there now and you're safe."

Thunder laughed at him from the sky as he spoke. Rain was still pouring in a roaring flood from the sodden clouds overhead. The headlights revealed water running over the drive. He drove carefully, looking for the narrow bridge that he knew spanned a small stream just outside the high wire fence that surrounded that estate.

He reached the bridge.

His headlights revealed a solid sheet of fast-running water pouring over the road. Sticking out of the water like a gauge measuring the depth was one of the bridge-stringers. The heavy timber throbbed from the pressure of the current pouring against it.

Hayden slammed on the brakes. The car slipped sideways, threatened to go into the ditch. He jerked it back to the road. Water sprayed upward

from the front of the car. The radiator dipped down, water poured over the fenders.

For one terrible moment the car teetered on the edge of the brown flood rolling across the road.

Slowly, while Hayden's heart jumped into his mouth and threatened to choke him, the car stopped moving. It was on the very brink of the stream.

The bridge was out, washed away by the swollen torrent.

Thunder laughed again from the sky.

"I guess this is as far as we go," Hayden said.

With the bridge washed out, they couldn't reach New York this night. Light glinted from the rearview mirror in front of his eyes. Reflected in the mirror, he saw the twin beams of a car's headlights racing toward them from the rear.

"Someone's following us!" Narida Barclay gasped.

THE HEADLIGHTS enlarged as the approaching car boomed through the night toward them.

"Nardia, you've got a job ahead of you," Hayden said.

"What, Ken?"

"We can't get out of here tonight." That means we're going to have to return to Crawley's house. When we get back there, you are going to convince every person in that house that every word you said tonight was a gag, a stunt, part of an act you were putting on."

"I don't quite see why. If you say so, I'll try to do it, but—"

"I see why and I say so. You're going to have to spend the night there. There are people in that house who are scared enough to put a bullet in you and be glad of the chance to shut you up so easily. If you are going to be safe, you will have to convince

them the whole thing was nothing but an act, including the way I grabbed you and jerked you out of the house."

"Is it that serious?"

"It is."

"But they will call me all sorts of names!" the girl protested.

"Let 'em call you anything they want to call you. Names won't hurt you. I'll back up every word you say. Do you think you make them believe this whole thing was nothing but a stunt?"

"I can't try," she answered.

"Good girl." He squeezed her hand, looked up at the headlights of the approaching car. It was slowing right behind them. "Here comes the first questions," he said.

As he watched in the mirror, the slowing car suddenly seemed to pick up speed. The driver had seen the redlight on the rear of the reporter's car and had slowed down. He must also have seen the car on the brink of the stream.

"Look out!" the girl screamed.

Wham!

Hayden's head was snapped against the back of the seat as the automobile hit the back end of his car. He jammed at the brakes as his car was knocked forward.

The brakes held but they didn't hold enough. His car was knocked off the end of the abutment. It splashed into the stream, the front end went out of sight, a flood of muddy water slapped the windshield, water began to spurt up from the cracks around the doors and to gush up in boiling fountains through the floorboards, and utter darkness closed in around them.

"Get ready to hold your breath!" Ken Hayden yelled. "And hold on to my right arm. We're going out the left door as soon as I can get it open."

The car had settled to the bottom of the stream. The force of the cur-

rent shoved against it, threatened to turn it over and roll it end over end. Water was already up to Hayden's knees. He caught Nardia's left hand, felt her close her hands around his wrist.

"Hold on tight because I'm going to drag you over the wheel and out of here!" he yelled.

"I'll hold on, Ken."

He tried to open the door.

It wouldn't budge.

The pressure of the water on the outside of the car was so great he couldn't open the door. Shoving with all his strength, he couldn't move the door.

"Can't you get it open?"

"The pressure's too great. Sit tight until the water rises to our necks. Then we can open it."

HE COULD hear her breathing rapidly, sharp panting sounds that rose above the roar of the stream outside the car. The automobile moved, wobbled. An icy circle of cold was creeping up his body, inches at a time. Was the door actually sprung? Was that the real explanation why it wouldn't open? He didn't know, knew he might never find out. They either got out of the car or they drowned right where they were sitting. Water coming through the floorboards had raised the level up to his chest. He was standing up, his head bumping against the top of the car, and he knew Nardia was standing up too. He could feel her hands locked around his wrists.

"Get ready to hold your breath if the door opens. I'm going to try again."

Pressure on his wrists told him that she understood.

Shoving down on the handle, he pushed with all his strength.

The door came open.

Instantly the water level inside the

car rose above his head. Holding his breath, he fought his way out of the car, pulling the girl behind him. Standing on the runningboard, he pulled her out of the car, then kicked himself and her upward. His head broke water and he gulped blessed air. Then the full force of the current struck him, rolled him end for end, his head went under water, he lost grip on her hand, felt her lose her grip on his wrists, knew they were separated.

The current rolled him like a log. Part of the time his head was out of the water, most of the time it was buried inches deep in the muddy flood. He felt himself scrape against a rocky bottom, managed to kick upward. His head broke surface and he gasped his lungs full of the sweetest air he had ever breathed. The current hustled him along. The drooping limb of an overhanging tree brushed against his fingers. He grabbed it, held on for dear life itself.

The sound of rushing water filled his ears. The night was as black as the inside of a sack of coal. Where was Nardia?"

He yelled and the roaring water drowned his voice.

She was somewhere in the roaring torrent fighting for her life.

Lightning lanced across the sky, illuminating the whole world in a blue glare. He was downstream from his car. In the glare from the lightning flash he caught a glimpse of something white moving with the water. It was being swept toward him. He grabbed at it and his fingers closed around dripping silk and he touched a struggling body. Nardia! He caught her under the arms with one hand, lifted her head above the water. She coughed and he could hear her fighting for breath.

The limb to which he was holding gently pulled loose from its parent

tree. Then it let go abruptly.

THE CURRENT took them again, pushed them, shoved them, rolled them. Water closed over them. There was death in the water, death in the rolling flood, and Ken Hayden knew it. He clung to the slippery silk with desperate strength, feeling himself growing weaker. Then the current hurled them into an eddy and he felt bottom under his feet. He had enough strength left to crawl ashore and drag the girl after him before he collapsed.

Rain fell on them, lightning blasted through the black sky above them, thunder roared at them.

Hayden coughed water out of his lungs, coughed until he thought his guts were coming out. Nardia lay on her stomach beside him and coughed with him. He could hear her breathing in great gasping sobs. "We're alive anyhow," he choked. "And damn the careless fool who didn't see my car."

"He saw it," she whispered.

"Huh?"

"That wasn't an accident. He saw your car and guessed you had stopped because the bridge was out. It was a wonderful chance to get rid of us. That was attempted murder."

"I know it," Hayden said weakly. "I just didn't want you to know it."

Rain poured over them. At their feet, the stream roared. He could hear her teeth beginning to chatter, could feel her shivering. And he knew what had to be done.

"We've got to go back to the house," he said. "You've got to have dry clothes and a good stiff jolt of brandy."

"I'd rather go anywhere else on earth," she said.

"So would I but that's where we've got to go. You're chilled to the bone and soaking wet. If I don't get you into some dry clothes, you'll have a

fine case of pneumonia. Can you walk?"

"I can try," she answered.

She couldn't walk, alone, but with him supporting her, she could just manage to stumble along. It was a desperate journey back to the big house. Muddy, soaked to the skin, they staggered through the front door just in time to hear Sam Crawley say:

"We've got to go find them, I tell you. The current pulled them away before I caught more than a glimpse of them. But I know they were in the car—"

"You needn't bother," Hayden croaked. "We've found ourselves."

Crawley's face went gray as he saw them. "I—I thought—"

"You thought we were dead," the reporter finished for him. "Sorry to disappoint you but we're not dead. We need dry clothes, hot coffee, and some brandy, but fast."

"Right away!" the startled millionaire said.

THIRTY minutes later Ken Hayden was drinking hot coffee laced with brandy and was wearing Sam Crawley's clothes from the skin out. He was in Crawley's master bedroom along with the millionaire and Crawley was talking fast. He had been talking fast ever since he had seen them come through the door and he was still going.

"It was an accident, Ken," he was repeating, for the tenth time. "I swear it was an accident. I didn't see your car there until it was too late to stop."

"Did I say it wasn't?"

"I slowed down because I was afraid the bridge was out."

"I'm sure that's right, Sam."

Sweat was oozing out of the pores of Crawley's face. "Matter of fact, I ought to thank you for saving my

life. If your car hadn't been there, I would have gone in myself."

Hayden, silently wondering why Crawley's life was worth saving, said, "You ought to thank me, then."

"I am thanking you," Crawley protested. "But you act as if you don't believe what I'm saying."

"You're nuts," Hayden said quickly. "Why should I doubt your word?"

"You act like you do."

"I'm still dizzy from that impromptu swim, Sam. Don't pay any attention to the way I act. You don't mean to say—" Hayden's face showed amazement. "—that you're worried about what Nardia said about you?" He laughed. "What I don't understand is why you followed us."

"I'm not worried," the millionaire answered. "I followed you because I wanted to pay her off. Between you and me, I wanted to shut her mouth. I thought if I offered her a sizeable chunk of money, she might see her way clear to taking a trip to Europe or somewhere."

"For the love of Pete!" Hayden pretested. "Why?"

"Because—well, some people might believe what she said about me pushing Lucy overboard—"

"Nonsense!" Hayden laughed. "You mean to say you don't know how she worked that?"

"No," Crawley said suspiciously. "I don't know how she worked it. Of course, there's nothing to it, but—"

"She just went along with your own gag, that's all."

"How?"

"Simple. She told me about it as we left. She just looked up your name and the names of several of your guests in old newspaper files before she came here. That's one way these mind reading acts are worked. She ran across the story on the death of your second wife and decided to turn

it into a big joke on you. She thought you would go right along with it and love the whole gag. Hell, Sam, you don't mean to tell me that you were worried about that stunt? And after you had coached her on what she should say when you pulled that key and that diamond ring!" Hayden laughed again, a sound without mirth. "This is rich. Sam Crawley caught on one of his own gags!"

Crawley stared suspiciously at him. He took another drink of coffee and set the cup back in the saucer. "That business about Woster was worked the same way," he continued. "Of course, she now realizes she carried the gag too far and she wants to apologize for it, but if I were you, I wouldn't give it another thought."

THERE WAS a hole in this line of reasoning big enough to run a ten-ton truck through. Hayden knew the hole was there, and he knew Crawley would find it too, in time, but he was taking a chance the millionaire wouldn't see it immediately. Crawley had never had to do any hard thinking. He could hire men to do his thinking for him. Hayden was gambling that this fact would keep Crawley from spotting the hole too soon.

Hayden was stalling for time, for nothing but time, enough time to let the stream run down so he could borrow a car and get Nardia Barclay away from here. Probably that wouldn't be possible before morning, he estimated.

"Well, that sounds all right," Crawley said. He wiped the sweat from his face. "Of course, there wasn't anything to it but you know how people will talk."

"What the hell do you care how people talk? You've never given a damn what anybody said."

"I know and I still don't. But she put on such a darned good show that

I was afraid somebody might be suspicious. Say, was your effort to keep me from putting on the mindreading act a part of the gag, too?"

"Of course it was," Hayden answered. "We worked it out between us. I admit I ought to have known better but I thought it was such a good gag that I couldn't resist going along with it. And the way I grabbed her and jerked her out of here was part of the act too."

"I'll go tell everybody what you said," Crawley spoke. "They'll want to know. It looks like the whole bunch is marooned here for the night." He turned toward the door, hesitated. "There's one thing—"

"What?"

"How did she know what Rose wanted?"

Hayden laughed. "Hell, I don't know. She didn't tell me everything. Maybe she guessed."

"Maybe she did," Crawley said. He left the room.

"Well, that's that," Hayden thought uneasily. Crawley had seemed to accept his explanation but had he really accepted it? He was more worried about Crawley than he cared to admit even to himself. The millionaire was emotionally unstable. The fact that he had married six women proved his emotional instability. A person with that kind of an emotional set-up might suddenly blow his top, especially if he was under a heavy strain.

When Hayden thought about it, he realized that Crawley had already blown his top, once, maybe twice. Maybe when he had pushed his second wife off his yacht, he had blown his top. Maybe he had blown it the second time when he had deliberately rammed Hayden's car off the bridge. Knocking the car off the end of the abutment was not the act of a man in full possession of his faculties. It was the act of a desperate man, of a

shrewd, quick-thinking dangerous man, but not the act of a man who was completely sane. He wondered how psychotic Crawley really was.

Hayden got quickly to his feet then, went out into the hall. Men and women were collected in little groups in the hall, collected and talking under his breath. They shut up quickly as Hayden came out of the room. He ignored them, went quickly across the hall to the room to which Nardia had been taken. As his hand touched the doorknob, Marcus Woster came running up to him. "I want to talk to you," the paunchy little man said.

"What about?"

"I can't tell you, here," Woster glanced nervously at the watching people. "It's something important. Can't you maybe come downstairs to the library?"

HAYDEN hesitated. He didn't particularly want to talk to Woster but the little profiteer acted as if he had something important on his mind. "All right," he said at last. "But wait a minute first."

He opened the door of the room, looked in. Three women were in the room. Nardia was sitting in a nest of pillows in a big four-poster bed. She was drinking hot milk. The reporter moved to her side. "How you feeling?"

She grinned at him. "I'll live."

"Have you told these people about your act yet?"

"Not yet."

"Okay. But get started as soon as you can. I'm working on the same proposition out there." He nodded toward the door. "Crawley's already sold on the idea." He patted her shoulder, walked out of the room.

Woster tugged at his sleeve and he followed the little man down the broad front stairs and into the library of expensive books that Sam Crawley had ordered from the interior

decorator who had furnished this place for him. Crawley bought books to put in shelves, not to read. The room was empty. Woster cautiously closed the door and then drew Hayden over to the corner.

"Are you—ah—a close friend of the young lady?" Woster whispered.

"Um. I know her, yes."

"Do you know her well enough to talk freely to her?"

"I think so. What's on your mind? You got something you want me to speak freely to her about?"

"Well, not exactly," Woster hedged.

"Don't bear around the bush," Hayden spoke. "If you've got something to say, say it. Otherwise I've got things to do."

Woster screwed up courage to speak. "Not that there was a word of truth in what she said about me," he began. "But you know how people talk. Somebody who didn't know me might misunderstand what she said, and I thought—"

He hesitated, looked carefully at Hayden's face as though searching it for possible flaws.

"What do you think?" Hayden said.

Woster glanced nervously around as though he suspected the presence of hidden dictaphones. When he spoke he lowered his voice to a whisper.

"I thought maybe you might talk to her and get her to state publicly—before everyone here tonight—that there was not a word of truth in anything she said about me. I would—I would—make it worth your while. Her's too," he added.

This was exactly what Hayden had already planned to do but he saw no point in telling Woster, yet. He was curious to see how far the little man would go.

"Um," he said. "This making it worth while, how much does that

mean in actual cash to me?"

Woster squirmed. The thought of parting with money was not pleasant to him. "Five—three thousand," he said.

Hayden laughed. "What a chiseling little rat you are! Five thousand dollars! Does that sound like important money to you? Is that your idea of making something worth while?"

"I said three thousand," Woster corrected.

"You did? I guess I can't hear so good tonight. So long, Woster. I've got other things to do." Hayden started to walk out of the room. Woster grabbed his arm. "I'll make it five."

"Nuts," Hayden said, shrugging off the arm.

"I'll make it ten," the little man frantically said. "If she will just tell everybody here she was playing a game, I'll pay her ten thousand dollars. Think how much money that is!"

"Think how long ten years in jail are!"

"I'm a poor man," Woster whined.

"That's not the way I heard it."

Woster was in acute distress. "I just can't pay any more than that. I haven't got it. I'll have to sell some bonds to raise ten thousand even."

HAYDEN decided Woster had suffered enough. "Save your money," he grunted. "She has already told me it was only a gag, that she knew you were going to be one of the guests and that she looked your name up in the newspaper files and decided to gag you. All for the laugh, you understand."

Woster's face had turned ash gray. "She told you that?"

Hayden nodded. "Sure. She's going to tell everybody. Too bad you had to get so excited and lose your head over a gag."

"Why—why didn't you tell me this

sooner?" Woster gasped.

"I'm telling you now. Isn't that enough?"

"Certainly. Of course. Has—has she made that statement publicly?"

"Not yet but she's going to make it. Will that satisfy you or would you like me to print it in the paper too?"

"No. NO! Don't ever do that. I mean—there's no need to give this affair unnecessary publicity. No need at all. Thank you, Mr. Hayden. Thank you so much. You've taken a load off my mind."

"I'll bet I have at that," Hayden said. With Woster's agitated thanks ringing in his ears, he walked out of the library. "That ought to keep Woster quiet for a while," he thought. "At least it will keep him quiet until he realizes that trying to bribe Nardia is the same as openly confessing she told the truth about him." By the time Woster thought of that, Hayden hoped to hell that he and Nardia would be gone. He began looking for Bishop. The accountant was not in sight.

Hayden didn't know how many guests there were in the big house, but there seemed to be a million. He went from group to group looking for Bishop and stopping long enough each time to say, "Miss Barclay thought everyone would realize she was only putting on a show. She didn't for a minute think anyone would take her words seriously. She is very, very sorry that she was misunderstood."

They accepted his explanation, except for an over-dressed dowager who breathed heavily at him and said, "It seems to me that she might have thought of the possible consequences of her action before she went ahead and made those awful statements!"

"She didn't dream anyone would believe her," Hayden said unctiously.

"By the way, has anyone seen Mr. Bishop?"

No one had seen the man. Hayden kept looking. He didn't find the accountant but he caught a glimpse of Sam Crawley hurrying down the steps that led to the basement. Nor did he see Rose Crawley. He went into Nardia Barclay's room again, found her still sitting up in bed. "I've been telling everyone what a fraud you are," he said.

She smiled ruefully at him. "I've been telling these nice people how sorry I am," she answered, nodding toward the three women. "I didn't realize anyone could possibly think I wasn't putting on a show. I hope everyone forgives me."

"I'm sure everyone will," Hayden answered. "I've talked to Sam Crawley and Marcus Woster and explained the situation to them. Both have agreed to forget the whole thing. I'm sure everyone else will be equally generous." Hayden put on his most pleasant smile and he felt like a ham actor but the job had to be done. He and Nardia were getting it done. These three women believed him. He went back out into the hall and continued smiling and talking.

THEY BELIEVED him out here too.

It was much, much easier to believe the revelations of Nardia Barclay had been a gag than it was to believe she had been telling the truth. If you believed she had told the truth, then you had to admit she could read minds. Only a very intelligent person was willing to make such an admission, an intelligent person with nothing on his conscience. Hayden wondered if there was such a person! The idea of mind reading opened up too many uncomfortable avenues of thought to be readily accepted. If you admitted such a thing

as a mind reader existed, then you had to change your manner of living and thinking because your sins were no longer your own secrets. They belonged to the mind reader too. More than that, a mind reader could discover what trusts you had broken, what faiths you had betrayed. Would you believe anybody could read sins? No, a thousand times no! It was much more comfortable to believe that mind reading was a gag and that people like Nardia Barclay were only paid entertainers.

That was the thing to believe. You couldn't believe that a man as rich as Samuel Crawley had been guilty of murder or that so successful a man as Marcus Woster had stooped to income tax fraud or that the nice Roger Bishop had embezzled funds to buy diamonds for a grasping wife!

You couldn't believe these things, or you would deny them so vigorously that eventually you would hypnotize yourself into saying you couldn't believe them. It was much easier to believe that this common showgirl, this nobody, had not been reading minds but had been playing a mean, deceitful trick.

Hayden couldn't find Roger Bishop. But he found Mrs. Bishop. "I've been looking for your husband," he said. "I want to explain the situation to him. Perhaps you can tell me where he is."

"I've been looking for him myself," Mrs. Bishop answered. "I don't know where he is either."

They were standing in the hall on the second floor. As she spoke, the muffled crack of a pistol echoed through the hall. The sound came from one of the rooms at the far end of the corridor. It was followed by the thump of a heavy object falling on the floor.

Neither the pistol shot nor the thump were repeated.

Hayden ran down the hall.

"IT CAME from there!" a woman squealed, pointing to the door of the last room. Hayden jerked open the door. And found Roger Bishop.

The accountant was lying on the floor.

The whole top of his head was blown off.

A pistol was lying on the floor beside him.

Hayden dropped to his knees. He knew there was no point in feeling for a pulse but he felt anyhow. People were crowding into the room behind him. Somebody found the note on the writing table and was reading it aloud before Hayden even knew it existed. He heard the fatal words.

"The information given out by that damned mind reading woman has ruined me. I don't know how she discovered the truth but she certainly had everything right. I can't face the consequences and I am taking this way out.

Roger Bishop"

There was silence in the room. It grew and grew. "He killed himself," someone whispered.

"Give me that damned note!" Hayden said. He snatched it from the hands of the woman who had read it. Marcus Woster pawed his way through the crowd. "Vot happened?" he squealed. In his agitated state, he had relapsed into the dialect of his youth. "Vot is it dot happened? Did somebody shoot Bishop? Who doned it?"

"Bishop went crazy," Hayden snapped.

"Crazy, is it? Crazy—"

Mrs. Bishop forced her way into the room. She saw her husband on the floor. "Dead?"

Hayden nodded.

"Then that woman killed him."

"Nonsense!" Hayden exploded.

Mrs. Bishop was wringing her hands. "I know he was taking the money," she wailed. "I warned him to be careful. Everything would have been all right if he hadn't come here tonight and if that horrible woman hadn't said all those awful things."

In the silence that followed Hayden could hear hammers driving nails into Nardia Barclay's coffin. Bishop's suicide, the suicide note, now the wailing statement of his widow, had blown their gag story out the window. Everybody knew the truth now. Woster was frantically tugging at the reporter's sleeve.

"Why does anybody hev to knows about this?" he was demanding. "Vhy can't we joost keep it one big secret?"

"You don't keep secrets like this," Hayden said.

"But maybe ve could take de body away someplace else—"

Hayden's laugh was harsh with boiling bitterness. "I may be a damned fool but I'm not that big an idiot. You don't joost take dead bodies around someplace else, brother. This is police business now and there's not one damned thing anybody can do about it."

The police would have to be notified and official questions would have to be answered. And after the police came the press! How the reporters would love this story! Hayden would love it himself if he was on the outside writing it. A red hot scandal in high society. He could see the headlines now. A big party at the country estate of the notorious Sam Crawley. A pseudo mind reader had dished out a lot of dirt. Only the dirt happened to be the truth. One man had killed himself because of the things she had said. There were hints about many of the guests and the

host himself. The papers would run pictures of all of Crawley's six wives, they would start an investigation into the death of the second Mrs. Crawley. And Marcus Woster might just as well go pick his cell.

"Then what are you going to do?" Woster bleated.

"If you want my advice you will get in touch with your lawyers just as soon as I finish using the phone," Hayden answered.

"The phone? Was you going to call the police?"

"Certainly."

"But you can't do it." Woster had hold of the reporter's arm.

"It's got to be done. Let go of me." He shook himself loose from the pasty-faced little man, pushed through the crowd. There was an extension phone in Crawley's room. He found it. At least he could report the suicide but didn't see how the police could reach the mansion until the stream ran down. He lifted the phone from its cradle.

THE RECEIVER was soundless, the line dead. "Wires probably went down in the storm," he muttered, tossing the phone back into place. The lights in the room flickered out, came back on, gleamed brightly for a moment, then went off again.

The room was as black as a grave.

"Who the hell is monkeying with the lights?" Hayden yelled. He didn't expect an answer. The yell was pure nervous tension seeking release. He didn't get an answer. He fumbled his way to the door and out into the hall again.

A lot of yipping was going on out here. There was a dead man in one of the rooms and the lights were out. Women were finding cause for consternation in this combination of facts. "Charles! Charles, darling!

"Where are you?"

"I'm over here, dear."

"Green, will you either turn on the lights or find us some candles? Or something?"

Green was the butler. Hayden guessed that Green was probably down in the pantry on the first floor having himself a quiet nip. He wished he was down there with him.

"Where are all the servants?" a woman yelled.

People were running into each other and into the hall and into the furniture in the hall. Hayden had never heard more heart-felt profanity in his life. When he tried to cross the hall and barked his shin on a chair, he added his voice to the profanity.

Down on the first floor a woman screamed, a sound that ended as suddenly as it began. The scream produced silence on the second floor.

"What was that?" a woman whispered.

"A ghost, for all I know," a man's unsympathetic voice answered.

The woman began to wail. "Shut up!" Hayden shouted at her. He fumbled his way across the hall, found the door of the room he was looking for, shoved it open. "Nardia! Where are you?"

There was no answer.

Women were moving in the room. He could hear them. "Where's Miss Barclay?" he asked.

"She got out of bed just before the lights went out," a woman's voice answered. "I guess she's out in the hall. What—what happened to the lights?"

"I don't know," Hayden answered. "Nardia! Where are you?" he shouted.

There was no answer.

"Has anybody here seen Miss Barclay?"

"I haven't seen her and I hope I never see her," a woman answered viciously.

Cigarette lighters and matches were beginning to flare in the hallway, their pale glows revealing white shirt fronts and low cut evening gowns. Hayden walked to the top of the stairs. Green, the butler, was coming up the steps. He was carrying a candle. "The lights seem to be out, sir," he said.

"You're telling me! Where's the main switch?"

"In the kitchen entrance, sir."

"Take me to it."

Hayden wanted to see that switch. If it was on, then the lights were off because of failure of the current. If the switch was off, somebody had turned it off because there was something that he wanted to do in the dark.

"Nardia!" he yelled again, at the foot of the stairs.

There was no answer.

"Hurry up and find that switch."

HOLDING the candle in front of him, the butler hurried to the back of the house. Hayden followed right behind him. Voices called to them from the darkness, wanting to know what the hell was wrong with the lights. They reached the switch. The butler held up his candle.

The switch was open.

"I don't understand this, sir," the butler said. "I don't understand it at all. It looks as if somebody deliberately turned off the lights, sir."

"That's the way it looks to me too," the reporter said. He reached up and closed the switch.

All over the big house lights came on.

"That seems to have corrected the difficulty, sir," the butler said,

As he spoke, a woman started screaming.

"Yes," Hayden answered. "It seemed to have started that too."

The woman was screaming her

throat out. Hayden ran to the front of the house. He reached the front entrance hall just in time to see a woman run out of the big drawing room where Nardia had put on her mind-reading performance.

"There's a dead woman in there!" the woman screamed again, pointing back to the drawing room. "Let me out of this place." She went up the stairs three steps at a time.

Flesh crawled all over Hayden's body. He had tried to find Nardia and had failed. Now there was a dead woman in the drawing room. He had to force himself to walk from the entrance hall.

She was crumbled up on the floor.

The whole front of her dress was covered with blood. A knife had gone into her heart.

She was a peroxide blonde.

"Rose!" Hayden whispered, recognizing her. "Rose Crawley!"

The fifth Mrs. Crawley had been murdered.

He bent over the sprawled body. Clutched in her right hand was an oblong strip of green paper. He gently tugged at it until he could see what it was.

A check for a hundred thousand dollars!

The scrawled signature was legible. *Samuel S. Crawley.*

"So Sam saw the hole in my argument!" Hayden thought. "We might convince everyone else that the death of his second wife had been an accident, that Nardia's mind-reading act was a stage trick, but no matter how hard we tried, we would never have been able to convince this woman that it was a trick. *She knew better.* Sam knew she knew better. So he shut her mouth, with the hundred thousand dollars she wanted. Then somebody came along and stuck a knife in her."

People were beginning to peep into

the drawing room. After they looked in they seemed to wish they hadn't been so inquisitive.

"I wish I was in New York," Hayden thought. "I wish I was in bed drunk. I wish I was anywhere else on earth except right here. I wish to hell I knew where Nardia is."

The people staring into the room looked as they agreed with him in his desire to be somewhere else. They were scared right down to the bottoms of their souls. Hayden saw slack jaws and eye tics and shaking hands and twitching lips everywhere he looked.

"Has anybody here seen Nardia Barclay?" he demanded.

Slack jaws shook at him in answer. "Do—do you think she did it?" a man asked.

"Hell, no!" Hayden raged. He stalked out into the hall.

Sam Crawley was coming up the stairs. "Where have you been?" Hayden asked.

CRAWLEY'S hair was tousled and his white tie was loose. "Who the hell turned off those lights?" he demanded.

"I don't know. Where were you?"

"Down in the basement. I've got a rumpus room down there and I've been raising a rumpus in it."

"Come in here," Hayden said. "There's something in here you will want to see."

He steered the millionaire into the drawing room. Crawley looked at the blonde figure slumped in the pool of blood.

"Well, what daya know?" he said. "Somebody stuck a knife in one of my ex-wives! Well, what daya know?"

There was no sign of shock in the tone of his voice, none on his face. That fact that the woman was dead didn't seem to mean anything to him.

"I thought you might want to see the piece of paper in her hand," Hayden said.

Crawley bent over and looked at the oblong of green paper. "My check," he said. "I made Rose a little present tonight." He grinned. "I bet she's mad as hell that she didn't live long enough to cash it."

He snickered at his own remark. "She'll never get over not living long enough to spend some more of my dough," he said. The idea seemed to please him. "She liked dough," he said. "She liked it better than anything else on earth."

"Including life?" Hayden said.

"Yeah, including life. Have you called the police yet?"

"No."

"Well, you better go do it."

"It's your responsibility."

"Nuts," Crawley said. "I don't have any responsibilities except to sign checks." He turned, lurched out of the room. Hayden heard his voice come from the back hall. "I don't want anybody turning those lights off again!" Crawley was shouting.

Hayden stared after him.

"And I thought I had seen everything!" the reporter said.

He started up the steps to look for Nardia Barclay.

The lights went out again, plunging the whole house into darkness.

"Damn you bastards to hell and gone!" he heard Crawley yelling. "I told you to quit turning off those lights. How many times do I have to tell you before it sinks in?"

HAYDEN groped his way back down the stairs, through the back hall, and into the butler's pantry. Green was in there. He was phlegmatically relighting his candle. "The lights seem to have gone off again," he observed. As though he knew what Hayden wanted, he led the way

through the kitchen and into the back entrance where the light switch was located. The kitchen, the back entrance, were empty. Whoever had pulled the switch this time hadn't had many many minutes for a getaway and there was a chance they might run into him. They saw no one. Hayden was reaching up to shove the switch back into the proper position when he saw it was already closed. He jerked his hand away.

"The damned thing isn't open!"

"So it is," the butler said.

"But how could the lights go out when the switch was still on?"

"Perhaps a fuse blew out, sir."

The fuse box was directly under the switch. Hayden pulled it open, glanced inside.

A fuse was blown.

"I'll get a spare, sir," the butler volunteered. He trotted off into the kitchen, the fluttering candle making him look like some elderly benevolent gnome about important tasks in the darkness.

"Why in hell did this fuse pick this particular moment to blow out?" Hayden wondered. "Why didn't it blow out an hour ago? Unless—"

Had the fuse blown out because somebody had shorted the lighting circuit somewhere in the house? Usually a house as big as this one was served by several different circuits, with individual fuses in each circuit, but this was an old installation and the whole house was on one line. When a fuse blew, the whole house was left dark.

Had somebody short-circuited the the wires?

Short-circuiting was not a difficult trick. Screw out a light bulb, slip a penny into the socket, screw the bulb back in again, bingo! It could be done anywhere there was a lighting fixture or a light bulb. There were lighting outlets in every room.

To Hayden's left was a door that led to the outside of the house. As he stood there in the darkness, trying to decide whether the blowing of the fuse had been accidental or deliberate, he was suddenly aware that this door was slowly coming open. He could hear it squeak as it turned on its hinges.

Every hair on his body stood straight up on its hind legs and howled like a frightened wolf.

"Ken," a voice whispered. "Is that you, Ken?"

Nardia's voice! His gasp of relief came from the bottom of his heart. "Nardia! Are you out there?"

"Sh!" she whispered. "Come here and come quietly."

He felt her hand guiding him. "There are two steps," she said, still speaking in a whisper. "Watch carefully. I'll close the door."

HE HEARD the door squeak as she closed it. They were completely outside the house. The thunderstorm had passed but a thin drizzle of rain was still falling from the overcast sky. The night was blacker than black. The big house behind them, the servant quarters and garage at the rear, were dim blobs of deeper blackness in a darkness already so deep it seemed as solid as a wall.

"How did you get out here? I've looked all over this blasted house for you. I was scared to death something had happened—"

"Sh! I heard you calling but I didn't dare answer and I didn't dare go back into the house."

"Why?"

"Because someone is looking for me!" she whispered.

"Someone is looking for you?"

Her whisper sank even lower.

"Someone is trying to kill me," she said.

"Huh?" he grunted. She was wearing a rough topcoat. She clung to him and he could feel her shiver.

"I could feel him looking for me," she continued. "I knew then that I had to get out of the house. When the lights went out I slipped out of my room and came downstairs. I found some shoes that belong to one of the maids and this coat in a closet. I put them on and came outside. Ken, I'm scared."

"How do you know anyone is after you?"

"I can feel it," she answered. "I can't tell you how I know what I know. Ken, after all you've seen tonight, surely you don't doubt that I can feel things."

"You mean you're reading someone's mind?"

"Yes."

"I thought you could only do that when you were in a trance."

"Usually, that's right. Once in a while I can do it when I'm not in a trance. Ken, you've got to believe me."

"I believe you all right. I wish to hell I didn't! Who is looking for you?"

He felt rather than saw her shake her head. "I don't know."

"But—"

"I don't know who he is. I don't even know whether it's a man or a woman. But there's one thing I do know about him."

"What?"

"He isn't sane." He felt her shudder as she spoke.

Drops of rain dripped from the leaves of the trees making single splashing sounds as they struck the ground.

"I can feel his mind," her whisper continued. "I can't see him or tell anything about him. I catch little splashes of his thoughts, little glimpses, enough to know that he has

stopped thinking logically, in terms of cause and effect. That's why I can't get his or her name. To him, he isn't a man or he isn't a woman any longer. Not being a man or a woman, he doesn't have a name. He's insane, Ken, insane."

Her voice was a whisper as thin and as intangible as the drifting rain mist.

"He doesn't think as we think. His values are distorted and warped and he has a tremendous urge for power, a mad, insane urge for power. Murder, killing someone, is one way to satisfy that power lust. Murder isn't evil to him now. It's pleasant, pleasant because it satisfies his urge for power."

"Why is he looking for you?"

"Because I have power too, the power to read minds. He doesn't want me to have that power because it is a greater power than he has."

"He isn't trying to kill you to shut you up?"

"No. That may have been his original motive but it isn't his motive any longer. He has gone insane, here, tonight, within the last hour, and his motives have changed completely."

THERE WAS a baffled, distorted feeling of logic in her words, a mad sort of reason that gave Hayden a touch of the jumping willies. The light of a candle gleamed through the kitchen window. Green was returning to replace the blown fuse.

"I'm partly responsible for this man going insane," Nardia Barclay's rueful whisper came. "He was already close to insanity and the things that have happened here tonight have pushed him over the edge."

"Him and me both," Hayden vehemently said. He was trying to decide what to do. Accustomed all his life to living in the city where a police force was always available to run a nut off to the booby hatch, he was

faced with the necessity of solving this problem himself. He was not finding the solution easy.

"I guess we work this one out ourselves," he thought.

Near them, but inside the house, he heard a *thump*, a solid, heavy sound. The girl's grip tightened on his arm. "What was that?" he whispered.

Pound, pound, pound, like a meat cleaver on a butcher block, the sound came again. It was coming from the kitchen of the big house. *Pound, pound*. Then silence, broken only by the splash of water from the trees. He could feel Nardia trembling.

"What was that?" Hayden repeated. He felt her shake her head.

"You are certain someone inside the house has suddenly gone insane?"

"I'm positive of it."

"And he's roaming around in the dark?"

"Yes."

"And he may kill anybody who gets in his way?"

"Yes."

"Then there's only one thing to do—go in and tell everybody what has happened so they will have a chance to protect themselves.

"That's right, Ken."

"You stay here," he said.

"No. I'll be safer with you."

"I wish I had your confidence. I shudder to think what's going to happen when we tell that bunch in there that a murderous maniac is loose in their midst. A lot of those people will go nuts themselves when they learn that. I guess the best thing to do is to get several of the men together, tell them what has happened, then see if we can't run the killer down. First and foremost, we've got to get the lights on. What the devil has happened to Green? It shouldn't have taken him this long to replace that fuse."

He was talking to himself, clari-

fying the situation in his own mind and arranging the moves he was going to make. Survival was the problem now. Just staying alive was the job. Staying alive until they could get away, staying alive until help could reach them.

Staying alive didn't sound too difficult. There were fifty, maybe a hundred guests in the house. Surely that many people ought to be able to catch one maniac.

"I wish I had a gun," he thought. He opened the door, stepped inside, and stumbled over something lying on the floor.

He reached down and touched the object he had stumbled over.

It was the body of a man.

He fumbled in his pocket for a package of matches, found one, struck it.

The sightless eyes of the butler stared up at him.

THE WHOLE back of Green's head had been caved in. His candle, extinguished, was lying by his right hand. A fuse lay several inches from his left hand.

Hayden gingerly picked up the candle, held his match to the wick. The flame caught. "That pounding sound we heard was this!" he whispered. Above him as he bent over he could hear the girl breathing hard, knew he was doing some noisy breathing himself.

"The killer followed Green, hit him with a club or a hammer."

"The poor man," Nardia whispered. "Why did I ever come here tonight? I'm the cause of his death. If I had only stayed home—"

"Hold your horses," Hayden snapped. "You're no more to blame for this than I am. It isn't your fault that some men are embezzlers, others are thieves, and still others are murderers. It isn't your fault. The thief

was a thief long before you came here, the murderer had committed murder, and the insane man was ready to go insane. Sooner or later, he was going to blow his top anyhow."

"I know, but—"

He stood up, held the candle in one hand, cradled her in his left arm, and let her cry. He watched the door to the kitchen. "I'll never read minds again," she whispered. "Not ever again, never! No matter what happens, I won't do it. The consequences are too terrible."

"Don't blame yourself, it isn't your fault," he told her. Still watching the kitchen, he stooped down and picked up the fuse from the floor, straightened up to fit it into the socket. "Light is what we need, Nardia. As soon as we get some light, we will be all right. Don't worry about it."

He started to slip the fuse into place. And saw the switch was open.

It was not only open but it was pounded completely out of shape.

The blades were broken and twisted. One blade was missing. The handle and crossbar were missing.

A new switch and an electrician to install it would be needed to put the lighting system into working order.

"Somebody doesn't want us to have electric lights!" Hayden said grimly.

The sound of footsteps groping through the kitchen jerked his eyes back in that direction. A man holding a lighted match in front of him poked into the areaway. Hayden recognized him as one of the guests, a stock broker by the name of Gelette. Gelette saw them, saw the body on the floor at the same instant. His eyes popped open and he dropped the match.

"What—what happened to him?" he whispered.

Hayden explained what had happened, then said, "Gelette, I want you to round up eight or ten men, sober

if you can find that many, and bring them down to the kitchen. There's a job to be done and we're going to have to get organized to do it."

Gelette nodded. "They'll be sober when they get down here and see this and hear what you have to tell them," he said. "I wasn't sober when I came in here but I'm sober now." Holding a lighted match in front of him, he turned and walked through the kitchen.

Hayden started searching for candles. They had to have light of some kind. In a house like this, there was certain to be a supply of candles somewhere. Green had known where the candles were, but Green wasn't talking any more, about candles or anything else.

The big house was alive with subdued sounds, the murmur of frightened voices, the movement of feet. Little intangible noises that might mean anything came to Hayden's ears as he searched for the candles.

An insane killer was moving silently among many little noises.

HAYDEN found the candles in the butler's pantry, neatly stacked away in a drawer. He took them into the kitchen. Nardia helped him set them on the tables, on the window ledges, on top of the big electric stove and the huge ice box. They lit them.

"Anyhow we've got light in the kitchen," Hayden said. The door leading to the butler's pantry and from that into the big dining room swung open. Gelette entered. Following him in single file were six men. They came cautiously into the kitchen. Hayden looked them over. They were a scared, bewildered-looking lot, some of them well along in booze.

"We've got an insane murderer to capture," Hayden said. "Some of his

work is right out there by the light switch, if you care to look."

They looked out into the area-way, saw the body of the butler lying there. The sight sobered them up.

"A murderer!" one gulped. "That's a job for the police!"

"It's a job for us tonight," Hayden said. "For once in our lives, we are going to have to do our dirty work ourselves instead of having somebody else do it for us. We can't even call the police and they couldn't get here if we could call them. We might as well face the situation. We've got to catch this man, or woman, we've got to stop him."

"Who is he?" a man whom Hayden vaguely remembered as being named Curtis asked. Curtis was another stock broker and normally he oozed oil and confidence that everything was completely all right in the best of all possible worlds. Curtis wasn't oozing confidence now. He looked as if he wished he was back in New York with nothing but stock market bears and bulls to worry about.

"I don't know who he is," Hayden answered. "He might be Sam Crawley, he might be Marcus Woster, or he might be somebody else. For all I know, he may be one of you."

They looked uneasily at each other then, each wondering about the others.

"The man who turned off the lights is the killer, I *think*," Hayden said.

"I heard Crawley raising hell because the lights were off," Curtis spoke.

"So did I," Hayden said. "Have any of you seen Crawley recently?"

Shaking heads answered him.

"Do you have any idea where he is?"

Gelette pulled out a package of crumpled cigarettes, lit one. "I haven't seen him since you showed him the

body of his murdered wife," he spoke. "He went back downstairs."

"Has anybody seen Marcus Woster?"

Again the head shake ran around the group. Hayden turned to the pale and silent girl. "Can you help us out?"

Her voice was toneless. "I'm sorry, Ken, but I can't."

"All right then. Here is what I think we had better do. I want two men to stay here in the kitchen—"

He left two men and two candles in the kitchen. At the foot of the front stairs, he left two more men and two more candles. In the big hall on the second floor, he posted two more men with candles. Gelette he sent back to the butler's pantry for more candles. "Just keep your eyes open. Sooner or later some of us will find the man we want. In the meantime, we're going to put candles everywhere."

Gelette came puffing up the stairs with a double handful of the useful wax sticks. "That's all I could find," he said. Hayden distributed them.

THE GUESTS huddled around the flickering flames. Candlelight was not much but it was better than the darkness. And it was a darned sight better than matches and cigarette lighters.

Hayden drew the girl to one side. "Can you still feel him?" he said.

She nodded. "He's still here, I can't tell where he is or what he is doing but I can feel some of his thoughts. He has seen the candles and knows we are looking for him. He is worried because we are looking for him but most of his thoughts are about the candles. I get—"

She hesitated, then continued. "I can't express the way he is thinking and the way he feels. There aren't any words for that sort of thing. But

—the candles fascinate him. He saw them and now he is thinking about them and his mind is radiating an odd feeling of pleasure. I can't describe the way he feels about the candles but it must be similar to the way a moth feels—a delight in the beauty of the flame."

Her voice was very low, her face taut, her eyes inward looking pools. She clung to Hayden and he patted her and tried to reassure her. Her mind was reaching out across space and making contact with another mind and Hayden knew, as he had always known since he first met her, that he was in the presence of a living, breathing miracle, of a phenomenon beyond the understanding. Fear was walking through him and he had to fight to keep it under control.

"You still don't know who he is?" he whispered.

"No. I doubt if he even knows his own name anymore. His mind is churning like a whirlpool. He doesn't even know who he is or what he is doing."

"Where is he? Can you tell me that?"

She looked at him and he knew she did not see him. Her eyes were out of focus, her vision centered inward. "I think he's in the kitchen," she whispered. "He saw a stove just a minute ago and he thought how nice and warm a stove is. He loves warmth just as he loves the flame of the candles. He's seeing candles again. And—" Her whisper strengthened. "He had a knife in his hand. Ken! Ken!"

"You think he's in the kitchen?"

"Yes. The knife, Ken!"

"Come on," he said. He led her along the hallway of the second floor moving toward the stairs that led downward. Frightened faces were turned toward them. Gelette, panting again, kept pace with them.

"Hurry, Ken. He's going to do

something. Something terrible!"

The girl tensed as if she had been touched by a live electric wire.

"He's done it!" she whispered.

"Done what?"

The hoarse yell of a frightened man came up the stairs and met them. The yell came from the kitchen.

"He did it again," Nardia sobbed.

THE TWO men stationed at the foot of the stairs beat Hayden, Nardia, and Gelette to the kitchen. When they got there they found four men in the room. Three of them were lifting Curtis on to the top of the kitchen table. When they got him there, they jerked off his coat. His shirt front was stained with red. He saw Hayden, spoke.

"He came in here and was talking to us. One of the candles fell over and I went to straighten it up. When my back was turned, he pulled a knife out of his pocket and took a swing at me."

"Who?"

"Crawley!" Curtis answered.

"Crawley!" Hayden echoed. "He tried to kill you?"

"He sure as hell did," Curtis said, "And for no reason."

"He had a reason," the girl spoke. "You knocked over the candle and put out its pretty light. That was enough reason for him."

"What the hell is she talking about?" the amazed broker gasped. "How did you know I knocked over the candle?" he said to the girl. She didn't answer.

"Sam Crawley!" Hayden thought. He knew he should have known the name of the killer all along. He knew Crawley well enough to know that the millionaire was psychotic. But how had Crawley turned out the lights the second time they had gone out? Realizing that the lights could have been shorted anywhere in the

house, he knew at last that Crawley could have put them out, then yelled in apparent anger for somebody else to stop turning off the lights. This was exactly the sort of devious subterfuge that would have appealed to his warped mind. And minutes after Rose Crawley had been found murdered Crawley had come down the steps from the second floor. Or had seemed to come down the steps. With the lights out, all he had to do was leave the drawing room, move half-way up the stairs and then turn around and come slowly back down. The check found in the hand of the murdered woman would not incriminate him. In fact, it would be the strongest kind of evidence that he hadn't killed her, since he knew that Hayden and everyone else would reason that no murderer would leave the equivalent of his calling card in his victim's hand.

"Where is he now?" Hayden spoke.

"He ran back in that direction," Curtis answered, pointing to the door that led to the butler's pantry.

"I caught a glimpse of him going down the stairs to the basement as we came back here," one of the men who had been stationed at the foot of the stairs said.

"Two of you stay here and help Curtis, the rest come with me," Hayden said.

At the head of the basement stairs he paused. "We know where he is now. All we have to do is go get him. I'll go first."

"You're going down into a dark basement and capture a murderous maniac?" Gelette questioned.

"I don't like it any better than you do," Hayden answered. "But it's got to be done."

THERE WAS a door at the head of the stairs, a heavy oak door, with a brightly polished brass knob.

Hayden put his ear close to the door, listened. He could hear nothing. He silently turned the knob, pushed gently on the door. It refused to open.

Laughter sounded on the other side. "You'll never catch me!" Crawley's voice came out to them.

"Sam!" Hayden called. "Come on out. We want to talk to you."

"Do you think I'm crazy?" Crawley yelled back at them.

"We'll have to break the door down," Hayden said. He backed off, hit the oak panels with his shoulder.

The door shook but did not give.

"Go get a big chair from the drawing room," Hayden said.

Gelette, taking two men with him, hastened away. The hallway and the dining room were filling with people. Nardia pulled at Hayden's arm.

"You will have to hurry," she whispered.

"Why? He's down there, we know where he is. He can't harm us as long as he is in the basement."

She seemed not to hear him. "He's thinking about candles again," she whispered.

"So what? He can't hurt us with a candle."

"He's thinking how bright candle flames are and how beautiful. Ken, you've got to hurry!" She was shivering again. Fear was hidden deep within her eyes.

Gillete and the men with him came staggering in with a heavy overstuffed chair.

They used the chair as a battering ram, drove it at the door. The crash was thunderous.

"Hurry!" Nardia screamed. Then she seemed to wilt. "It's too late now."

"What do you mean, too late?"

"He is looking at flames," she answered. "Paper is piled on the stairs leading to the basement—"

And Hayden at last understood

what she meant.

"Come on. We've got to knock that door down."

They backed off and used the chair again as a battering ram. A crack appeared in a panel but the door did not open.

"I smell smoke," someone whispered.

"Again!" Hayden yelled. "Hit that door again!"

Again the thunderous crash came as the chair was rammed against the door. This time a whole panel was knocked out. "One more lick will do the job," Hayden said.

Smoke was pouring through the crack under the door. Tongues of flame were following the smoke. A distinct crackling sound was audible in the hushed house. Hayden knew then what had happened.

He reached through the broken panel and tried to find the catch that was holding the door. Smoke boiled in his face. Flames puffed out of the opening, singed, drove him away from the door.

"The whole stairway is on fire!" he gasped.

Averting his head, he tried the door again. His groping fingers found the catch, released it. He shoved the door open.

IT WAS like operating the door of a furnace. Given a draft by the opening of the door, the flames roared upward in a bright yellow flood. Smoke poured into the room.

"Sam!" Hayden screamed.

The fire was on the stairway. Beyond it he could glimpse a man standing at the bottom of the stairs looking upward. Crawley! The millionaire had a bottle in one hand. He was watching the glowing flames.

"Aren't they beautiful?" he was screaming. "Look how bright they are!"

"Sam!" Hayden screamed again. He tried to enter the stairway and the flames forced him back. "You've got to get out of there. You'll burn to death."

"Are you still crazy?" the answer came.

"The house is on fire!" Hayden screamed.

"I know it is," Crawley answered. "I set it on fire. Aren't the flames beautiful? All my life I've loved flames."

"But, Sam—"

Laughter came from down below. Hayden saw the millionaire take a drink out of the bottle, then upend the bottle and dribble the contents on the stairway. Hayden's first thought was that the bottle contained water and that Crawley was keeping the fire from coming down to him. Then he saw the flames leap up as the spattering drops touched them and he knew the bottle contained whiskey or brandy.

"Come down and join me, Ken," Crawley called to him. "I'll let you play with my fire too."

These were the last words Hayden heard. The fire forced him away from the doorway. After that his impressions were dazed, muddled, confused. He remembered swearing at the frightened guests and telling them they had to get out of the house. He remembered going outside the house and attempting to organize men to break into the basement through one of the basement windows or the outside door. The basement windows were covered with heavy iron bars and the outer door was locked. By the time they got it broken down the flames were coming out of it too, driving the would-be rescuers back. Crawley's supply of liquor was stored in the basement. The flames reached the stock, the bottles began to explode, throwing flaming alcohol

bombs in every direction.

Crawley did not escape. He did not try to escape. As a moth loves the candle flame, he loved the sight of fire.

He died in the arms of the flames he loved.

THE BIG house burned for hours.

There was nothing anyone could do to stop the fire. There was no fire department within miles and no way for the fire department to reach them if pumpers had been available. The rain had died to a drizzle which did nothing whatsoever to quench the flames.

The panic-stricken guests watched the burning house. They climbed into the parked cars, crowded into the quarters of the servants. The fire roared upward.

Ken Hayden and Nardia Barclay sat in the back seat of somebody's limousine and watched the yellow flames soar up to the sky.

"You know," Hayden said slowly. "When you were in that trance, you described a murder, a death that seemingly resulted from accident. A man was killed in an accident that involved a racing car. You said somebody had tampered with the steering gear of the car and this had caused the accident."

"I don't remember what I said," she whispered.

"You said it was murder and that it happened long ago. Can you explain it to me, can you tell me more about it?"

"I'm sorry, Ken, but I can't."

"Could you have described a murder that happened years ago, a murder that you didn't read in anybody's mind, that nobody knew about any more?"

"That would be clairvoyance if I did a thing like that. I don't remember talking about it."

"But could you have been telling the truth?"

"Yes."

"Do you know," he went on, "that my grandfather was killed in exactly the kind of accident you described, in the way you described it?"

"No."

"Well, that's what happened," he said. "Crawley's grandfather and my grandfather were partners in a company that manufactured automobiles. My grandfather was killed in a demonstration of one of the cars they manufactured. Because of that, Sam Crawley became a millionaire—"

"But Crawley couldn't have killed your grandfather. He wasn't born then."

"I know it. But his grandfather could have filed the steering gear so it would break. And he inherited his millions from his father who got them from his grandfather, and—"

He was silent, thinking of the ancient murder she had described, thinking of what it might have meant to him.

"Are you sorry you didn't inherit at least part of the money that Crawley had?" she questioned.

He shuddered. "Not a bit sorry!" he answered fervently. "Not a bit." Before his eyes the flames of the burning house were shooting sky high.

Had Crawley's grandfather murdered his grandfather? He would never know, for sure, and it wouldn't make any difference if he did know. Better to let the dead past bury itself. If only it would stay buried! It kept coming to life again.

"Lord, no, I'm not sorry," he said again, watching the burning house.

A LITTLE man came poking among the cars looking for them. It was Marcus Woster. His clothes

were soaking wet, his shoes muddy, but his face, lighted by the flames from the burning house, was strangely peaceful.

"I tried to run away," he said.

"Why didn't you?" Hayden asked.

"Because I have been thinking," Woster answered. "And I have reached a conclusion. You cannot run away from sin, from wrong-doing. It always catches up with you sometime. You may think you have escaped, but you find you haven't. Nor will your sons escape, nor your grandsons, even unto the third generation."

"You have sons?" Hayden asked.

"Yes," Woster answered. He took a deep breath. "So I have reached a decision. I am going to the authorities and make a clean breast of everything."

"Then what Miss Barclay said about you was correct?" Hayden questioned.

"It was absolutely correct," Woster answered.

There was silence.

"You may have to go to prison," Hayden spoke.

"I am ready," Woster answered. "Better me than my sons or my grandsons."

He watched the flames eat the burning house. "I feel better now," he said at last. "I don't feel like I'm running any more, that I'm hiding."

He walked away from the car. His head was erect, his shoulders straight. He had made his peace with himself and was at peace.

"That little man has found something he never had before," Hayden said softly. "Your mind-reading act gets credit for making an honest man out of that little chiseler."

He was silent, thinking of the tremendous power she had, power for evil or for good, depending on the way she used it. He fervently hoped

she would always use it for good purposes.

"I will," she whispered, close to him. "We will—"

"Hey!" he gasped. "You're reading my mind now!"

He felt her nod, felt her move closer to him. He sighed.

THE END

The EARTH'S INTERIOR

By

Clayton LaStar

There have been theories about the Earth's interior, but they remain only theories. What is it really like at Earth's center?

FOR MANY years, man has been searching for information regarding the interior of the earth. Probably he can never observe directly the materials and conditions that exist at great depths. An imaginary super x-ray would reveal whether or not the composition of material varies with depth, if the innermost material is in liquid form, and what temperature conditions exist. However no such super x-ray exists and science must turn to indirect measurements and observations to obtain the desired information.

The measurement of temperature at various known depths indicates a general increase of temperature with depth. It is generally accepted that the earth's center has an enormous temperature of close to 20,000 degrees C. The heat of lava in surface volcanoes often reaches 1100 degrees centigrade. This is above the melting point of copper which is 1060 degrees centigrade. Hot springs and gyser are caused by the hot molten lava.

Seismology, the science of detecting and recording earthen vibrations, contributes a wealth of information about the earth's interior. Vibrations produced from earthquakes can be detected from distant points, oftentimes completely around the earth. Before the advent of seismology scientists believed that below a thin crust of solid earth existed hot liquid. However, the behavior

of subsurface vibrations proves this old concept false. These seismic waves can travel only in rigid formations and they have been found to penetrate into the central core of the earth.

With the aid of evidence based on temperature, pressure, seismic and other discoveries, scientists have presented the following picture of the earth's interior. Beginning at the surface there is a thin layer of unconsolidated material ranging from a few feet to several hundred feet. The next zone is composed of a dense layer of rock, approximately 600 miles in depth. Outcrops of this layer is evident on the continental land masses.

The third and fourth layer is still surrounded with shreds of mystery. It is supposed that the third layer, approximately 1200 miles deep is composed of oxides and sulphides. The remaining 2100 miles comprises the inner core and it is believed to be nickel and iron. It is interesting to point out the fact that much information is obtained from the study of meteorites that have fallen on our planet. Investigation of these fallen meteorites show that the majority of them are of metallic construction. However, spectroscopic study of meteors is indicative of flaming stoney material. This fact would tie in the relation that the outside of the meteor is composed of a layer of rock, and establish the resemblance of the meteors to the earth's composition.

THE END

SWAMP GIRL



of VENUS

By
H. H. HARMON

To die from the poison of the needles of a saro tree was the most horrible torture on all Venus—but maybe the fifels were worse!

IN A TINY clearing around a saro tree in the vast Southlands jungle of Venus, two humans and a Venusian were watching a native die. There was worry on their faces, they were afraid the native was going to die before he talked. After he had talked, of course, they were quite willing for him to die, in fact, they would give him the last necessary shove in that direction, but they didn't want him to pass on to his ancestors until he had told them what they wanted to know.

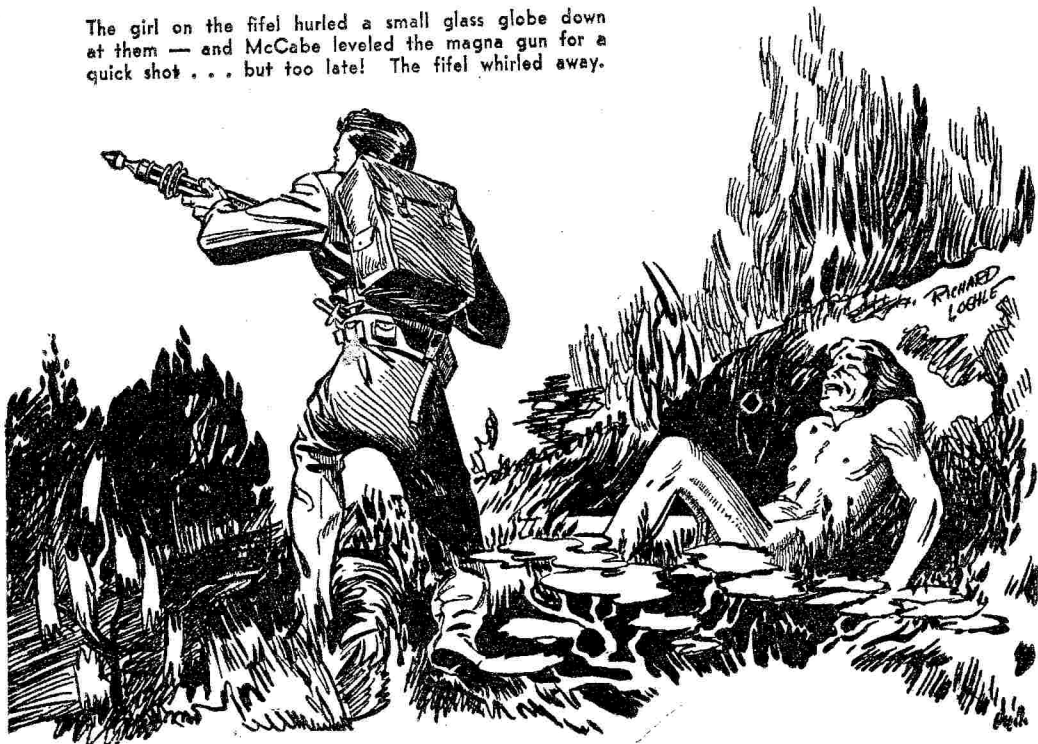
"Do you suppose this punk is

actually going to croak?" Red Haldane worried.

"I think he's playing possum," Ambrose Ritter answered. "Stick another one of them needles in him, to prove we mean business."

The "needles" were actually thorns broken from the saro tree. Needle-sharp and coated with a virulent poison, the natives of the Southlands jungle had used them for ages as blow-gun darts. Humans could usually survive two and sometimes three doses of this poison. Venusians had acquired a certain tolerance to the

The girl on the fifel hurled a small glass globe down at them — and McCabe leveled the magna gun for a quick shot . . . but too late! The fifel whirled away.



poison and could survive five or six of the needles.

The native on the ground already had four of the needles in him.

A saro tree grew in the center of the little clearing. In fact, the existence of the saro tree accounted for the clearing itself, poison dripping from the thorns killed all vegetation within a radius of ten feet. Reaching up with his gloved hand, Haldane cut another thorn from the tree.

"Where'll I stick this one?" he asked.

The third member of the trio, Kard, a Venusian, spoke softly in the slurry Southlands language. "Don't stick him with it, just scratch him with the point. Better results from scratching. Hurt more, don't die so fast."

"Oh, an expert," Haldane said approvingly. He grinned and spoke to the bound native on the ground. "What say Juth? Wanta talk or want another dose of this?"

He waved the thorn in the air, making scratching motions with it. A small droplet of dark green ooze had already collected on the point. With sick fascination in his eyes, Juth stared at the needle. "Not know," he whispered. "Not know anything about Coth. Please—not know."

"He knows all right," Kard grunted. "He's just stubborn. Go on and scratch him with that saro thorn."

"Scratch yourself with it." Hal McCabe spoke from the edge of the clearing.

The three jumped like startled cats suddenly dropped on top of a hot stove. From the expression on their faces, that had thought no one was within miles of them. Haldane's hand started toward the magna pistol holstered at his hip, Ritter's hand jumped toward the rifle leaning against the saro tree, Kard dropped his hand to the hilt of one of the throwing knives stuck in his belt.

When they saw the blunt muzzle of the magna rifle covering them from the edge of the clearing, they quickly changed their minds about reaching for their own weapons.

Nobody in his right mind took a chance on a magna rifle. The three lifted their hands.

"Okay," McCabe said. The two humans he knew vaguely as being jungle traders, which was his occupation also. What they were doing here torturing a native he did not know, but he knew exactly what he was going to do about it. "Shuck the gun. You first, Red." Muted protests formed on Haldane's lips—he didn't want to lose his gun. Gently, McCabe squeezed the trigger of his rifle. There was a soft *phut*. No smoke came from the barrel of the rifle but something howled past Haldane's head, and flared in sudden violence in the jungle behind—the explosive shell of the magna gun.

"Better do as you're told," McCabe said. "You're a long way from taw."

HALDANE hastily unbuckled the gun belt and let the pistol slide to the ground. McCabe turned the magna rifle toward the Venusian. The belt of throwing knives followed the pistol. Ritter had no hand gun. The rifle leaning against the tree apparently belonged to him.

"Good," McCabe said.

"Who the hell are you? What the hell—"

"Each of you break a fresh thorn from the saro tree," McCabe said, as if he had not heard the question.

The three hesitated. Although they didn't understand the purpose of the order, they didn't like it. With the squirming native before his eyes, knowing they had been using torture, McCabe had no hesitancy. "Break off the thorns," he repeated. His voice was the coldest sound ever heard on

Venus. Reluctantly the three obeyed him. Breaking off the dripping thorns, they fingered them carefully.

"Stand in a circle," McCabe ordered. The three men shuffled into position.

"All right," McCabe said. "We're going to play a little game here. Each of you sticks the man in front of him. Ready now? Stick!" His voice roaring out the command, at the same instant he fired a shot from the magna rifle. The startled Venusian, his nerves already on edge, jabbed Red Haldane. Haldane roared in pain, and jabbed Ritter in an uncontrollable motion. Ritter screamed and jabbed the Venusian.

The effect of the saro poison is similar to a jab with a red-hot soldering iron. The poison in the needles produced instant pain and violent, uncontrollable, muscular contortions. A man who has been jabbed with a saro needle breaks instantly into a wild dance. A second later, so intense is the pain, he starts running.

The three dived headfirst into the jungle. Yells and the sounds of breaking branches came back after them. Listening to the sounds go out of hearing, McCabe grinned. "You dirty bums, you got exactly what was coming to you." He stepped out into the clearing.

Revealed was a big man, tall and well muscled, with a broad face and cold gray eyes. Greenish-colored water-proof clothes disappeared into water-proof boots, the standard water and bug-proof garb of a human in the Venusian jungle. His waist was circled by a broad belt, which held cartridge pouches, a hatchet in a protected sheath, two of the Venusian throwing knives. On his back was the typical pack of a trader.

He knelt beside the squirming, bound Venusian. Quickly he counted the livid patches of slowly spreading

red, the marks of the saro needles, shook his head when he saw four of them. Even to a native, this was going to be close. From his pack, he took a sealed box, which, opened revealed a hypodermic syringe and needles. Quickly he flushed an antiseptic solution through the syringe, plunged the needle into an ampule of colorless liquid. Into each of the patches of spreading red, he made a quick injection. Cleaning and replacing the hypodermic equipment in its container, he untied the native, made him as comfortable as possible, lit a cigarette, and waited. Already, under the influence of the drug, the native's breathing had grown less labored and his heart action had improved. "What's your name?" McCabe said.

The native gazed at him from devoted eyes. "Juth," he answered.

"What were they trying to get from you, Juth?"

"They try get me to take them to land of Coth," Juth replied. "Or tell them the way. I not want to."

"Coth?" McCabe mused. "Never heard of it." There were depths in this jungle that no human had ever penetrated, he knew. This was one reason he liked the place. Although space travel had been established for over twenty years, here in this jungle a man might find—anything. Venus was Earth all over again, with one important difference. It was Earth before the coming of civilization, before the dawn of the great barbarisms, Earth in the days of its wandering tribes, Earth in its savage jungle days.

FROM THE jungle came a howl.

From another direction came a series of grunts. Somewhere a lizard was singing, a high thin song like the piping of a wren. McCabe, whose ears missed nothing, knew that the howl came from a frog, that the grunts

came from a mottled hyena hunting carrion, and as for the singing of the lizard, the sound took him back to Earth, back to the days when he was a boy watching the wrens nest in the tin can beside the kitchen door. The singing lizard always made him homesick. He shrugged the homesickness out of his mind. Venus was his home now.

Off in the distant sky, just under the canopy of eternal clouds, shadows moved. For a moment, McCabe thought they were planes, although he knew the only planes on Venus were helicopters brought by humans. Then he saw the flapping wings.

Along the back of his neck, hair crawled. The things that flapped in the sky were huge birds. As he watched they slid out of sight into the clouds.

"The great birds of Venus!" he thought. As a trader, he had heard his fair share of what he considered to be tall tales. Once a native had told him a tale of a lost tribe that lived somewhere in the Southlands jungle and raised and trained huge birds. There was something else too, about the birds and the bird people... He couldn't remember what it was except that it hadn't been pleasant.

From behind him came a sudden wail. Turning, he saw the native had struggled to his feet and was pointing toward the sky where the huge birds had vanished. His face, already blotched with pain and oozing drops of green perspiration where the drug was boiling the saro poison out of him, was writhed with fear. Clutching at McCabe to hold himself erect, he poured slurred words into the human's ear, speaking so rapidly that the trader could not understand him.

"Slow down, old man. What's wrong."

"The *fifel*—" McCabe translated

the word literally to mean "flying death". "The *fifel* come. Hide!" Tugging at McCabe, the native urged him to seek hiding in the jungle. McCabe patted the stock of the magna rifle, with this gun he had stopped the charge of a swamp alligator that weighed three tons.

"I've got my own brand of flying death," he said.

The native shook his head. "Gun no good," he said. "No stop flying death." Over and over again he said it. McCabe was unmoved. "You've got so much saro poison in you that you're nuts," he said.

Off in the distance a rain squall was approaching. He fitted the cover over his pack and pulled the hood over his head. From the ground he picked up the magna pistol and buckled the belt around his waist. Juth clutched at the belt of throwing knives. buckled it around him—and watched the sky.

The rain squall struck. "Hide," the native repeated.

"Okay," McCabe answered. They moved into the jungle.

Above them, from the heavy growth of interlacing leaves, came the drum of raindrops. Down on the ground level was misty twilight. The jungle formed a canopy over them but Juth seemed to feel the canopy was no protection. Listening, watching every opening in the branches above them, he continually urged McCabe to hurry. Suddenly he stopped, hissed sharply, and jerked his head up like a dog on a point.

Through an opening in the leaves above them, McCabe caught a glimpse of gigantic wings beating the air. Rising above the drum beat of the rain on the leaves were sharp, shrill voices calling back and forth to each other.

The giant birds! The *fifel* were

above them. McCabe lifted the magna rifle, then gulped as he caught a clear glimpse of one of the huge creatures. The bird had a rider!

THIS ONE fact was enough to make the trader gasp. But there was a second, even more startling fact. The rider was a woman! And not only a woman but a woman from Earth.

So far as McCabe knew there were not a hundred human women on the whole steaming planet. There wasn't one in the whole Southlands jungle area and there wouldn't be one, McCabe had always thought, in the next century. They liked their comfort too well to buck the jungle, style shows, new clothes, perfumed baths, none of which were available in the jungle. Hence, no women.

Except one! And she rode a gigantic bird that, from its looks was more reptile than fowl.

As McCabe gawked upward, his mind heavy with wonder, the second giant bird flapped into sight above them. Looking down, the rider seemed to catch a glimpse of him through the opening in the leaves. Calling out shrilly, the rider pointed downward, then flung something that came smashing through the green leaves above them.

"Run!" Juth screamed. "Get away—quick!"

"A bomb!" McCabe thought. He started to run. The bomb hit within ten feet of him and exploded with a soft phut. The explosion would not have harmed a singing lizard and McCabe's first thought was that the bomb was a dud. Then as a giant hand seemed to reach inside of him and grab his lungs in a paralyzing grip, he realized only too well what the bomb contained.

"Gas!" he choked out.

It was the last word he spoke. The ground seemed suddenly to come up and hit him in the face. He went down like a falling tree, in a clatter of useless magna weapons, hit the ground, groaned, tried to get to his feet, and collapsed, unconscious.

The native, holding his nose, got a few steps farther than the trader. Then a second bomb smashed through the leaves and the Venusian, forced to open his mouth to breathe, got a lung-full of the gas and went down to the ground with the trader.

Above them, over the rain-splashed jungle, flapped two mighty creatures out of nightmare land, two flying reptiles. Off in the far distance, others were coming.

Like vultures, They circled, then like vultures finding waiting carrion, they came down.

THE AFTER EFFECTS of the gas were not pleasant. McCabe's first dazed impression was that his head was going to split open. Then, as he realized how his stomach was feeling, he hoped his head would split open.

On Venus, a trader has to have an iron constitution and a level head. Both are needed to survive. Venus is no place for little Nellies.

No one had ever accused Hal McCabe of having lace on the edge of his underpants. When he opened his eyes, rolled over and sat up, cursing the way his head felt, he discovered he didn't even have any underpants.

Stripped competely naked, he was in a cell as bare as he was. Dim light filtered through a barred window high up on one wall. Between the bars splashed the eternal rain of Venus. The 52 hour day was drawing to a close. With McCabe was Juth.

The red blotches of the saro poison had almost disappeared and Juth was looking better. The expression

on his face said he wasn't feeling as well as he looked. Like McCabe, Juth was without clothes.

Holding his head in both hands, Juth groaned. "Head him feel like hell."

"Head him feel like mine," McCabe answered. "Stomach him feel worse. Where the hell are we?"

"That's where we are," Juth answered.

"Huh?" McCabe grunted, not understanding.

"In hell," Juth said.

Since hell was an Earth word and an Earth concept, Juth didn't really know what the word meant. All he knew was that it was supposed to be a bad place. But, if he didn't have a clear conception of the meaning of hell, he did know exactly where he was. And in his opinion, he was in a very bad place.

"Land of Coth, land of fifel," Juth said. "Same as hell. Maybe worse. Rather be in hell than back here."

"Back here?" McCabe questioned.

"I here once," Juth explained. "Captured, brought here, turned loose in valley. Got away. Fifel after me. You with me when they caught me. Bad luck for you." He shook his head sorrowfully.

McCabe grunted soundlessly. He got slowly to his feet, moved to the wall, and looked up at the grill in the window above him. His first leap was short. His second enabled him to catch one of the bars. He pulled himself up to the window.

Overhead, so near the wisps of mist were passing just above the window, were the eternal clouds of Venus. Below him was a straight drop of hundreds of feet. Stretching away into the distance, almost hemmed in by mountains, was a tremendous valley. As he watched a giant bird rose from the valley, flapped upward through the rain, lit on a ledge, and waddled

out of sight. From its talons dangled a swamp deer.

"Valley is hunting grounds of fifel," Juth said from the floor. "Birds are trained there."

Under the pressure of McCabe's weight, the bar to which he was clinging was slowly bending. He stared at it. The metal was overlaid with a thick layer of greenish corrosion but at the spot where the bar was bending the corrosion was cracking away, revealing the dull yellow color of the metal underneath. A pressure began to build up inside the trader. He dropped back to the floor. "Juth, those bars are made of gold!" he exclaimed.

"So what?" Juth said, utterly unimpressed. "You can bend bars and get out. Long way to ground. Big broken neck if you go that way."

"I wasn't thinking about getting out," McCabe answered. "Those bars are made out of gold. Doesn't that mean anything to you?"

Juth shrugged, conveying the impression that gold meant something but that his neck meant more. "Much gold here. Very common. That's why they were sticking saro thorns in me, to get me to guide them to land of Coth. They wanted gold. Me, I wanted to stay alive."

"I see," McCabe said grimly. "So that was what those buzzards wanted?" For a moment, he wished he had been a little careless in aiming the magna rifle.

"Sure," Juth said. "What good is gold to a dead man?" He shrugged.

"Eh?" McCabe said, startled.

"You and me same as dead men," the native answered.

"You got out of this place once, didn't you?" the trader challenged.

"Once," Juth answered. "Very, very lucky. Nobody ever be so lucky twice."

"Tell me about this land of Coth," McCabe answered. "Maybe we can figure out some way to be lucky twice."

OUT OF THE halting words, he got a picture of a vast section of land lost in the Southlands swamp, its location, even its very existence unknown to most natives of Venus. Probably it had been mapped on the radar screens of space ships from Earth but the mountains and the swampy jungle had discouraged attempts at landing here. Even the hardy traders had never penetrated to Coth. From Juth's answers, McCabe got the impression that of all the savage places on this planet, the land of Coth was the most savage.

"They turn us loose down in valley," Juth finished. "Hunt us with great birds. Much fun—but not for us."

"Eh?" McCabe said. "You're nuts, Juth." But deep in his heart, McCabe suspected the native was telling the truth. He knew Venus and Venus was Earth in the days of Earth's cruel youth, when strong men took what they wanted of the wealth and the women and weak men took what was left. In his more candid moments, McCabe could not see where the Earth had ever really advanced beyond this point. Men used space ships and knew how to control the atom, they had magic drugs to cure diseases, their astronomers probed the depths beyond the stars, their living was made comfortable by a host of gadgets, in these and a thousand other ways they had advanced, but in devious ways the strong men still got what they wanted of the available wealth and women. Men had hunted each other with bows and arrows, with spears and meat axes, with poison gas and atom bombs. Why shouldn't one tribe of Venusians hunt

other Venusians with giant birds? McCabe grunted tonelessly. There wasn't any reason why they shouldn't. It was just his bad luck to be on the hunted end.

A metallic clang came from a section of the wall and a door swung aside. Three natives, armed with swords and the eternal throwing knives, entered. Behind them came the woman McCabe had seen riding the giant bird. The three natives said nothing. The woman moved forward into the cell.

There followed then the spectacle of a tough jungle trader trying desperately hard to hide behind a Venusian as McCabe, remembering his nakedness, tried to put Juth between him and the advancing woman. "Get out of here!" he yelled.

The girl stopped and stared at him, astonishment on her face. To her, the fact that he was unclothed meant nothing. She didn't have on many clothes herself and she was completely accustomed to the society of unclothed natives.

Profanity rumbled deep in McCabe's throat. This was no way to treat a man. "What do you want?"

"I—I want to talk to you," she answered hesitantly, apparently at a loss as how to interpret his strange actions in trying to hide behind another person. "Bel-ast captured you. He claims you do not belong to any of the jungle peoples, or even to Venus." She spoke in the slurred Southlands language but a dialect that McCabe had trouble in understanding.

"So I don't," he answered. "I came from another world."

"Another world?" Sudden eagerness showed in her eyes, then was quickly blotted out. "But there are no other worlds." Glancing sideways at the natives with her, she repeated the words as if they were some lesson she had learned and must not forget.

McCABE STARED at her incredulously. Her gray eyes and brown hair, her lithe legs and tanned skin, the shape of her face, these and a thousand other things told him she came from Earth. Why, then, should she deny the existence of other worlds? "What makes, baby?" he said softly, in English. "Have these buzzards got you behind the eight ball?" He glanced at the natives with her.

She frowned at him, her eyes blank of understanding. "What noises are these?" she asked.

"What kind of a game are you playing?" McCabe said angrily. He thought he was being tricked, somehow. There was also the galling irritation of his nakedness and the fact that he had to keep hiding behind Juth. Why in the hell had they taken his clothes away from him? Without clothes, he couldn't think what he was saying to this woman. "Sure, I came from another world. So did you. Haven't you ever seen a space ship?"

The expression in her eyes seemed to indicate she thought he was crazy. Many natives, lost under the eternal cloud banks, had never seen a space ship, but this girl had certainly seen one, had in fact arrived in Venus in one. There just wasn't any other way to get here.

One of the natives stepped forward, lifting his sword. "Shall I teach this animal some manners?" he asked, indicating McCabe.

At the sight of the sword, Juth dropped instantly to the floor. McCabe stood naked and alone in the middle of the room. As the native glanced over his shoulder at the girl, to see what she wanted him to do about teaching this animal some manners, the animal stepped forward, caught the native's sword hand wrist in his left hand, shoved the sword out of the way and drove his right fist

clear up to the wrist into the native's stomach.

The native whooshed air in a gasping grunt and went down, the sword clattering on the floor. McCabe snatched up the glittering weapon. "Grab the girl, Juth!" he yelled. The two natives were already moving.

IN THIS moment, McCabe would have given a year of his life for a magna pistol. The two natives had been standing together. As McCabe picked up the sword, they split apart and each drawing a sword, came at him from different directions. If he had had a magna pistol, they would have been sitting ducks, but armed with a sword, he was the sitting fowl. From the left a sword reached at him. He struck it aside. From the right the second native moved in, sword arm outstretched in a diving lunge—and screamed in pain as the sword arm was suddenly cut completely in two. McCabe gasped. The girl had snatched free the sword strapped around her own shapely waist and had moved into the fight—on his side!

McCabe was so astonished at the sight that the native coming in from the left almost spitted him before he realized what was happening. He swayed to one side. The sword passed under his arm. Dropping his own weapon, he closed his left arm around the native's neck. Fists and the use of fists McCabe thoroughly understood. His right fist came up. There was a solid *thwuck!* Released, the native spun backward and collapsed, moaning, in the corner of the cell.

McCabe turned to face the girl. "Thanks," he said. She started to speak. He held up his hand. "Just a minute." Stripping the clothing from the unconscious native in the corner, he speedily donned it himself. "Okay, now I'm ready to talk."

The native who had lost an arm was

clasping the stump and standing in sullen silence against the wall. Juth was busy picking up swords and strapped belts or throwing knives around his middle.

"So they were holding you prisoner?" McCabe spoke to the girl.

"No, not exactly. They considered me as one of their people." From her lips, in slurred Venusian and the stumbling, halting English that a child might use—or a person who has not spoken the language for a long time—poured a torrent of words. "I've been living here in this valley for twelve years. My father was a trader. He landed here in a space ship and the natives attacked him. Because I was only a child at the time, they adopted me."

"And you have been living here as a Venusian girl all this time?" McCabe gasped.

"Living here and waiting for the day when one of my own people would come here!" she answered. "I didn't dare try to escape without help. They would catch me and—" A shudder passed over her body. Her eyes came up to McCabe. "Will you help me?"

"Of course!" the astonished trader answered. "The only catch is—how? Juth tells me it isn't exactly easy to escape from the land of Coth."

"Don't worry about that," the quick answer came. "Less than a month ago, I discovered a perfect way to escape from this place. But I had to have help. Just as soon as night comes, we'll be gone. That is—if you will help me?"

"It's a deal!" McCabe answered instantly. "But first, I want my own weapons, if you can get them for me."

"I can and I will. Come with me."

"But what about these birds?" McCabe indicated the three natives.

"Leave them here," the girl an-

swered. "We'll lock the door on the outside. They can't escape."

"Hot golly damn!" Juth said, as he and McCabe followed the girl to the door. Outside of the cell was a tunnel cut into solid rock. The door had a heavy metal bar, which they fitted into place. In the distance down the tunnel a flaring torch set in a wall socket gave a dim illumination to the scene.

"The whole mountain is honey-combed with tunnels and living quarters," the girl explained. "The people of Coth live here, in the mountain itself. There are levels above and below this one. If we meet anyone, act as if you belong here and the chances are, you won't be noticed. Your weapons are two levels below this one and we have to go down to the bottom level to escape."

THEY MOVED down the tunnel. Below the first torch was an open door, with dim light coming from inside. Through the door, they caught a glimpse of a Venusian family moving about. The sleeping mats had been laid out and the natives were preparing for the coming of night. Since their world turned on its axis once in every fifty-two hours, the natives had adjusted themselves to a sleeping period of approximately this length. For the next fifty-two hours, McCabe hoped the whole tribe of Coth would sleep like so many logs.

They walked boldly past the open doorway and the Venusians inside did not so much as glance at them.

More torches appeared in the wall niches, each one marking the door of living quarters. Each time they walked past. The girl, of course, was known. In the dim light, the two men with her were not conspicuous. When she led them safely down two levels

and opened a door and placed his magna rifle in his hands, McCabe almost whooped with joy. With this gun in his possession, he could lick the whole tribe of Coth. The pistols were in this room too. He removed the sword harness he had taken from the native and strapped the pistol belts around his waist.

"Okay, sweetheart, what next?" the trader asked.

"Sweetheart?" The English word puzzled her and she repeated it, trying to grasp the meaning. "Don't let it worry you," McCabe laughed. "It's just a name for a pretty girl. By the way, what is your real name?"

A shadow crossed her face. "I do not remember my real name. My name in the land of Coth is Le-ann."

"All right, Le-ann, lead us out of here." He had no idea where she was taking them but she had said she knew a way to escape and she had proved she knew all the ins and outs of the land of Coth. He and Juth followed her. They went down, down, down. The wall torches disappeared. They moved through darkness. Ahead came the sound of running water and McCabe knew where she was taking them. Into the swamp! Coming to the end of the tunnel, the swamp was before them.

The night was pitch black and they couldn't see the swamp but they could hear it. There was the sound of rain and the splash of water falling down the face of the cliff and above every other sound there was audible a vast, submerged, never-ending roar that came from the life in the swamp itself. The roar was composed of a thousand different sounds, the soft singing of a lizard, the distant muted bellow of an alligator, the hollow booming of love-hungry frogs as big as washtubs, all blended into one vast symphony of sound. There were beasts out in the valley who

made no sound, McCabe knew, like the wegarths, the hunting dinosaurs, who moved in silence. Le-ann didn't seem to mind either the darkness or the booming symphony of death coming from the swamp. "Follow me," she said, and plunged forward.

"Hold up, hold up!" Juth protested. He was a native and he did mind the swamp. "Cross swamp at night!" Horror sounded in his voice.

"But we're not going to cross it," Le-ann answered. "We're only going a little distance." Urgency sounded in her voice. "Let me tell you, it would be better to try to cross the swamp on foot than to risk recapture by the men of Coth."

"The devil in front and the devil behind," McCabe muttered. "Lead on." He followed the girl. Juth followed him. But Juth didn't like it. McCabe could hear the native praying softly to dim Venusian gods to protect him from all the dangers of the planet, but to protect him most from women and the swamp.

THEY SPLASHED through water and mud. Slippery things moved reluctantly out of their way. In spite of the almost total blackness, the girl moved swiftly, not minding the rain or the mud any more than a native. Trying to estimate how far they had gone, McCabe guessed they had traveled less than half a mile. They were in a grove of tall trees and among a nest of interlacing vines. If there was a trail, only the girl knew where it was located. She stopped. "Wait here a moment," her whisper came. She slid forward into the darkness and disappeared.

Behind McCabe Juth stirred apprehensively, muttering about the delay. "There are wegarths in this place," Juth's whisper came. "I smelled one not two minutes ago."

"Hell, I know there are wegarths

here," McCabe answered. "Shut up, before they smell you." He gripped the stock of the magna rifle. Ahead of him there was a click and a rasp of metal. Then silence. Then sudden light.

McCabe stepped back, stifling the cry that sprang to his lips. He did not know what he had been expecting but light streaming from a round door in a metal hull was the last thing he had been expecting to see in the middle of this swamp! Before him was the port of a space ship! From that port Le-ann beckoned to them. Her voice rang out. "In here! Quickly!"

McCabe needed no urging. He moved forward, Juth hastily following him. An instant later they were inside the air lock and Le-ann was closing the door behind them. She moved forward, unlocked and opened an inner door, closed a wall switch. Lights gleamed ahead of them, revealing what was unquestionably a room where men entering and leaving this vessel had changed clothes. Bulky space suits still hung in open lockers. A litter of disarranged equipment lay in one corner, oxygen masks, gloves, helmets, an old model magna rifle.

"Lord in heaven, Le-ann!" the trader whispered.

"This is my father's ship," she said quietly. "We will use it to escape from this valley."

The words and the tone in which they were spoken took McCabe's breath away. He stared at the girl, saw the expression on her face.

"I just located it," she explained. "When I found it my memory came back and I remembered what it was and who I was. But I couldn't fly it. If I had ever known how, I had forgotten."

"And you expect me to help you fly it?" McCabe whispered.

"Of course," she said, simply. Delight made her face radiant.

"This is the way you expect to escape?"

"Yes," she answered.

McCabe started to speak, choked over the words. One glance at the tumbled disarray of equipment in the corner told him that this ship had been heavily damaged in landing here. It had been in this spot twelve years, long enough for a jungle of vines and creepers to grow around it. Finding it, this girl had tried to make it fly. Now she expected him with his greater knowledge, to do the task she had been unable to do.

"Le-ann—" He choked again. She just didn't know. From what she had told him and from the condition of the ship, he suspected that she had taken a hard lick in the landing crack-up. Perhaps her memory had been lost. She didn't know how space ships operated, he doubted if she had ever known. When this ship had landed here, she had been a child, incapable of understanding the intricacies of an atomic drive, of steering, lifting, and driving tubes. And now she did not know that this ship would never fly again. When she had found the ship after long years, it had seemed to her to be in perfect condition. True, she hadn't been able to make it work—what risks had she unknowingly taken in trying! But McCabe could.

She read on his face what he was thinking. "Please—" she whispered. "You can make it fly again."

He shook his head. "Nobody can make this ship fly again," he said, as gently as he could.

BUT THE lights work," she protested in a whisper, her face suddenly as pale as death itself. "If the lights work, surely the ship will work."

"The ship draws its power from an atomic drive," he tried to explain. "An atomic engine lasts forever. Current for the lighting system is drawn from a magnetic converter and current will be generated as long as the converter lasts. Since it has no moving parts, it may last a hundred years, or until the insulation breaks down between the windings. The lights will work as long as the converter works, or until their filaments burn out, but that doesn't mean the ship will fly. I'm sorry—"

The pain of bitter disappointment showed on her face. "Then I brought you here for nothing? I'm sorry. . . . I thought. . . ." He saw tears in her eyes. He put his arm around her, patted her very gently. "You did the best you could, Le-ann. You tried. Juth and me appreciate it, don't we, Juth."

"Damned right," Juth answered. "Better here than back there. But we still have to walk out of damned swamp." He shook his head vigorously. "Walk no good. Mighty soon dead."

"Anyhow we have a safe place to lie up and rest," McCabe said to the girl. "You got that for us. Now it's up to us to get out of this place. In the meantime, I'm both hungry and tired. . . ."

"There are tins in the lockers," Le-ann said. She found the tins for them. The preserved food was still edible. He and Juth ate like hungry wolves.

Outside in the night the swamp roared unheard. For this long night, they had food and shelter. Tomorrow some denizen of this swamp might make a meal off of them but tonight the stout steel hull of the wrecked ship protected them. In a bunk that some spaceman had once occupied, McCabe went contentedly to sleep.

On Earth, he would have slept the clock around before he awakened. On

Venus, his twelve-hour sleep was less than a quarter of the night. On a second bunk, Juth still snored. If left undisturbed, the native would probably sleep out the entire night. Having never learned to sleep fifty-two hours at a stretch, McCabe rose. He looked in at the cabin Le-ann had chosen, found she was still asleep, and went sternward to the engine room, hoping against hope that by some miracle he would discover the ship was still capable of flight.

It was a vain hope. The engine was still there, hidden away beneath its shield of Zwenthoffer's metal, but the stern drive tubes had rusted to paper thin shells. Moisture had crept up the tubes, rusting them away. The thought of moisture in this engine room sent him quickly to examine the shielding around the atomic engine. Examining it, he was making clucking noises of dismay deep in his throat, when a sound came from behind him. Turning, he saw Le-ann had awakened and had followed him into the engine room.

"Oh, there you are," she said. "I heard someone moving. Can you make it fly after all?" Hope showed on her face.

McCabe shook his head. "No. And there's something else. . . ." Fear was beginning to climb through him. "Get back," he told the girl. "Get out of the engine room. Quick."

SHE DIDN'T understand the reason but she obeyed him. From the passage, she called out. "What's wrong?"

McCabe did not answer. He was examining the shielding. Zwenthoffer's metal, of course, had made possible the use of an atomic drive on space ships. This silvery-appearing metal was a shield that effectively stopped gamma and other types of hard radiation flowing from an

atomic drive. Without Zwenthoffer's metal, the lead shielding required to make an atomic drive safe for humans to use would have weighed so many tons that the ship would be incapable of flight. Zwenthoffer's metal had been a god-send to space engineers, but it had one important deficiency—in the presence of moisture, it tended to break down. Hence all engine rooms were well equipped with devices to sop up all possible moisture.

But moisture had crept into this engine room through the rusted drive tubes....

McCabe turned to the wall counters, saw that they had all gone out of order long ago. In a supply locker, he found a spare radiation counter, a portable type, which was still serviceable.

The instant it was set in operation, the little warning bell with which it was equipped began to ring, and the needle on the top of the case jumped over into the red as far as it could go.

McCabe backed hastily from the engine room, closing the door behind him, noting as he did so that the door was lined with Zwenthoffer's metal.

Outside the door the ringing of the bell slowed but did not stop and the needle of the gauge remained over in the red.

"What is wrong?" Le-ann questioned, worried but not knowing why.

"The engine room is red-hot with gamma radiation," McCabe answered. "An hour or two in there is sudden death."

"Radiation?" She did not understand.

"I haven't got time to explain it." He moved forward, checking with the counter. Away from the engine room, the radiation was less, but even in the forward control room the needle remained too near the danger area.

"This settles it," McCabe said. "We've got to get out of this ship right now."

Moving to the bunk, he began to shake the sleeping Juth. "Wake up, sleepy head. Climb out of that sack. We're clearing out."

"Clearing out? Not going into swamp!"

"Maybe, maybe not," McCabe answered. "Get yourself ready."

He didn't like the idea of crossing the swamp any better than Juth but he could see no way to cross it in safety, except one. He turned to the girl, seeking information. She answered his questions promptly but when she understood what he was going to try to do, horror moved on her face.

"The odds are ten to one against us, if we try that!" she exclaimed.

"They're a thousand to one against us if we try anything else," he answered. "We're going to try my way. If we fail we won't be any deader than we will be if we stay where we are now."

"All right, we'll try it," Le-ann agreed.

A few minutes later, they again opened the lock. This time they were quitting the space ship that so short a time before had seemed a secure refuge but had been revealed as a hidden death trap.

Outside the lock was darkness. The hour was about the equivalent of eleven o'clock on earth. Rain was still falling. If in the early evening the sound from the swamp had seemed a rough approximation of bedlam, now that the middle of the night was approaching, the sound had almost doubled in volume.

As they opened the lock, a wegarth that had somehow managed to smell out their hiding place and had waited patiently in the hope that they would sometime emerge, stuck its

lean neck into the opening and reached a fanged mouth for them. Le-ann screamed and tried to draw back.

McCabe fired once with the magna rifle. The bullet struck the back of the giant reptile's throat, going straight into the gaping mouth. The explosion blew a hole the size of a basketball in the throat of the beast, shattering the spinal column. The we-garth collapsed in the doorway.

They left it there, pushed past it, fled into the night, the girl, Le-ann leading the way.

THE KEEPER of the fifel twisted restlessly in his sleep. The long night was near its end and his rest was almost complete. When the sun rose, important events were due to happen, events in which he, as keeper of the fifel, was due to play an important part.... The two prisoners brought in the day before would be released into the valley and given a start, then the fifel would be turned loose. The warriors both male and female of Coth would ride the fifel and the rest of the tribe would watch the show from the high cliffs, screaming their delight and approval each time a circling bird spotted its prey and dived with outstretched talons for the kill. Or, if the fleeing prisoners managed to find refuge among the trees where the fifel could not get to them, then the gas bombs would be dropped and the warriors would go in. The gas bombs were the invention of a forgotten genius of Coth, perhaps the only genius the tribe had ever produced.

Twisting in his sleep, the keeper dreamed of directing the hunt.

Dozing half asleep and half awake, the keeper thought he heard a light footstep near him. One of his helpers, he thought, coming to ask his permission to begin preparing the fifel

for the hunt. Let the fellow wait a minute, the keeper thought.

A hand closed around the keeper's throat, cutting off all chance at a yell. His arms were grabbed. Even before he realized what was happening, he was gagged, his hands were tied behind his back, he was yanked to his feet, and a cold voice was whispering in his ear. "Lead up to the fifel cages. And if you make a noise, you will get a knife in the middle of the back. Stick him if he makes a sound," the voice continued, to some second person present.

"Glad to," the second person answered. "Juth very glad to stick this one."

With the point of a knife, Juth prodded the startled keeper forward. McCabe and Le-ann followed close behind. Ahead of them, the tunnel opened to the outer air on a high ledge. Dawn lights were in the sky and the rain had stopped.

"I wish we could have made this hop at night," McCabe said. "It would have been a darned sight safer. If this joint wakes up before we get away, we'll have a nest of hornets after us."

"The fifel sleep at night," Le-ann answered. "If awakened, they are vicious and unmanageable. They can be used only in the day. Hear! They are beginning to awaken now."

AHEAD OF them were muffled noises that sounded like the broken cawing of monstrous crows. Also, there was a leathery rustling, an occasional drum-beat of giant wings. Next they smelled the creatures. It was the most horrible stench McCabe had ever smelled. "Phew!" he whispered under his breath. "If we have to stand much of this, I'm going back and tackle the jungle."

The girl had placed a piece of cloth over her nose and was trying

to breathe through it. "It's awful, I know. I never could get used to it. I hope this is the last time I ever have to smell it."

"One way or another, I imagine it is," McCabe answered. The keeper of the fifel did not mind the rank odor coming from their cages and Juth did not seem to notice it.

"Each is kept in a separate cage," the girl explained. "If they put more than one in a cage at night, there's never but one left the next morning. One eats the other."

"Nice brutes," McCabe said.

They reached the cages, a row of grilled doors set in the walls of the tunnel. The keeper's hands were released and under the pressure of the knife, he was told to put riding harness on the fifel. This he did by dropping a loop of rope over their necks, drawing it tight from a ceiling hook, and after the monster was half-choked, entering the cell and placing a bridle and saddle on the great birds. Each saddle was equipped with a shield and either a sword or an axe. The bridle reins were tied so tight to the saddle that the fifel could hardly turn their heads. "Otherwise they're likely to eat their riders," the girl explained.

Wings flapping, claws dragging, three of the fifel were dragged forth to the high ledge.

A thousand feet down below, soaked in the steaming mist of the morning, was the valley.

"You guide them by pulling on the reins," Le-ann explained. "If they don't do what you want, beat them over the head with the saddle sword. And don't try to be gentle with them."

"Okay," McCabe said. "We'll take off. But first we'll tie up the keeper again." He turned. The keeper was gone. Juth, engrossed in dodging a hooked claw that was thrust at him,

had momentarily taken his eyes off the keeper.

"Come on!" the girl yelled. "We haven't a minute to waste." She swung into the saddle, jerked loose the tie rope, and snatching the sword from its scabbard, hit the fifel a smashing blow on the back with it. The ungainly creature squawked and leaped forward, straight off the ledge. McCabe held his breath. Gigantic wings beat the air. Air borne, the fifel flew away, the girl waving at them to follow her.

"You next, Juth," McCabe said. "I'll bring up the rear in case we get company."

"Here goes nothing," Juth answered. He stepped into the saddle. Scorning the use of the sword, he jabbed the fifel with his throwing knife. The giant bird leaped straight up. Juth clung to the saddle for dear life.

Then McCabe took off. His bird jumped from the ledge and dived straight down. He had the sickening sensation of falling free. Then giant wings spread out and beat the air and the bird was flying. McCabe breathed again. It was possible to ride these monsters! Up until now, he had hardly dared believe it.

Across the top of the jungle, the three giant birds flapped away, Le-ann in the lead. Each flap of the monstrous wings was taking the three nearer to safety. Le-ann, looking back toward the high ledge, screamed and pointed. Turning his head, McCabe saw a whole procession of the monstrous birds launching themselves from the high cliff.

"Well, let 'em come," he thought. He lifted the magna rifle.

MIST SWIRLED around them as they flew into a bank of fog. Above them was a cloud bank. Flying out of the fog, for a moment the

pursuers were invisible, then they came in sight again, closer now. Fierce cries sounded behind them, light glinted on the blades of drawn swords. Le-ann's white face was turned toward McCabe as she urged the fifel to great speed, beating it with the sword. She moved ahead. McCabe, making no effort to keep up with her, deliberately fell behind. He waited.

The warriors of Coth were less than a hundred yards away. When they were within fifty yards, McCabe lifted the rifle to his shoulder. The gun belched, firing on full automatic as he kept the trigger pulled down, sweeping the ranks of the approaching hunters of Coth with bursting magna charges.

The shrill cries of exultation turned to screams of alarm as the hail of death hit them. Stricken fifel plunged downward carrying their riders with them. Wounded birds tried to right themselves and failing, joined the downward plunge. Great gaps were blown in the ranks of the pursuers.

"First time they ever run into a magan rifle," McCabe grunted. "I wonder how they like it."

Swish!

Out of the cloud-bank above him, diving with outstretched neck and closed wings, came a gigantic fifel. Crouched low in the saddle, brandishing his sword, the daring rider was barely visible.

McCabe had no time to shoot. He ducked down in the saddle and tried to hold on.

Crash!

The diving bird struck his fifel a glancing blow. Both birds screamed and tried to fight each other. For a moment McCabe had the dazed impression that he was being knocked out of the saddle. Spinning, the magna rifle flew from his hands. To keep

from falling, he snatched at the saddle grips. His hands closed around the handle of the axe. He jerked it free.

Locked together the two giant birds were biting at each other. From behind his shield, the warrior of Coth reached for McCabe with the point of a sword. Lifting the axe, the trader brought it down with all his strength. The edge bit heavily into the shield, the warrior ducked down, the two fifel separated.

Up in the cloud bank above him, McCabe caught a glimpse of movement, another warrior diving at him. He dropped the axe. From his belt he snatched the magna pistol. The stream of explosive bullets blasted upward. Above him in the air the diving fifel was struck and struck again. One wing blown from his body by the impact of the explosive charge, the bird turned over. The warrior fell. A scream ripped from his lips as he flashed past McCabe, diving headlong for the jungle far below.

Clinging to the saddle, McCabe waited for the third charge. It did not come. Above him, no movement showed in the cloud bank. Behind him the pursuit had stopped. The warriors of Coth had met at last the magna guns of earth and had gotten themselves a fast bellyful of the blasting weapon.

Looking for Le-ann and Juth, McCabe saw that they were trying to turn and come to his rescue. He waved at them to fly on. He didn't need any help now. They beat the heads of their fifel around, turned the giant birds again toward the rising sun.

Clutching the saddle with one hand, the magna pistol with the other, he followed them. Far ahead of them, the clouds were suddenly bright with light. Over there above the eternal cloud banks of Venus the sun was

rising—a new day.

Le-ann pulled her fifel near him, yelled out. "Are you all right?"

"Never felt better in my life," he answered. Ahead of them, many miles away but coming closer with each flap of gigantic wings, was the

snug trading outpost that he called home. Riding beside him was the prettiest girl he had ever seen in his life. He put the two together—home and a girl. A grin split the leather of his face.

THE END

DID THE A-BOMB CAUSE THEM?

By

Mollie Claire



THE PAPERS these days are full of juicy items that should make Rog Phillips "nudge himself to listen" as Whitman said.

In San Leandro, California, recently, a kitten was born with 23 toes instead of the usual twenty. It has six toes on the left forepaw and seven on the right forepaw.

In Concord, California, a five-legged lamb was born, which is not such a rare freak, but in this case, the fifth and well-developed leg grows out of the animal's head!

Both San Leandro and Concord are practically on San Francisco Bay where several radio-active vessels used in the A-Bomb experiments at Bikini were tied up for a couple of years or so, but their radio-activity apparently not having diminished they were recently towed far out to sea and sunk.

And now comes word of a two-headed baby born in Germany. (Well, we always thought the Germans were big-headed and now we know it!)

Of course there have always been abnormal humans but it appears that in the last two or three years they are being born at a greatly increased rate.

I have been wondering since the "Smog"

caused so many deaths in that little Pennsylvania town if some radio-active cloud from Bikini could have settled to earth there. There is definite proof that a radio-active cloud passed over Los Angeles after the first Atom Bomb explosion at Bikini. From L. A. to Pennsylvania is only a hop, skip and jump.

Leaving that aside, the air of every city is polluted with evaporating gasoline. I have often wondered what eventually becomes of it. Some day wash your hands and arms with gasoline as I did once. Wipe off the gasoline and then wash your hands and arms immediately with soap and water. You will feel as if a swarm of mosquitoes had settled on your arms and hands and as if everyone were poking a proboscis into a capillary. Talk about a Dero using sting rays on you, or being "needled! Oh Boy! Oh Boy! Sting rays would be mild.

Could it be that evaporating gasoline combined with the moisture of a heavy fog could cause such frightful, stinging pains in the lungs? Remember how so many people died in Holland from the same cause several years ago and the Dutch accused the Nazis of using some new kind of gas?

THE END

COMING NEXT MONTH

"TIGER WOMAN OF SHADOW VALLEY"

By Berkeley Livingston

She was a mistress of hypnosis. She could make people believe her world was peopled by gigantic monsters . . .



As the night wore on, the revelers grew more wild . . .



ERDIS CLIFF

By
RICHARD S. SHAVER

Time is like a book, and
its leaves are worlds very close
to each other; and yet . . .
distant beyond imagination.

SLOWLY the clouds came, dawn-rose above the jagged outline of Erdis' cliff-edge. The eye fled down the sheer, clean, rock face of the cliff, to come softly to rest among the drifting, rising morning mists in the small, sweet valley at the foot.

Ancient and virgin those gigantic trees, unknowing mortal man. Clean and happy those small laughing streams, meeting there beneath the glittering arc of the iridescent bridge of glass that swept in one long material rainbow of poetry made into actual mass, but mass without essential solidity, shimmering and fragile as air, sweeping up and up from the misted green floor of the valley to plunge into the mid-face of the cliff.

There where the rainbow bridge met the raw face of the rock, a great stone beast-face leered, and into the dark mouth of that giant sculpture the glassy shimmer thrust, stopped at last by the great bronze halves of a circular doorway.

One of those halves of heavy ancient metal hung open, and in the gloomy opening a tiny figure stood, the morning breeze stirring timidly about the smooth curves of her body.

Nearer the eye of view, and nearer, and that figure by some magic becomes intense.

The darkling sweep of her hair above the wide white brow, the deep thoughtful eyes black mystery below, the strong cheekbones balancing the raven's-wing touch of her upsweeping eyebrows, cheeks tapering down to a sweetly pointed chin centered by a dimple. That dimple beneath the wide generous red lips incongruous upon the almost stern, thoughtful face, contradicting all the will and majesty of it with the impish impression of humor held inwardly on a tight rein.

Feronia of Erdis, she. Erdis the cliff's name, and her home's name. That home, whether constructed by

magic in the forgotten past, or by her own witch-wisdom, this eye of view could not at present say. Nor could you, seeing the dark wisdom of her presence, the sweet classic magic of her breasts' soft thrust, the small-waisted suppleness of her eternal youth, the masterful curves of her hips, the strong-loined stance of the witch who was first a woman and second the mistress of a dark art.

Her clothing was a white length of soft fabric, bordered about with the Greek wave in gold thread, caught about the swell of her hips and looped over itself, ample folds falling in clean soft lines clear to the high arched feet in laced antique sandals, of golden leather without jewels or decoration.

Above the softly clasping purity of the fabric her waist outshone its purity with the satin sheen of flesh, narrowing and then arching out to frame the glory of her breasts, full and adult, two poems framed with golden arabesques clasping a white soft fabric beneath their weight and about her fine wide shoulders.

On one shoulder a great black bird sat, something like a raven but with long legs like a heron, big as a hawk but mild and solemn of eye. She paid it little heed, only stroking it once with her long, acid-stained fingers along the arched neck. Suddenly it lifted, arrowed down into the mists below.

Feronia sighed, as one lonesome and weary of self. She turned, a soft sweet grace in the knee-lift of the kirtle, in the sway of the arching hip, in the line of her arm as she gestured to someone invisible, and disappeared within the dark opening of the stone beast's mouth.

Now about the still open metal valve of the door small chattering shadows moved, bunched, exhorted with shriller cheeping, and the door

swung slowly closed after her step had died in the echoing distance.

At the closing of the door, some magic faded out over that hidden valley, the whole vista of its majesty and ancient untouched beauty slid down some subtle scale of values, hung at the bottom to present a face of utter desolation and malignant unwelcome to the chance of any life happening that way. The mists grew thicker, even as the day advanced, shutting out the sun, clinging concealingly about the still shimmering magic of that impossible bridge, making the whole valley and awful face of the cliff into one ugly, haunted wasteland.

* * *

IN AN ARCHAIC mountain stronghold, far-off, this eye sees now: A woman, flame-haired and lovely, who turns slowly the pages of an ancient book, Lua, Mistress of Vole, reads:

There is a planet that is ultra-simultane with the vast rotunditie of TIME, which you probably know. Our own world is but a slice called *now* of this planet, and upon that planet, though it partakes of our own, the part we take is but as the part a page takes to a book.

Within the ultra-simultane sits a figure called by various names. On our *now* he is called the Devil; but in this world we speak of, he is called the Red Dwarf, which is more politic, and they are wiser there.

Now the Red Dwarf turns the pages of this book of time, reading it in the simultane, and as he reads he takes painfully written notes upon the many planes of all the *nows*, for he is a student who means quite intensely to surpass the other simultanes, but this eye-of-view has had opportunity to inspect the writings of the Red Dwarf, and I can assure you that even in your thin slice called *now*, you have as good a chance as he.

However, though he is an untalented student, he is a most thorough recorder of the doings on certain of the planes of *now*. But as he is old and absent-minded, he sometimes mislays his notes, and even his vast notebooks, upon the planes of time which he leafs through. That is how this came to get hold of the records from which I have translated these events. He left them in my *now* for an instant, and I seized them, though not without trepidation.

So we come to the beginning of this tale of Erdis Cliff, and I have pictured to you Feronia, the witch of Erdis Cliff, as well as I could.

Now the Dwarf's eye-of-view swung away from the valley, an around to the northward and westward, and settled downward, and I read on:

* * *

THIS VALLEY lies open and unmisted under the green-bright rays of the bizarre sun.

Through the center of the wide, flowered valley meanders a river of vivid pink liquid, wide and placid and many-curved.

The sands that line the river are purple and poisonous to life.

Above the purple ribbons of treacherous poison sand are the grassy banks of the river, with strange flowered plants among the grasses. Beyond the grass the trees move their limbs slowly, rhythmically, waiting, waiting, for what is to come to them.

High on the ridge of the grassy bank lies an old forgotten stone God. His limbs are half imbedded in the blue soil; it has been an age since he has had an impulse to move those strange, mottled, sculptural limbs. Stonily the God stares out at the lazy pink river, over the slowly groping limbs of the far hungry trees, toward the distant hills that are the

unsuckled breasts of the Zoogyte, the planet-being which allows these things to exist upon her roundness.

Nothing moves in that valley except the slow-streaming river and the rhythmic limbs of the hungry ancient trees.

Time moves, though, invisibly, trying to set her grip upon this valley that waits, regarding her not.

THE EYE-OF-VIEW moves then, and the records is that of another side of the strange planet that is as our own, but several times removed by that thin repeating slice called *now*, as the pages of a book are separated, yet the same in one basic way.

Focusing again, it is the slowly descending darkness and a city named Maneon.

* * *

Lua, flame-haired young widow of Faustis, Master of Vole, the ancient fortress he had made his stronghold against his many enemies. Lua, Mistress of Vole, reading there in the great-beamed antique room, the carved and huge old furniture weird in the firelight, leaning back and closing the Mystic Book.

That word *Maneon*, in this ancient book! That city must be very old, to have been spoken of then as a great city. This was written hundreds of years ago, this worm-eaten tome she held in her hand. Centuries, or spaces ago?

Maneon, that was where she had last had word of Ruy Egan! If only he were here, now that Faustis was gone from her life, now that his will was no longer the tune she must dance to!

Perhaps the old glass in the tower would show him... *you could at least try, Lua...* it has been so many years not to even have seen his face.

Eagerly she ascended the tower stairs, winding, and unlocked the door

of the south chamber. There was many strange contrivances here, produce of Faustis' looting. He had found always an excuse to fare off on an expedition against some rich holding or other. Bandit he was, and looter he had died, leaving her this ancient keep stuffed with his treasures, most of which he could never use—they were not negotiable values—not such things as this great solid glass globe. Who would know how to use it but herself or its former owner? No one who had not read the book of Mors, which Faustis had brought home to her for its beautiful gold binding trimmed with red leaves. She picked the book from the shelf, laden and dusty there beside the globe of glass, and leafed through, looking for the formula. Slowly she chanted the dread words, and made the sign of Tee upon her breast, and bent to peer into the green depths of the sphere murky as a stagnant pond.

Maneon slowly appeared, a city of low roofs, many of them stretched beside the muddy river, and the temple there beside the water, squat and ugly and huge. She knew the city well, had seen it from the hills where she had waited for Faustis more than once when he was picking up some gold from the highway caravans.

The eye-of-view lowered, focused, and the young widow made out a line of slaves, with chains about their necks, loading sacks with the black rich soil near the river bank, and loading the bags into carts. She started, bent lower, watching the slow weary movements of one of the slaves. Ah, Mors, it was *her own heart's love* wearing out his life on that chain of endless work!

Lua, Mistress of Vole, turned away from the globe, and an anger flamed in her against fate that had brought her only those things she had no wish to own—and denied her always those

things she most wanted. Ruy Egan, a slave! Not that bold young spirit, not that youth from these, her own hills!

SHE TURNED, went swiftly down the tower stairs, and there in the weapon room, no longer visited except by the old men-at-arms to reminisce, since Faustis' death, she chose two swords from the wall. From the chests she lifted a suit of small-link mail—oiled and waiting it was, she noted—smiling a little at the work of greying warriors who still looked at her with a little hope that she would take up the old ways and give them yet a little excitement. Five years it had been since Faustis had faced the wrong man at swords point and gone to his well-earned death. Ten, since Egan had fled from the wrath of his lord, Denis of Castle Lehar. What was it he had done? Stolen some trinket or other, they had said! False, on the face of it! He was above such a petty crime.

She tried on the coat of mail, slipped on the leg plates, and belted on the lighter of the two swords. This was the same outfit she had worn last five years ago when she had waited in the forest above Caer Elar and they had brought him back to her on a litter, dying. He had been sorry he had left her alone! Sorry! and she glad inside to be from under his will at last. Yet he was not evil to her, she had still a sadness at her passing. But...to be free!

To the stable, and old Lon Harrick to help her wrap the horses feet, saddle the two young horses he had trained himself for her riding, and whom she almost forced down on his face to keep him from mounting and riding with her.

"I'll be gone a week, Lon. Take care of things, you old goat, and I'll get you something special."

Then she had remembered, and gone back and got the long-handled steel cutters from the smithy, and food from the kitchen stores. She had to stay away from people, this trip, just like old times.

Then she had ridden into the night, and her heart had been light. She understood now why the few who still remained to her of Faustis' men always looked at her, sadly and hopefully, waiting for orders that never came. Did one never outgrow the need for action? Never get too old to want the night wind, and the freedom, and the thrill of danger? Perhaps that was why Faustis could not leave the raiding alone. It was the thrill of it, not the booty, he wanted most.

For an instant she knew she was mad, to believe the silly visions her mind had conjured from the gloomy green depths of that old chunk of glass. Stupid of her, to ride off after something she had missed ten years and more ago. You can't turn back on time like that! Love, once lost, can never be gotten back, not the young fresh love that had lived in her for Egan! Never had either of them even touched hands, or been closer than a score of feet! Never did she know whether what burned in her young heart burned in him. Never could she get away from Faustis long enough, never was there any way to get Egan alone and find out if this was love in her or only madness from her lone fancies, and her loveless bed with Faustis. Well, at least, now she would know. He *had* noticed her, he *had* felt the wind of her passing, it *had* burnt him as herself, this strange thing that still possessed her! Or he had never even seen her except as part of the scenery.

* * *

THE GREEN-BRIGHT sun sinks below the dark hills, low and round and many hills far off, and the

slave leaves off work, clanking his chains back to the sleeping shed.

Lying there among the hundred-odd weary hulks of things that would be men if freedom were added, waiting for the evening bowl of boiled flesh and black bread, Ruy Egan wondered about the endless home of Night, and about the strange life said to inhabit the night, far off. Off where the mocking stars winked, fortunate in aloof freedom.

Lower, by the river, he could see the river mist rising, slowly sliding up through the streets, making all the little lights of the city get dimmer and dimmer.

Farther on, he could see the bigger, yellower lights of the temple, and he thought of all the women prisoned there with their brazen "god", thought with desire and revulsion and pity strangely mingled. And he turned to shake off the thought, and his chains rattled and tugged where they had been fastened to the wall bolts for the night, and the rage rose in him, choking, at those chains and the shame of it.

Then he lay still and watched the mist-ghosts, now gliding by the wide shed door, more and more of them and thicker and bigger, then the mist closed down solid and foggy. The mocking stars disappeared, and only the vague white face of the enigmatic mist remained.

Now through that vagueness came a figure, silent as the mist itself, closer and taller, and seemed to Egan to be the sinuous soft body of a woman as she came graceful and tall through the ugly timbered opening of the shed.

Then she came close and stood over him, and a chill and a dread ran through Egan's cold limbs, for he or she glimmered everywhere over her strange womanish body with steel mail. And the links chinked softly as

she moved, holding out to him a long-handled pair of heavy cutters, such as sword-makers use to cut half-tempered steel.

But Ruy Egan was not one to fear any weird ghost out of the fog. He took the great snips, with the handles of heavy oak and a yard long, and flipped them quickly from chain to chain, throwing his weight on the handles hard, and one by one his chains parted, but yard-long pieces of chain still dangled from his big red wrists and from his thick neck collar.

Then Ruy, not even glancing at his deliverer, passed the great cutters to the next man, and stood up. Beneath the masking helm he could see only the chin and mouth, the curling lips half smiling, half-scornful of the stink of the place, and the long chin, square-ended and strong, yet somehow soft like a woman's.

Into his hand she pressed a sword. On the hilt glittered emeralds and gold, and the blade shimmered all along its length with an inner fire of its own.

RUY HEFTED it, a good weighty blade, light in the tip, weighty in the handle, made for swift work and heary strokes, too. And even as she turned, and that thrill that was somehow like fear ran through him at the long beautiful line of her hip and leg in movement, a dark burly figure came out of the mist and stood in the doorway. Ruy's heart sank, they had posted a guard here because of the fog; at each slave shed he knew another was taking his stand, and that moving outside there were a score of men. But they too stood there, still as stone, until the movements outside quieted, then she moved on ahead, leading him.

A curved scimitar in her hand, she paused for the barest instant to spin

it up and hard around toward the face of the guard standing there agaze, looking out toward the far dim glow of the city below, pining for some of the fun he knew was there, perhaps.

But Egan didn't wait for the unknown savior to do his own job entirely. He thrust his newly acquired weapon hard against the belly of the man even as her weapon slashed across his face, biting deep, both of them, and the man fell with a sound like gushing water in his throat, a moan and a cry and blood in his mouth.

Then the stranger led on into the fog, fast and dim in the night to Egan's eyes, so that he hurried after, and his dangling chains clanked and rang with his hurry, and he wished she would move slower.

Over the low wall of the slave compound. Across the hard rutted soil of the road, and into the bushes where stood two horses tethered. Still she spoke not. They mounted together and she led on, away from the road, across the fields, and on into the trees of the hill-side, and up, scrambling along some trail no other eyes could have found. And still the awe of her silence, her man-woman appearance, the strong capable way of her, was with Egan, and he made to speak, but the words stuck in his throat.

Now they could hear afar the noise and the cries and see the faint glimmer of torches rush back and forth, and hear the hoof-beats of horses setting out along the hard road, and for the first time she made a sound—a low rich laugh which marked her surely. A woman, a rich woman! For only a well-fed woman ever made a sound so replete with the cloying sound of rich food, which a slave learns to hate in his owners. Yet it was a good laugh, gallant and thrilling in the dark, and the slave-thought

that made him hate the richness of it died away in admiration.

NOW EGAN noted the horses they rode stepped silent on wrapped hooves, and he knew there were no tracks left behind to betray them. At last he raised his voice, ashamed when he heard it of the weary quavering in his own harsh tones, and said:

"Who are you, to come to me, Ruy Egan, for this is strange work for a woman?"

"Later, friend! Have patience, you will learn why I want you." That voice was low and husky, and pitched with an under-ring as of hidden metal under velvet, thrilling as her laugh, and it spoke of culture and long years among high-bred people. Ruy knew the sound of it from old; it was home to hear such a voice in his own tongue.

All that night she pressed on, leading ever deeper into the increasing hills toward the far mountains, and ever the trees rose greater about them. Still she did not talk, or tell him who or what she was, or where she led. And Egan, weary from the day's work and the long starving, followed in a dull silence, a little warm glow of gratitude in his breast toward this stranger, and half slept, his head bobbing.

When he was awake, he pondered a little, for Ruy Egan was a thief, and he was a thief well known. His enemies had made sure of that! That he was not as black as he was painted by the magistrates who had sentenced him, and the people of Maneon who had talked about him, and the inn-keepers who had worried about him, and the travelers who had hired guards to protect them from himself—was known to few. How could this woman whom he was sure he knew not at all—know that?

Did she know that he had deserved

the life of hard labor he had been sentenced to, or did she think he was some other prisoner—some brother or lover, perhaps, whom she mistook him for in the fog? But he had said his name, and she had not seemed to notice that it was not the right name. So indeed, she must be a thief or a bandit, and that was very strange, for who else would come to him? Unless she was someone from his own youth, from his home, whom he could not remember! And when he could stay awake, he puzzled through his memories of the days in Castle Lehar, long ago, before he had had to run away from the wrath of...but better not to think of that, the memory was too painful to blight the sensing of the sweetness of this night of his deliverance, who had never expected any such thing for him. Not in Maneon, where they hated his name with a hate born of fear.

HAVING RIDDEN hard all night, the rim of the sun found them toiling over a hill, and the light went with them down into the copse in the hollow, where his guide dismounted. Ruy Egan nearly fell from his horse, and she caught his arm. He looked for an instant into the eyes still hidden behind the masklike visor, and a sense of fear struck into him from his eyes, but he surmised it was weakness in him.

She tied the horses beneath the trees, and for a time they both rested on the soft grass by the stream. Then she sat up, removed the helmet, and bent to the stream to drink.

As she turned back to Egan, his mouth dropped in astonishment, for he knew her! That sleek she-leopard look; the bold, eager face, the luxurious, pampered mouth of her—this was the the Mistress of Vole, the woman who in his youth had filled so many mouths with gossip, set all the

tongues to wagging with her doings, so that she was said to be a warlock, a werewolf, a sorceress, and worse things darkly whispered, but none openly for fear of her power.

"Yes, Egan, you know me, but it has been long since we crossed trails. If you had come to me when they ran you out of Lehar, you would not have had to leave your home-country. Didn't you know that men who get on the wrong side of the fence always run to Vole?"

"Such things I have thought over many times, since, but I had no time for thought then. But, even so, what are you doing here, and why bother with me?"

She shook out the tightly bound flame-red hair of hers, and sat combing it, her heavy brows slightly tilted in an odd frown, as if taking stock of him, her eyes quizzical and deep-set beneath. He had never been close to the woman who laired in Vole's old fortress and defied all men to drive her out or molest her, even. He saw that it had been the ignorance of youth that had kept him from her.

"You have heard that I dabbled in magic, Ruy Egan?"

"Of course. But I take little stock in such tales now that I have seen somewhat of the world."

"Well, it is not exactly a lie, Egan. And I heard, even back in Vole, that you had become a most skillful thief."

"I can't get the connection? What do these two tales about our private affairs have to do with us and why we are here together?"

"A witch has need of many things not easily gotten in this world. Egan, I rescued you to do a bit of thieving for me. I knew enough of your youth to know that gratitude would hold you to my will long enough for that."

Egan leaned back, the sharp edge taken from his curiosity, and his eyes

narrowed to perceive the greed that underlay her deed. This talk of magic was but a red herring to distract his mind from that greed and from the danger of what she wanted, and had somehow heard of his plight in far-off Maneon. Well, she had figured it out all right.

"YOU DO not need to becloud the issue with talk of witchcraft. I'll steal your baubles, and be glad of the chance to pay for your night's work. You who lair in Vole's old walls could be there but for one reason, anyway. Sometime in the past, you got yourself into the same fix I did in Maneon."

"You know very little of me or of Vole, Egan!"

"True enough, but it has been ten years since I was a beardless youth worshipping you from afar as you rode by in the hunt, too. Those ten years have not touched you, Lua of Vole. Does big black-beard still ride by your side? What did men call him, Faustis or something? No one could ever get you all figured out, hidden away there in the cliffs of Vole mountain, and it bothered them no end."

"Faustis was killed in a battle. They couldn't figure us out, because they lived by farming, and we by looting in far places, riding into the fastnesses of the mountains and by secret ways back to Vole. We took great care no one really knew our business, Egan."

Egan laughed. "I have often wondered, lying nights and thinking back over it all, if he was not a robber baron, that Faustis, and those who knew afraid to talk."

She laughed too, a polite laugh to make him at ease, and began to plait her hair tightly again and bind it up small about her head in order to get

the helmet on again.

"After he died, the best of our men went their way, and the rest of us, those who loved me well, remained. We have lived well enough, but not trying to upset the world or anything like Faustis. He was over-ambitious, I always privately held. If he had lived, he would have become king in time, but he overreached himself. Without his ambition, he would not have been Faustis, but he would have been alive."

"So you hold title to many a holding taken by force, Baroness?"

"Never mind the titles or salutations, Egan. To you I can be Lua when no one is about." Her eyes were suddenly soft upon his, the strong chin somehow sweet, the lips smiling reminiscently.

Egan pondered his memories of her. Somehow her eyes had always sought him out when their troop had joined his own lords for the hunt, and had seemed to enjoy what they saw. He had been a handsome sprig, at that. And now she was a widow, and had rescued him from a slave prison. There was meat for thought in that. But he was being a fool. There was more to it than that!"

"This thing I am to steal for you, you who have helped to steal so many things, by your own tale, that it is strange you would need my experience?" Egan's eyes were narrow on hers, and his suspicions awake.

"The best of our men are left Vole these five years, Ruy. I have no men skillful at the job I want done. Besides, I want a man not known as connected to me, so if he is caught, I will still be safe. You would not betray me, even if they racked you. I remember all about you."

"I don't know how you could know that! I don't know it myself."

"Once you saved a little girl of a peasant's family from a flaming cot-

tage, when everyone else sat their horses to enjoy the blaze. Once you dived headlong into Moray Falls, where the great whirlpool below the falls is feared by all swimmers, just to pull out a dog, a mere hunting dog. Do you remember that, Egan?"

Her voice was very thrilling and reminiscent of much quiet thought up there in her stronghold in the mountains. Egan saw that here was a deeper fish than he was familiar with. Could such things tell her he would not betray her? But then, she was a woman.

"I had forgotten, long ago," murmured Egan.

"To you, such things are nothing. You do not have time from living to weigh them against others' actions and get the answer that they hold. To a woman, with time to sit and ponder, such things tell a great deal."

THERE WAS a warmth in Egan's breast, and it was not the sun, higher overhead. That anyone should have remembered him then when he was young and wholly clean, and that such things should have brought freedom, was a warming thought. The suspicion died in his breast. She could get plenty of dupes, if that was what she wanted. He fell asleep, a little smile on his over bony face. And it seemed that Lua of Vole bent over him in his sleep, looking into his face for a long time, her eyes wet and shining. But that must be a dream. For she was not known as a sentimental woman, but as a kind of Amazon hard-riding, of hard hands and high, proud ways; ruthless in her dealings, and possessing wealth because of her hard, harsh way of life. Or so he remembered.

The day wore on, the copse was utter still, the horses' feet still muffled and themselves hid in deep leafy shade, and all that day Lua of Vole

did not sleep, but sat guard. The little stream babbled very pleasantly and drowsily, and Lua propped her sword so the point would waken her nodding head, and her eyes remained open. It was not the first time she had watched over her sleeping men.

The day died at last, and she woke Egan. They mounted and rode on northward and westward, toward the ever greater mountains wherein lay his old home and hers. Riding through the night was an eerie thing, silent as they both were and stranger one to the other, and Egan wanted very much to know this woman creature who had done what no man would have done for him.

"This must be a very valuable thing you want stolen, Lua, for you to go to so much trouble?"

"It is, Egan, it is. It is a thing hard to believe. I had better tell you all about it. You see, among the loot my husband collected from various places were many books, some of them old, some of them strange beyond the half-wisdom we call learning today. After he was gone, and time hung on my hands, I read some of those books, and I learned of some curious places on this round globe. Curious places, and wonderful things I had not known true at all, or that they could exist. I want some of those things, and the ones I want cannot be come by with the work of just ordinary men. Heard you ever of Erdis Cliff, Egan?"

"Erdis Cliff? I heard a silly tale of it as a place of witchcraft that no man can enter, something like that. Why?"

"That's where you are going to get the first of the things I want. And what that thing is you will have to learn there, for She, the witch who hides there, has a map and other information of places and things not on any map, that you must get for me."

"I don't see why you think I can get it, if others can't."

"Egan, I never loved a man, I married young. He was rich, not knowing what love was, till riding out with the hounds and the whole herd of us from Vole, I saw you among the youths from Lehar Castle, one among many, but standing out to my eyes like a brand in the darkness. Love has no reason or rhyme, it comes and goes, or stays. You stayed in my heart, since that day, and you knew it not, and I did nothing but wonder when the pain would stop. It did not stop, it is still with me."

NOW IT came clearer to Ruy Egan. Her heart reached for him, had longed for him steadily, and at last she had mixed up in her reason so many idle tales with the image of him she could not separate them! Magic, and witches, and the foolish tale of Erdis Cliff where the immortal Feronia waits always for the man who never comes... Yet his heart bounded within him to know this woman loved him, however strangely or madly or with what unreason. His pulse beat faster, and something came into the emptiness inside him and filled it warmly.

"What has that to do with Erdis Cliff, and jewels or what-have-you? What to do with the witch of Erdis Cliff?"

"I have read in a book that was not written on this world, of other worlds like our own, separated from us only by a little slice of thing called multi-time, or space-time, or some other word meaning dimensions unknown, all called *Simultane*... That 'magic' is the crossing and mingling of these worlds' planes of like, and the bringing of the knowledge of one into the other. And the way of this is known to the Witch of Erdis Cliff!"

"Why do you want such a thing as

that knowledge? It sounds like madness!"

"It is like madness, till you see such things and understand, Egan. Many of those worlds are but half-way houses of civilization, and ours is one of them. Others have immense wisdom, and they have conquered the secret of life, have put off death and age, and have pleasures beyond pleasure, have immortal love."

"I am a simple man, Lua. I have fought in a war, I have stolen, I have been many strange places and wild ways I have followed, evil men I have known and women too. Yet these things you say sound like madness to me. *Are you mad, Lua?* For you have said you loved me all these weary years... it would be terrible to learn that you were mad!"

"I meant not to tell you anything, until I could show you, Ruy Egan. Not another word will I say, until we have reached Vole, and you have slept and eaten and rested. Then together we will go over these things in the old books, and you can decide whether I am mad or whether there is not a way for you and I to win more, much more than this life around us ever has. This place of Erdis Cliff contains the way and the wisdom, but she is against all men, against women especially, a bitter soul hurt by time and circumstances and forces we do not even know exist. To get into her heart I wanted you, I thought that as you entered mine, you might enter hers... which is reason enough for a woman. Now no more will I say until I can show you the proof that wisdom is not even imagined among the people we call civilized today."

"Have you talked with no one else of these things? It seems odd that another than me should never have been interested."

"My mind and my heart turned always to you, wanting you; and around

me are only rude, untutored men, the folk of Vole, who serve me, but are not wise in any way that I need."

THEY RODE on through the night and the increasing dark hills, and the moon rode serene overhead, and Ruy Egan pondered the mind of this woman, so strangely different was it from what he imagined. Mad she undoubtedly was, yet that madness had saved him from a lifetime of toil and starvation and misery, and he would humor it to the bitter end, whatever that end might be. He could do no less! He owed her that.

Toward morning they entered the lower reaches of Vole pass, and ascended now through the forest as the morning brightened. The smell and the scent of things here were familiar and nostalgic, bringing back his boyhood when he hunted nuts under these trees, and shot squirrels with a crossbow, and swam in the cold pools of the rapids of Moray river, or hid himself away for wild days in the dark caves of the cliffs above.

Aye, and glimpsed Lua of Thorny Ridge in her father's house, a lonesome little girl peering out at the world from behind the black skirts of her mother's maids. Spied upon the maids of the castle when they went maying in the woods for flowers, and sometimes removed their burdensome clothes for a dip in the stream where they were sure no one could see. But he had seen, from the rocky outcrops above the stream. Wondered why maids hid that white beauty behind all the ugly petticoats, too.

"It were better if the folk here do not know who you are, the tale might get back, and we are not so bold with others' rights as we used to be. So do not speak of your name, your face is too changed for them to remember you, I think."

Toward noon they came into her home, the old worn stone walls of Vole fortress, where Faustis of Hane-mar from the north had made his hideaway, and had his wife, and fretted over the children she had not borne him between forays to the southward and west among the rich landowners for gold and other things needful. For such was his way, and it was an old way indeed.

Smoky old beams and great hanging figured cloths and smoke wraiths from the ancient fireplace, the rude faces of shepherds and worn-out men-at-arms, not a young man among them. The faces of women, too, but not young. It was a household stricken by the years, he saw, withering and fading, and only the fair face of Lua to make it seem anything more than a forgotten place of rude people who care naught for the world and all its works. Among them all was only Lua with her deep-set eyes and fair skin and flaming hair braided in a coronet of red-gold about her balanced head, the strong woman-lines of her, the ruler here of all things, he saw, the reason for its being.

They did not question him or her, they remembered that much from the old days of banditry. And at the little sparks in her eyes, Egan saw they knew better than to question her about anything. They set food before them, and poked up the fire in the big room of the carven chairs, which smelled already of the few days it had been empty and cold with her absence.

And she spoke no more of her mysterious purposes and her old books and her magic, and Egan wondered if he had dreamed it, riding along in the night. But her eyes were often on him, soft and warm, a warmth almost incongruous in such a woman, so capable and so strongly made. A gentleness she had not exercised

enough for it to be natural was growing in her now on his account, he saw. She must have been very young when she married, for time to have touched her not when everything else about showed the blight of it so deeply.

EGAN slept away three days, eating his fill of mutton and cheese and bread and fruit and other simple but wonderful things he was not used to having as a slave. The weariness left his limbs and the pains left his belly, and when he began to pace restlessly in the morning, she put up her needlework and led him up into the round tower in one corner of the ancient stronghold.

There were several chambers there, with great metal-bound doors locked and bolted, and Egan guessed that within there was riches enough to last a man for several lives. But the door she opened showed only bookshelves, and worn volumes in strange outlandish script of the past, and she closed and locked the door after they entered.

That was a weird day in Egan's life. When they came down again, he knew that Lua of Vole was not mad, but that he himself might be soon, if his brain did not stop spinning from the strange things she had shown him. A book that can tell you how to bring a man from another world alive before you, in all his gear and otherworldly trappings, talk to him and then send him back a-packing—a book that can open doors into strange sights beyond believing, of chimera worlds where monsters swarm over each other forever warring and growing fat upon it—of other times and places seen in a glass by the means of a few drops of some strange liquid; and a tube which shows the life beneath the range of the eye, little monsters grown suddenly big under the eye to frighten a man out of his wits

—and a tube to point up at the moon and bring it down close enough to touch it with your hand, it seemed!

When darkness came, she led him down again, locking the door after her carefully.

"So you see, Egan, we do not know anything surely about anything. And some people *do* know, in other places, and some on other worlds, quite close to us but once removed by some strange barrier we cannot see or cross unless we know the way. And they have things we can use to great advantage, to make our life rich and worth having, and we must win those things or die unloving and unloved—as we have both lived so far."

"Lua, I thought you mad, I take it back. You are sane, and this is an ignorant world, a savage world of foolish people. If you can win some of that wisdom of life you want by my help, I'll give it you gladly."

The two strangers sat and ate, facing each other, and the joy of good food was palling on his no longer starved appetite, so that Egan began to look on Lua more than before, and when he looked he saw much that was wonderful to the eyes, and he stared too long and too often. Lua flushed at last under his regard, and turned her head away, and Egan asked:

"Give me forgiveness, I have so much to learn! Remember I am a slave who did not expect life again. Now that I have life again, it is all centered in you. I cannot take my eyes away for fear it will prove untrue, and wake up again in the chains on the bare ground."

"I have thought of you for years, Ruy Egan. Yet now you are here where I desired you so long, I feel strange with you, and it hurts me that we are strangers to each other."

"I never knew a good woman, Lua. I never knew a woman who had

brains and had learned to read and write and was beautiful too, who had lived a civilized life as you have."

"Me! Hah, it was not a civilized life, being the wife of Faustis. He was a murdering scoundrel, and I aided and abetted him. I am no better. Yet it was that or die by his hand and he get another better suited to his ways."

"Well, but you were brought up gently, I remember seeing you when you were little, in your father's house."

"I saw you too, more than once."

"Once I loved a girl, Lua, as you say you have me. When I was fourteen years old I saw her. I could not get nearer than twenty feet. It seemed some devilish barrier froze my limbs at that distance. I hung around her house, waiting for a glimpse of her. Then later, she married, and my love disappeared like a ghost in the sunlight."

LUA GOT to her feet, sleek and lovely in the firelight, and moved languidly to a great harp, running her fingers across the strings, thrilling the room with sudden humming sound.

"Who was that girl, Egan?"

"Your older sister, Sabrina!"

"You fool! Sabrina is the younger sister, I am the oldest! It must have been me you sought."

Lua sat down on the double bench beside the fireplace, the fire lighting her hair and the lines of her neck and back. Egan got up and went to her, standing beside her and looking down upon her bare shoulders, white as cream, smooth and beautiful and strong and yet so alien to him. The embroidered hem of her gown touched his feet. Green it was, with little fleur-de-lis in gold on it, and the green and gold ran up intricately along the fine lines of her leg and

thigh and waist, ending in two points below her full breasts' thrust. A soft white waist, sleeveless and neckless, was held by a drawstring around the shoulders, and the exposed upper breasts drew his eyes as women intend them to do. His were eyes which for years had beheld no women but from a distance, and this glory of her beside him warm in the flickering firelight was strong magic in itself, making him quake inwardly with her nearness.

Egan dropped to his knees, there beside her, putting one lean black-haired hand on her knee, and drawing her face into the light with his other hand.

"Woman, I am a rude man too, and it is hard for me to show what I feel toward you who have done this deed no man dared to do for me. I owe you my life. I give it to you, since you set such store by it, to do with what you will. Your will shall be mine, and your orders my task-book. I have no more words such as I said riding here for you to hear. If you are mad, then I will be madder, and outdo you in insanity. If you want marriage, that is good, I am willing. If not, still I am yours, to do with what you want."

Her eyes, sleepy-lidded, rested on his, burning deeply. And Egan looked into them, and saw there stranger depths than he expected, but nothing to be afrighted of at all. After a time she put her hand on his where it rested on her knee.

"Later on, I will know. Meanwhile, be a friend, and study those writings said to be from the Red Dwarf's notes. They tell of many things beside Erdis Cliff that we are headed toward. It were better to know it all. *In a week, we ride, Egan!* Later, when I have what is needful, you will know why I wait to talk seriously of love."

So Egan rose again to his feet, and after a while she went and left him, and he slept alone that night, as always. Which was strange to him, after her words. But she was deeper than an ordinary woman; he would be patient. Perhaps, knowing him close like this, she no longer wanted him? But her eyes had not said that, thank the Dead God. For Egan knew that if he did not win this woman, he would never want another.

CHAPTER TWO

FERONIA of Erdis, she. There, where the rainbow bridge met the face of the cliff, thrust into the dark mouth of that impossible stone beast face, she stood, looking down upon her valley, waiting.

The dark wisdom of her presence, the sweep of her hair above the wide brows, the thoughtful eyes black with mystery...

Something moved over there, coming painfully down the slopes, into her valley where no thing ever came!

Feronia shaded her eyes with her hand, peering. Two figures on horseback, steadily nearing. For an instant she hesitated, turning, beginning that gesture to her invisibles which would have hidden her home from these interlopers. Then she turned back, the waiting on her face turning into a hope, a more keen suspense of waiting. Perhaps they bore some word, they seemed to know where they were going, and this was their destination? They were but two.

So it was that Lua of Vole and Ruy Egan found the home of Feronia, as they had expected to find it.

Now, as Feronia watched them approach, she saw by those aural signs known to immortals that these were mortals, and ignorant people, strangers to her and to all the world of things that mortals do not accept be-

cause they cannot understand.

She smiled a sad slow smile, thinking of the day that she had found Druga half dead by the pool, just as ignorant and full of wonder at her self.

The two dismounted at the foot of the shimmering bridge, and mounted toward her hand-in-hand, somewhat slowly for fear of the strangeness of transparence beneath their feet. It seemed to Egan that this bridge crossed some wider gulf than met the eye, some strange whirling invisibility passing beneath the feet, as if time itself were turning there within the glass-like stuff, and themselves now outside of their common world. Which was true enough, but unbelievable to Egan, and he shook the feeling off, fixing his eyes instead upon the calm white figure waiting there by the great open metal door. On her shoulder the long-legged black bird had perched itself lifting its crest nervously at their approach, and ruffling its feathers.

For a long moment the two women faced each other there in front of Egan's eyes, and what it was that passed between them he did not know, except that it changed things. The flame of Lua's hair above the metal links of her mail, and beyond the dark deep eyes of this woman who was not woman as he knew them, the antique of her body, the impression of height she gave although Lua was taller, the strangeness of this great beast's face of stone upon the cliff and the doors that were his mouth—all gave Egan a fear that would not leave, but stayed, shuddering and cold in his bowels. But perhaps it was the shadows that moved when no thing was there to cause such movement, or the sensing of deep power, unheard but felt, behind and beyond this woman, that seemed to wait the movement of her hand.

"Lua of Vole, greetings," murmured Feronia, so low and soft Egan barely heard.

"Feronia of Erdis Cliff, I know you from the word-pictures that sent me to you. We seek what our life cannot give us, Feronia."

Feronia smiled wearily, shaking her head a little.

"Immortal love, you seek. I have it, Lua, and every day my heart breaks for his absence. Could you bear an immortal life, waiting for him to come again?"

Feronia's eyes had turned to Egan, as if she knew completely that this man was the center of Lua's seeking.

"Ruy Egan, do you seek the same thing?"

"Her will is mine, strange lady of this mysterious place. What there is in her imaginings and studies I know not, nor care greatly. I serve her, only."

"I understand." For one eternal moment her eyes burned into Egan's, piercing and measuring, and Egan felt the flame of her, the little sparks flickering in those dark eyes like stars in a night sky, the cold sweep of mind weighing him, and he felt fear.

SHE TURNED again to Lua, and Egan did not know if that weighing had been favorable or not. She took Lua's hand in her own, looking at it, then leading her into the doorway, and Egan followed a step behind. And as the door swung to, with a chattering and movement of the shadows, Egan sprang back from the weight of the door fearfully, for no visible hand moved it. But the two women appeared not to notice his fear.

"There is a code among us, Lua of Vole, which is harsh and strict and ancient and somewhat unjust. But we live by it, and to give you what you

seek, I must first test you, and the testing is not anything a mortal always lives through."

Lua only nodded, noting every tiny stitch of her clothing with her woman's appraising eye, noting the calm grave strength of her, the eternal beauty that her eyes could hardly look at, for the thing about her that was beauty was also something like a hidden pain to her eyes, like too much sunlight. And everything about her told Lua that she should have studied those strange captured books much more deeply, for this woman was very truly not the same as ordinary people. Which removed for her the last faint doubt of any of those awful words she had read, those terrible impossible pictures of worlds within worlds, and pain within agony, and death within death, struggle within struggle, on and on forever repeating in every dimension of like.

Egan did not note anything but a vague glory about him of impossible translucent walls beyond walls, and vague gliding life that he could not see, and golden gleamings that were tapestries, and eerie carvings that were chairs, glittering shinings that were jewels inset in strange pictures, or on their chair backs, or in the eyes of a statue. He felt like a man at a woman's tea party, and shuffled his feet, not daring to sit.

Across the cool splash of a little fountain, Egan watched the women, and listened to the words of the dark one, and wondered if he was not mad to think that this place was real and himself inside it.

"But if you two will do a service for me, we can avoid the most harsh phases of the testing, for we have that latitude, we can favor some applicants if they are able to do us a service. And certainly you can do me a service, and certainly I should repay you if you did, in spite of any

code among us. Which is why we are allowed such latitude by those Elders who once enforced the laws."

"We would do the service anyway, but to earn your favor, what could we do for such as you? I do not understand!" Lua had herself in hand, but her eyes betrayed her, following the shadows that should not be, sometimes, and other times flicking to Egan to test for an instant the substance of reality. For Egan was the only thing in those halls to her eyes familiar and existant beyond doubt.

I am anchored to this plane in certain ways, I can not travel where and when I please, for none would remain to open the door back for me. That is how I lost my one man and my only son, you see. Waiting here for their return, to let them in again to me, was fatal for us both. Yet it could not be otherwise with us who are not of the Simultane."

"You mean, they, your man and others, went into the other worlds that turn about us, passed on where none may go without losing life!"

"He went, and when I was peering after him in my doorway, our child went into that place, and I could not follow, for one must always hold the way, else there would be no fixed thing in all the universe for them. So I lost them both, my son and my lover, his father. So I wait, and hard it is with my heart crying, 'go to them!' Yet I cannot, for there would be no return, even if I found them."

"You would send us after them? What makes you think we could return, if he cannot, who knows more how to cope with such things?" Lua was looking at Feronia's sad face searchingly, trying to sense what was for her too deep for understanding.

"I do not think it, it is a matter of chance only. And my heart is hard with waiting, and if you will not go

for him who loves me, why I will not do for you those things you seek. That is my proposition."

FERONIA waited, but on Lua's set face she already knew her answer. She would not stop for any threat of death or loss in those terrible planes between the life globes of variant now. But Lua did not know what she faced in truth, and Feronia did not intend to tell her, for she wanted one whose life was more by far than theirs, her son. These were but mortals, who unless fortunate, were ephemeral as midge flies. Let them then earn a less short life, was the ancient dictum. There was a wisdom in it, however harsh. Let them seek, and find. Let them strive, and conquer or die. Then at least those who lived would be worthy of life.

"So it was, and is, and will be," murmured Feronia, and Lua only looked at her with tragic eyes.

Egan heard, and almost understood that Lua was going to accept this death they were offered on the slim chance it was not a death, but something less terrible. Egan did not care greatly, since she had refused herself to him, and he saw now nothing else in life worth having, even after all the things he had longed for as a slave.

"We will need instruction, witch of the cliff." Lua's voice was harsh, for she felt Feronia had a usurer's heart, and was not dealing exactly fairly with them. "We will need to know many things, to go there where no thing goes and lives."

"Of course, Lua. It is not as you think, but it is bad enough. I have no other way to get him back, else I should make such demands of you never. But for him, I must do this to you two."

"There it can be years, and here but minutes to you."

"There it can be minutes, and here long lifetimes. Which hope is what keeps me waiting and alive and the way open for him, *I do not know.*"

* * *

DAYS PASSED, and Egan wore now a permanent look of fixed astonishment, for all the world he knew had turned to insubstantial veils of gauze beside the realities he saw daily. And this day they were ready, and Feronia showed them the door that was not a door, but a flickering dread nothingness that went in and in forever into the rock, or into space, or where one could not see for the blue flames that licked always upward and across that tube of force.

Hand-in-hand they two walked into that tube, and along it, and the flames burned at them, the vibrant forces of it stung their feet, but something else from behind them exhilarated and protected them, and they walked on, courageous and with high heads.

Now through the walls they saw the naked anatomy of the simultane, and about it the immaterial tenuous whirling lacy curtains of repeated *Nows*, thin—separated by only Time, as the leaves of a book unleaving in the wind.

"On one of those painted windows that are worlds like our own, but different, is where our quarry is trapped." Lua's voice was strong in Egan's ears, strong and brave, yet it wavered as if from very awe of the terrible repeated variance of the simultane, which mortal eyes never see.

"What would happen to us if that dark lovely witch of Erdis shut off the great machine that throws this flow of energy upon which we walk?" asked Egan, staring hard at Lua's face, transparent now as tinted glass, a tall ghost of a life, wavering beside him as a thin wine glass shivers from repeated ringing blows.

"We would blink out like two lights the wind blew upon, and this fearful tube of force with us, of course." Lua did not look at Egan, but her eyes searched always the fearful complexities of the repeated planes of immaterial reality, separated by the dark nothings that she felt were just as much a something, but a something beyond her eyes' search, or her mind's grasp.

"We must travel to the end of this, no matter what may happen to stop us, for that is how this Druga of hers planned. Then he was to return, without delay. But he did not return."

"And neither will we, without him, Egan. I could not bear her face, to come back without her little son."

Egan fell to watching the endless shadow play of life and the cities and works and movements of the worlds that their strange vibrant walkway seemed to drive through as a spit through a fowl, or as a sword driven through the pages of a picture book—and each page was world-without-end to his eyes, stretching beyond sight. Tall towers, square and endlessly windowed, where little ships flew through the air, and big ships plowed the oceans, and men lived and died there on that immaterial transparency that was to him but as tinted glass or the film of soap bubbles, and a child peering into the clustering walls of the bubbles. They passed on through the walls of this world of speeding planes and smoking ships and clanking machines and another world, and another, and many another still, each different and varied, yet monotonously the same in a weird repetition of shape and size and movement and meaning to his eyes.

Far off they could feel Feronia manipulating the terrible power that upheld them, and the tubes about them seemed to lower, and their stomachs felt the rush downward.

"The time she set for us has passed, and she is trying to set us exactly down where she sat her man down, and left him there. She has done exactly as she remembered it, and if she is right in her work, we will find some trace of him, and if not—why we had better just stay where chance leaves us."

"We can try and try again, Egan. If we return to the tube of force, she will know, and will repeat the calculation differently."

NOW IT seemed the tube lay open before them, and they walked out on the plane of the simultane, as Egan thought. But immediately they stepped upon that bare and awful rock of the ever-existent, it changed, and there was grass over soft earth, springy under their feet, and the frightening transience of the inconsequential reality had gone, the simultane was gone from their eyes, hidden by the Now reality of the world they had set foot upon.

"Now blaze the trees, here, Egan. While you mark the circle of the trunks, I will make sure we can step back."

Egan took out the sword she had given him that night in the slave pen, and hacked off the bark of one great trunk in a yard wide blaze, and then went on to another. The silence woke his mind from the work, and he spun about. His companion had done as she said, stepped back into that force tube! She was nowhere to be seen by his eyes!

Egan ran to the spot, three strides away—stepped up along that unseen plane that was to be there till they were ready to use it—and his foot struck earth. He tried again, and found it, scrambling, and at once solidity faded about him, far underneath the awful rock showed bare and blue and cold, many-sided and cliffy

as a mountain range, himself poised above it like a bird on the wing.

Now that transparent veil of this sphere he saw the glade, and the blazes he had made on the trees, and standing there the form of Lua, turning about, her mouth open, shouting silently to him.

Egan darted to the mouth of the tube, and nearly fell to feel earth, rocking on his feet like a seaman coming off ship. The tube was gone, the glade about him silent and empty. He shouted:

"Lua, quit this play-acting and show yourself!"

The moments slid by terribly, each one heavier for him. Then he darted back into the tube, and there she was, transparent beside him, but not in the tube—in the glade. But the glade was different, subtly, the sun was not morning, but late afternoon.

Egan sat and wondered it out to himself that since they had failed to keep hand-in-hand as the witch had explained, they could not now get together till both entered the tube again. For the times were different in and out, and only hand-in-hand could the Nows coincide!

Now Egan reached out with his hands through the flickering blue flame of the end of the tube, and reached into the transience of the fugitive Now where Lua sought him hopelessly, and waved his hand. Lua saw it, and came to him.

When she stepped in, an understanding of Feronia's agony of years came into Egan's mind, and he clasped Lua to his heart with a hug that made her cry out with pain. Fiercely he whispered to her lips' red waiting:

"Know this, Lua, I will not lose you to any other thing or time or place, and live. Think you I want the fate that tears always the heart of that poor woman in her cliff back

there? Whenever we are near this tube, our hands must be as grown to each other!"

And Lua, who had not yet even given in to her long love for this man, and he pressed his lips hot on hers, her body quivered against him eager and hungry, and they both knew that for them was only each other always. Neither of them wondered why it had been so, apart, that she had still loved him, and why he had been unfortunate and fallen slave, for both now understood that men and women mate their complement or lead unlucky lives! And then they had been separated by the walls of circumstance as here they had been separated by the frail walls of time itself! Both understanding now by this chance of their separation how it had been in the past when they were young, a thing between them, a barrier as impossible to circumvent, now removed by the vagary of chance.

"It is so we learn of love, Ruy Egan! Not by intention, not by accident, but by seeing how it can be had!" Her eyes were wet against his face.

Egan said: "It is blindness, strange ignorance which they never manage to remove and reach the simultane together, a simultaneous seeing each of the other that is a marriage mightier than any priest's. Down there is the ultra-simultane of terrible ever-life. Here over it are we and the ephemeral worlds of repeated Nows unfolded in the wash of strange energies across the solid world of All."

LUA SOBBED a little, in his arms, at all the wasted years behind them. "If only, Egan, we had known what foolish flimsy barriers there exist, we could have torn them aside and reached each other."

"I was blinder than you, Lua. I did not even see you wanted me. To me

you were a peak unscalable, beyond dreams, beyond my sphere. That was my opinion of this wall between people. What it is I know not, but it is somehow like the Now that is the plane of life, separated by the dark space between the worlds."

"Perhaps it *is* unscalable, that unseeable but terrible wall. Mayhap there is no way across it, but only at certain times or places where it overlaps."

"It seems that way. But hurry, now, Lua, we upset the witch's time-table for our passing. Keep tight hold, we go into the Now."

They stepped again across the flickering bisection of the plane by the tube of time-energy, and felt their feet strike the solid Now of this strange plane of life that was a round world.

There on the great bole of a tree was the blaze he had just cut moments ago, and rain had wet it, and mould had grown upon the fresh white-slashed wood. Egan wondered at the complex mystery of this Universe of worlds Feronia had plunged them into. How many days had become yesterday while they stood pressed lip to lip and breast to breast there in the mouth of the power-flow from the witch's weird ancient machine?

Still walking hand-in-hand, they passed on through the wood, and now and then Ruy Egan struck a blaze from a tree as they passed, for if they did not find the exact spot of the tube opening they could never leave this world.

A GREAT pig ran squealing from before them, as the two came out upon a height, where the land fell away in great sweeps of forest and of green natural unkept fields. Far below were farm dwellings, and farther on, by itself upon a large

stretch of velvet green, the sharp white walls of a temple, pillared and low-roofed, like the Classic Greek.

Without thought they turned their faces toward the temple, scrambling down the near slopes of crumbling rock, and out upon the cropped fields. Here and there were groups of sheep, and in the shade a sprawling boy, asleep.

So walking, stimulated by the calm beauty and peace of the scene to a keen sense of enjoyment, they followed the dim paths of the herds-boys, and more and more frequently their steps startled a pig in the brush.

Now there were vineyards, and sheds and low thatched dwellings, and people who turned their eyes away and did not speak. Their clothing was strange and rude and very little of it, but their bodies were fine and sun-browned and their features regular as sculptures. Some were fair-haired, and others dark-locked and olive-skinned. But one and all refused to look at the two strangers, Lua in her suit of light chain and the curved sword at her hip, the mask of her helmet lifted and looking very handsome in the rig; Egan in a hunting coat of leather once her husband's, with a hat of green felt and a cock's feather in it, and at his waist the same sword she had put in his hand the night she had freed him. Incongruous and alien they must have seemed, to these rude shepherds in their rough tunics and sandals, but that their passing should be looked upon with an eye of utter disregard was to them a wonder and an ill omen. Egan put it down to fear of their supernatural nature, and tendered them the same lack of attention.

They walked on through the silence that attended their footsteps, to rise into a whispering discussion of them after they passed, and presently were looking across a low stone

wall to the white, strange temple.

Here and there rooted the same man-sized great pigs, and it seemed to Egan that these pigs were tendered the same disregard, intentional and somehow insulting, that was directed upon themselves. There was something about those pigs that struck a chord in Lua's memories of her chaotic studies, but what it was she could not recall. For what is so common as a pig, and how could a pig seem to be important, even such very big pigs as these, and so many of them, and so busy everywhere at their rooting?

Egan vaulted the low wall, waist high, and helped Lua across, and side by side they walked toward the temple, feeling that if knowledge was present here in these rude farm people, it would be in the temple only.

Now as they came round the wide corner of the building, they entered a paved court, and this was the pillared front they had seen from the mountain side.

On the flags were several square stools, four-legged and strong and carved, and on the stools were several women, young and matrons and girls not yet fourteen, gathered in a group about one personage, a woman weaving. They were intent upon her swift-fingered hands upon the shining fabric, and Lua and Egan stood, their eyes drawn by the focus of the other eyes to the glittering stuff and the bright pattern of it, and the hands that moved so swiftly over it as to seem a blur.

In Lua's mind memory evoked a phrase: "that shining stuff the Gods are wont to weave," and she wondered as she looked at the noble figure of the woman at work, and all the others agaze, that she should feel for her such awe and such fear and other emotions too intense quite to understand, too swiftly passing and changing to name or know their

nature. Her mind was a chaos.

LUA'S EYES left the group, from very wonder weary, and passed on to the temple front, and up to the low wide doorway where the cool interior could be seen in dim shadows, and over the doorway big letters spelling out a word. Her eyes picked out the letters one by one, noting the shaping and the clever clean work of the stone-cutter. Idly she spelled it out, aloud: C-I-R-C-E!

As the meaning of the word struck home, her memory brought the whole meaning of the scene clear to her, and she gave a low cry of startled wonder. "Circe, she too is then *eternal*, and not vanished in the past of any single world!"

For the multitudinous details of the simultane planes of life were all too much for her mind as yet, and she could not understand that each world is but a repetition of the other, but with a different *now-bisection* of the simultane. Which was no wonder, for her studies were made without teacher, by accident, spurred on only by the keen curiosity of her birthright of a sharp, inquiring mind. Few students of the mysteries ever learn the facts of simultane, and the details of the repetitive Nows of life, in one mortal lifetime.

At her cry, the whole absorbed group of women turned, and saw the strangers come among them, and Circe's hands left off the weaving, and her eyes turned to their faces. Seeing they were not of her world, she got to her feet with sharp interest, for intrepid and few are those who cross the planes of time.

Strangely enough, her eyes were the only eyes which focused quite correctly upon them, the others' eyes seemed to have difficulty finding their shapes, wandering about in their stare as if startled to hear words

where no one stood.

As she stood, Egan was struck with the awful beauty of her, and knew fear and attraction of an intense kind, both at once, and knew again that this experience was teaching him of the reality of super-natural life, for here it was before him.

Egan turned his eyes from the broad-browed beauty, and beyond her, through the trees, he could see the sea, with white topped waves rolling inward, and it was strange to him he had not seen the sea from the heights, but could now see it.

Her voice brought his eyes back to her face. He could not understand the words, and shook his head, noting that Lua also shook her head.

Circe now tried another tongue, and another, and then he heard his own speech come from her mouth with a strange antique sound, as if she had learned it centuries before, when it was spoken that way. He had heard oldsters use those words in just that way.

"Whence come ye, and what seek ye, from what world, that ye know not ye tread forbidden soil?"

LUA'S VOICE was low and firm, but very careful and slow, as if she feared to anger this being, and wanted very much to be fully understood.

"We come in search of a certain being's mate, who is lost somewhere in these multi-planed worlds of the many Nows. To save her heart and her life from intolerable sorrow, help us, O one-whom-we-know-not, but reverence for the power we know you possess. This man was of a rose-purple skin, very big, and a little child followed after him, unknown to him. It is his son, and hers who sent us. Help us, Circe of wisdom, Circe of the kind generous heart, and show us not your anger. We are but mes-

sengers of a greater one."

It was strange to Egan to hear the humble tone of Lua's voice, who was not apt to be humble to any one, but the reverse. He looked at her, and saw her keen mind struggling with the things she saw that were too much to understand, and the careful wit of her working on her face to play no note of her voice the wrong tone, the sharp wakefulness of her eyes intent to miss no bit of learning in this woman that might betray itself to her. Egan felt a little humble before the spirit and the mind of Lua—showing then on her like light upon what was before in shadow. His eyes flashed back to the face of the Sorceress, and some vague tale of his childhood gave him memory of what she might be, but that was all. But his eyes gave evidence, and his senses made sure, that here was no ordinary life, but something else that was no woman born of life as he knew it. No eyes so big and deep and yellow-green, no hair so rich and lustrous and shining, no skin so velvet soft upon flesh so firmly moulded and alive upon her noble frame. No lips so flexible as to be both soft and firm in one breath, no spirit of woman as he knew her could flash itself through so many swift changes, merely from thinking about they two before her. This was an intense and voluptuous creature, vastly alive and hungry for more and yet more of the pleasures of life—and having the wisdom needful for wringing from that life what she wanted of it all.

Cruelty was on her face, and generosity, a lustfulness about the mouth that came and went flickeringly, as if hiding. And above these swift betrayed emotions was a nobility that denied them, yet seemed to look at them, as a man looks at his fingers, wondering how they do accomplish

all the things that are demanded of them.

The harsh line of thought between the thick straight brows, too heavy for beauty but made beautiful by the way the hairs grew, all in their places perfectly, accenting the broad white sweep of brow, balancing the strong cheekbones and round firm chin. Luxurious nostrils, firmly carved, moving with her breath like an animal's, a breath swifter than those about her by twice. It was a face intensely human, betraying all the human weaknesses of passion and anger and thoughtless indulgence, but so much greater by the intense strength of her were these things that they were God-like.

Egan knew himself to be a gaunt figure from an impoverished and hateful world, in her eyes, and felt ashamed of the gaunt great body of him, and the shameless stare of his own eyes upon her, and turned half way 'round to keep from such sharp regard.

NOW THERE came scampering from the dim depths of the temple a little boy, seemingly of four years or so of age, and came up to Circe, putting his hands upon her skirts and hanging there, hiding his head in the rich sheer folds, peeking out at them with black, deepset eyes that were familiar to Egan's memory like the eyes of someone he knew! Curly and jet-black his hair, well-set his head; supple and strong and active, yet his skin was an off-shade of white, a purplish cast in the shadows of it! A strange alien look to him from the others, he was no son of any of these women who stood silent and taut, waiting for Circe's welcome to make them regard the two interlopers with eyes that saw them. And Egan wondered if they *could* see the two with whom Circe talked, for ever

their eyes seemed to search for them, and then turn away, afraid.

Circe caught the boy up and pressed it to her lush breasts, kissed it fondly, then poised it astride her hip, holding it with one hand as she turned again to them.

"There is a long message I want you to take back to your mistress, of whom I know. She will not like the message, but I don't think she can do much about it. I have her Druga, and her child, and I have use for both of them in the work I do, and that is far more important than anything she does with her life or would do with theirs."

"Have you ever seen Feronia's face?" asked Lua, startled to hear Circe admit she intended to keep another's husband and child.

Some tension in Lua's tone, and on Circe's face made Egan put in his oar, to avert the imminent storm.

"What is this work you speak of and its importance? Perhaps we too could be important cogs in this gin of yours?"

Now as they talked, the maids and matrons about Circe went silently away, one by one, and Egan noted each for the grace of their going and the swing of their hips, the light youth of their steps and the bright colors of the dyes in their peplums or shifts. Whatever they called them it was a shame they hid those bodies with them.

Presently there came and stood behind Circe two tall warriors with high nodding-plumed helmets, and great round shields and short wide bronze swords. And Egan knew he did not want any of their fighting.

Meanwhile he had better listen to the proud words she was so rapidly tossing at his ears:

"How can I explain to mortals the high designs of an immortal, who spends lifetimes preserving for men

one little bit of the great wisdom of the past—who works night and day to bring the plan of the immortals for the simultane state into complete fruition? Who are you to come aquestioning Circe? Bah, your mistress is a witless fool to send such as you to myself. Go back, and tell her I have need for such men as Druga in my work, and not of such ignorant ephemerae as yourselves at all."

Lua's face flushed rosy red and raised an inch in anger as Circe insulted them, but she only repeated in a tight, hard and angry little voice her question,

"Saw you ever the face of Feronia, Circe?"

"I spend my endless weary time devising for the good of man, to raise him from his low estate to something more than mortal, and I find a man able and willing to help me in my work, and a child smart and able to learn the immortal wisdom I alone possess—and this mistress of yours sends you to take them back! No, no little people, Druga the Bold stays here with me, and all others like him will I keep for my own use, and no talk of tears of broken hearts or mothers' empty arms will turn me from my intended work. Go back, you two pygmies of the life-stream, and tell your mistress to find another mate. To have another child, and to keep them both where they belong, not drop them into the interstices of time's manifold wrinkles."

"Could we talk with this man, so that we can tell our mistress how he looks, and that his health is good, and that he asked after her and we told him?" Lua's voice had lost its anger, but was still cold and a little quiver in it, as one speaking gently to a poisonous serpent about to strike, to turn away its thought to some other

thing to avert its poison fangs.

BUT CIRCE had turned from them, and gone into her temple entrance, still bearing the child on her hip, and the two warriors still stood, facing them and not moving, so that they could not follow her.

Slowly they turned away, and walked back through that antique village of shepherds and vine-raisers, and back into the forest, and there lay themselves down upon the mosses to rest and sleep. And everywhere about the pigs rooted and waddled, or ran from their presence lumbering and slow, like old men too fat to move properly.

"Lua, I don't get her talk, or her actions. Is she mad?"

"You thought me mad at first. We just don't understand her, that is all."

"What can we do if she is so totally against us?"

"Try to get to the man. He could help us!"

"After dark, Lua, we'll scout the place, see where he is kept."

"She talks largely of high designs and hard work. I suspect she lies, is an enchantress of some low degree compared to such as Feronia, who yet thinks she can thwart her of this Druga, but why she would want to risk her anger I don't know." Lua turned over on her side, composed herself to sleep.

"She is an attractive creature..." murmured Egan, to see what Lua would say.

"Hmmm," said Lua of Vole.

* * *

DARKNESS came, and they awoke from the chill of the night. Sitting up, Lua saw waiting beside them a very large purple pig, who regarded them steadily and unabashed, did not flee at their movement as had the others. She shook Egan to make

him notice, and both sat, observing the strange pig, which was very eery in the dimness. Purple and huge he was, and his snout curiously un-pig-like. Presently he spoke:

"I am the man you seek. My brothers in distress told me of your visit, and I trailed you here by means of my nose, which is good, I assure you. For instance, you of the metal shirt have a most pleasant odor, are you a friend of Feronia's?"

"You are Druga? And Circe made you into a pig? But why?" Lua stood up, and went and bent over him, exploring his hide and pig-face with her hand.

"These Elder survivors have different ways of thinking than more modern souls, and I don't think she needs what we call "why" in her vocabulary. This pig-changing stunt of hers is an old one, spoken of in the lore of more than one world where she has lived. I knew better, but I wanted to talk to her and see what the truth about her doings really amounted to. I learned. She preserves men in this guise for some project she has in mind, just what I can't quite figure. We don't run away, for she is the only one who can change us back to men again, you see. It saves her trouble guarding us, she lets us run wild. Presently, she is going to take us all to some world she is preparing to colonize, where we are to take our places as her people." So she seizes all the men she can get hold of. Ridiculous habit for a woman to cultivate, I'd say."

"Eh, I seem to have been lucky." Egan was feeling his limbs, to make sure some such change had not overtaken him in his sleep.

"Yes, she didn't take a fancy to your style. You are too starved looking for her taste, you would make a very poor looking pig."

Lua was thinking. "Druga, hadn't

we better take you back to Feronia the way you are? Do you know how long you have been here in this condition?"

"Why, it has been a few weeks. I suppose the time rates are a little different."

"It seemed to my mind that your Feronia has been waiting there alone for you for more than a lifetime of ordinary years. It has been a terribly long time on our world."

"Can't go back without the boy, you know. And besides I'm ashamed for Feronia to know I got myself into this shape."

"Never mind your being ashamed! She'll be glad to see you even in a pig-skin, Druga. If you could see her face and the awful strain of waiting all these years."

"Funny she never came, or sent some one."

"If she had, who would operate the machine of the tube? She can't leave; she alone knows the way of the machine."

"Yes, of course, I forgot. Well, I can't get the boy in this shape, but I can take you to him. Steal him, and we'll get off this island. That woman is full of the wildest ambitions I ever found in a mind. Simply impossible plans for dominion over man. She wants to be the tyrant of all time, if you ask me. Do you know how many pigs there are on this island?"

"No, do you?"

"No, redtop, I don't. But there are so many I can't even find enough acorns to keep me in flesh. I'm losing weight, running it off."

"I wouldn't trust those sheep herders if I was carrying all that bacon around with me," Egan smiled at the purple pig. "I wouldn't worry about losing some of it. Gradually is better than all at once!"

* * *

NOW, TOWARD morning, they stole into the temple of Circe, and the pig led them to the crib where the child slept. The pig said a charm that kept the woman by the crib soundly asleep. They took the child and mounted him on his father's back and went back the way they had come.

So it was that as the morning broke again over the Cliff of Erdis, Lua of Vole led the purple pig and the little boy out of the tube of force into the cliff-palace of Erdis, and Egan came out, too, glad to be free of the fear of the forces that were too much to understand.

"Feronia!" cried the purple pig, "I'm back! Oh, but it's good to see you again!"

Her dark face smiled, then frowned, and she picked the little boy off his back and hugged it, then turned it over her knee and soundly spanked the child until it screamed.

Setting the boy down, she shut off the power of the great time-force generator that did twist all the lines of *then and there* into a tube of *here and now*, and the tube blinked out; the strange hole in the walls of the many worlds disappeared, and the chamber was empty of the terrible hum of it.

"Now this is too much, to come back to me as a pig, of that particular exotic hue of hide. It is too much for a woman to bear! It was bad enough when you fell into that nymphomaniac's arms! Doris—Anthea was hardly fair, but at least she gave you back in one piece and your self whole and well. But this time you've gone too far! However do you manage to get yourself into such scrapes? Now Mors only knows how much research it will take to get you back to your own inadequate form again. Maybe it would be simpler to leave you this way..."

Which scolding voice the purple pig seemed to enjoy, nuzzling about Feronia's graceful knees with his big wet snout, and smiling gently with his huge mouth that could have bitten off her leg.

Lua and Egan stole silently from the two, the scolding dark-eyed witch now weeping and clasping the great purple pig about the tremendous neck, and the pig seeming to weep too.

CHAPTER THREE

IN THE MORNING, in that dim-lit palace of antique wonder, Lua and Egan awoke to find a tall purple male summoning them to breakfast. He was dressed in loose-fitting Turkish trousers of lavender, with golden scimitars embroidered, a vest of brilliant blue silk and a pair of carpet slippers. As he sat down to table across from Feronia and beside themselves, making four at table, Egan surmised that sometime in the night Feronia had managed to learn and execute the necessary antidote for the spell Circe had put on him.

"Most uncomfortable being a pig," said Druga, his mouth full of toast and egg. "And I had always thought a pig led a lazy life! Why I was busy morning till night just satisfying my appetite, running about till my bones ached with weariness, looking for *something* to eat."

Feronia, quite composed, but looking a bit weary as if she had been up a great part of the night, greeted them with a smile for each. Any doubts Lua had had of her intention to fulfill her promise to them was driven from her mind by her words:

"I have promised you your desire for wisdom and for life such as my own, and I will give it to you. But there is a deal of work attached."

"I can tell you that!" Druga was

very emphatic, his eyes rolling at them reminiscently. "She is a slave driver, when there is work to be done, and that process of making a mortal into an immortal is extremely complicated. Moreover there is no end to it, you go on and on doing things to the body to make it resistive to time, or what passes for time to most people, the destruction of disintegrant force. You see, Lua and Ruy, I appreciate what you have done for me and my son, and I intend to help with your re-education into our way of life."

"What is this disintegrant force you say is mistaken for time?" asked Lua, her eyes on Druga's big handsome body a little too interestedly.

"Well, in the universe there is a *growing* of all things, and there is a *burning* away of all things, for one must balance the other. One is called integrant, and the other disintegrant, or *dis* for short. One keeps on living by surrounding oneself, and filling oneself with the most active integrant substances and energy flows one can get hold of. It is enormously complicated. It takes a real magician to accomplish it. It is a very old science, such magic, and few there are anywhere who manage the thing successfully."

Feronia took up the instruction from Druga's somewhat haphazard description. "The immortal surrounds himself with a focus of integrant flows of energy, and fills himself with certain substances that induct the integrant forces into his flesh and blood. The mortal who does not do that, is burnt away as the burning particles gather in the body unresisted and not cast out again."

"Why don't you teach this process to all people, Feronia?" asked Lua. "Must they all go on dying, from pure ignorance?"

"There is an ancient compact

among immortals everywhere to keep it to themselves. I do not wholly approve, but I cannot struggle against the might of much more ancient wizards. As I told you, we have the right to break this contract only for those who have done us some important service."

"Like Circe, they are a lot of decadent, ill-intended old debauchees," said Druga, his eyes angry and frustrated. "But they are too powerful to argue with overmuch, and their laws must be accepted. When the worlds turn about enough, and a certain place is reached in the arc of Bon; a segment of the world circuit of macro-space, you know, why there will be a new order come to being, and that will be changed. Until then, we do our best with *things as they are.*"

"So today you two will serve as Feronia's laboratory assistants, while she studies her thaumaturgical pursuits, and I will take care of young Branchus, here."

The twig was busily ascending the brawny leg of Druga, and presently sat himself there on his lap at table, and began reaching for food.

"There is a deal of astonishing things about it all, which to Feronia are familiar and she hardly mentions as wonderful. For instance, among the immortals are those who have been living so long, their growth enters a new phase, an onward step in-life; and these ancients become something vastly more than matter of flesh. They are able to cast themselves into hyper-space as a vortice of energy, to reassemble again into flesh in another part of space or in another plane of matter, to traverse the myriad Nows which you crossed in Feronia's tube of force, without apparatus, merely by willing their bodies to overcome the barriers between. These are lives who have for-

gotten their beginnings, for the most part, and recognize no kinship with men like you and I. Of them all, I have only made friends with one, Mors, and she is superior to any of the others, to my way of thinking."

"But that is advanced study, and they are not ready to understand such things, Druga. Give them time, please!"

* * *

A YEAR passed, and another, or were they years? Neither Lua nor Ruy Egan knew any more whether they were there one year or ten, so absorbed were they by their work.

Now Ruy Egan and Druga were both men used in the past to a deal of outdoor activity, and one day when the two women had hurried off to the lab to attend to a certain diverting experiment having something to do with the foetus of an ape and the creation of something which they would not mention from it, and themselves were barred from the lab in consequence of this wish for feminine secrecy... Druga proposed a little "hunting" as a change.

"Whether it's going to be a cockatrice or a succubae I don't know and can't work up much enthusiasm for these more spectacular and less useful avenues of research," Druga was saying. "So let's saddle up and get out in the air."

Ruy was very much in favor of the idea, but he remembered Feronia distinctly telling Druga only last week "not to get any such ideas in his head and go gallivanting off and into trouble again. For she had quite enough of it for a long, long time to come." Which words Egan quoted to Druga, for he had a hearty respect for Feronia's ability.

"But man, she doesn't mean I'm not to get a breath of air if I want it. Why, if we listened to women all the time we would never do anything

but mind the baby and do the laundry. Am I a man or a mouse? I ask you!"

"The trouble with that is," said Egan, with a grimace, "that your dear wife can change us both into mice if she is driven to it, and I for one have no desire for the fate. I'm not married to her, you know, and she would find it no loss if I *did* become a mouse."

"Tom can take care of the boy. He's a most reliable hob-goblin. Come on, man! After all, I'm your host, and I can't sit here and watch you pine away to a shadow for the want of a breath of air."

With misgivings Egan got out the horse that had brought him there, and Druga saddled up a very peculiar looking elderly grey mare, and they rode off up the valley in the shadow of the great cliff of Erdis.

That there was something else on the big purple man's mind Egan could see quite well, for they had brought nothing in the shape of weapons but the swords at their belts, and you can hardly shoot rabbits with a sword.

As they rode hard and steadily north-by-east for a good three hours, and it became evident it would take the rest of the daylight to get back to the cliff, Egan asked: "I don't know what you're thinking, and I don't want to be a kill-joy or a spoilsport or a timid goose or anything, but still and all I don't want to anger your wife in any way. And if we are going to be home in time for supper we'll have to spur these none too rapid mounts most of the way!"

"We're not going to be home for supper, and you can rest your mind on that score. I have to assert myself a little once in a while you know, and I'm not living all my days just exactly for Feronia. Be a man, Egan. Must we be at the women's beck and call day in and day out? We need a

vacation of our own devising!"

Now Egan was a little fed-up with the same delving into musty books and practicing of thaumaturgical fum-a-diddles day in and day out, however profitable it had all been to his health, as he knew. After all, there was something in what this tall purple individual was saying. And indeed he knew a deal more about women than himself, who had spent most of the years of young opportunity with a steel collar on his neck and a shovel in his hand. So Egan rode along in silence, only muttering that it might have been wise to leave a note saying how long they would be gone.

"We'll tell 'em we chased a deer, and got lost. Don't worry so much, Egan! They've got to get used to it soon or late. We're men, and we can't be under foot around the house too much or they will forget we're necessary and begin to think we're nuisances. You want your woman to love you, don't you?"

NOW IT WAS increasingly plain to Egan that this strange fellow had a purpose, and was hurrying to keep an appointment, and had no intention of letting Ruy Egan in on it till the time came.

"You're not fooling me, Druga the Bold, as they call you for a reason I don't know as yet. You are up to something your wife would not approve of, and it is very probable that she's right. Else you would tell me, but you think I would let it out when we get back that this appointment of yours you are hurrying to keep was known to you beforehand."

Darkness had fallen, and still they rode on under a very large red moon, perfectly full and somehow ominous.

"All right, I'll tell you. You notice the full moon and the date is the latter day of October, by some reck-

onings. This night is Hallowed Eve, when certain doings take place which I have never observed and which I mean to observe, whether it's safe or not. So you can go back now that you know, and wait for me or not, just as you please. I am going to see what happens when they call up the black man, and what he is, and what is done there that is spoken of so much and with such reservation of information as to drive a man mad with curiosity."

"I'll stick it out, but it doesn't sound like a man should fool without proper precautions. Have you brought with you the herbs, the silver cross, a sword with a silver blade, garlic and all the other essentials of staying alive?"

"Why, man, we couldn't get within a hundred yards of the rites, with all that clutter on us. Garlic indeed! We have to pretend we're of the black order, and that is not hard, they're an ignorant lot. Just do as I do, you'll be safe enough. I want to see this."

"They perform certain erotic dances I admit to having a yen to observe myself — but from what little I know one is apt to wake up as a black cat the next morning, or as a pig or someone's donkey. I should think you would have had enough of being a pig!"

"No use living if you're going to miss all the fun. Why, Feronia used to attend these shindigs herself before she settled down to married life."

"It's easy to see how you get into all these scrapes, as Feronia says so often. You have little enough prudence in your makeup."

"Ninny!"

"I am no milksop, Druga. But just the same I don't like to put my head in a bag without taking a look at the one holding the bag. And you will be left holding some kind of bag before the night is over, if you don't

take some kind of precautions. Witches are up to their worst tricks this night, and you know it."

"Pshaw. They're too scared of Feronia to bother me. Now shut up, we're getting close."

The two men dismounted, tied the horses, and made their way on foot up the slope of a hill. At the top they crawled forward among the bushes, until they could see down the farther slope. Druga said:

"Tis Marlowe Heath, a spot, accursed and shunned of all mortals. The Sabbath is held here four times a year, but this is the one night when the real gentry attend, and not a lost soul misses the rites."

"So you're only going to watch, and not walk into the mess. I'm glad of that."

"I want to see who's here, first. I might see some friends of mine, you know. If it looks safe for us, we'll join in the frolic. Druga cocked an eye at Egan, half serious, but in fun.

EGAN DID not answer for below was a tremendous circle of dark stuff like smoke, and many torches, and spirits of people going about in it like fiends in hell. Through the air rushed more and more of them, landing in the circle of smoke and dull flame, and they were misty shapes, some of them, and some of them young and pink and extremely naked and quite solid looking.

"Now are they there in the flesh or in the spirit?" asked Egan

"It is a matter much disputed of virtuous people and theologians everywhere, as if the only way to find out was not to go there and see. I think it is both, by the look of it."

"I wish you'd explain just what is going on, so I'd have some idea what it's all about," Egan was straining his eyes after the numerous gyrations of various dancers, some with pink and

white bodies of a marvelous well-formed appearance, others black as ink and ugly shaped, others still red as fire and glowing all over as if they were made of hot iron.

"There's an awful press of them. Let's go down and mix in the mob. They'll never notice we're not of the annointed."

First explain it to me, Druga. The night's young yet; there's plenty of time. Why, there's more of them arriving all the time; nothing's going to happen till they're all here."

"Well, Satan, or the Red Dwarf, or the numerous other names the many-bodied thing has, is a kind of God and these are his worshippers. I don't *know* whether Satan and the Red Dwarf are the same or not; if they are, I don't believe this Sabbath is the one evil thing men think it is. It's one of the points I want to clear up. I think they are separate entities, and this Satan of the Sabbath is the one called the Black Man, who had a deal to do with the beginning of things and setting this clock of many-walled earths up and ticking on its way. But then he lost out in the shuffle, and got kicked out, which didn't worry him much, as the whole pantheon of Gods has perished since then, and he still exists. There is only *the one God* of course, and Satan is his rival, nowadays, but once it was a lot of them against Satan. Just who was in the right and trying to do the right thing for the sad earth of our Now I want to find out, as there is so much written about it by men who ought to have known better."

"Yes, yes, go on. What is the lewd naked dancing all about, for instance?"

"Well, Satan is a survival of a time when such dancing was considered natural and appropriate, and the prejudice against such frank displays is

of rather modern origin. So we can't hold his old-fashioned taste for nude flesh particularly against him. There are moderns who hold that men are too repressive of their natural instincts these latter times, and I for one could do with a little more fun of some kinds that I ever get out of life, without it particularly harming anyone. That is another thing I want to learn, whether he is the last stronghold of paganism or is a really devilish influence trying to tear down the work of the good forces of life."

"Yes, yes, but what are they going to do and what does it mean?"

"Well, see that large feminine display of flesh flying directly over our heads? That is the Queen of the Sabbath being borne to the feast by her attendant witches. She is to be the central part of the feast, everything will revolve around her. I've read up on the rituals pretty thoroughly."

"What is the feast about, and why tonight?"

"Just ancient custom. The original meaning is unknown to any but Satan, I guess. They practice an inverted form of the Mass, the Black Mass, you know, and go through a ceremony that has been deviously misreported by a thousand and one writers who never saw a Sabbath."

"They go through a ritual of the church of God in reverse to show contempt for it and its power to harm them for the sacrilege, I have heard."

"Yes, but a really honest historian has to admit that this ritual is much older than modern religion, so how could it be a reversal of the present-day ritual if it's older? I want to see the details and learn whether the Moderns didn't borrow theirs and change it by reversal. The Moderns wear clothes to the chin, the Demoniists wear nothing but skin, and it seems to me that bare skin is the old-

er of the two garments. Everything else is likewise in reverse, but which came first is a matter in which these Demonists have History on their side."

AND WHAT is that dark statue squatting there, with the naked nymph astride its lap?"

"Once it was called Priapus, and then Pan, and now Satan. What it really is is an excuse to forget that modern affliction of the mind called conscience, or consciousness of sinning, or remorse or what name you will. Nowadays a person can't amuse himself with his natural equipment for amusement without feeling guilty. So that statue came into being when the affliction became general, and has somehow evolved into Satan, the immortal creature who created the first alibi for erotic debauch."

"You seem to have a sympathy for this evil business going on here tonight!"

"Maybe I do, Egan. Things are not so right with the world that we can condemn an ancient order which has been a *minority objector* for so very long."

"And then of course it isn't wisdom to antagonize an order so noted for getting even with their enemies. Druga?"

"Exactly. Moreover, belonging to those who study the arts of magic, I can't condemn an order devoted wholly to that study, to whatever purpose they are said to devote their powers. There is a deal of ill-intended gossip in the world, you know."

"Still it hardly seems fitting to approve of what I see going on so furiously down there. Why every man has a woman with him, and you can't tell me that they intend any good..."

"Men and women will get together one way or another, and it is traditional of the Sabbath that no woman or no man may be there without

one of the other sex. So each female brings a male, and vice versa."

"Why this intense concentration on such matters? This monstrous gathering seems hardly the place!"

"Ancient custom, bred into a behavior pattern by the exigencies of life in the past."

"They still come flying through the air in droves. They are lining up back to back, men in one line, women in the other. Strange dance formation..."

"We'd better get down there. We can't see anything from here." With which words Druga heaved himself to his feet and began to stride speedily down the slope. Egan decided he might as well go along. Was he a man or a mouse?

Now Druga and Egan pushed through a throng of people, trying to get nearer the center of the performance which now seemed officially to be opened and begun. Egan had many a shiver getting used to the sight of normal fleshly people, farmers and serfs and laborers, as well as a sprinkling of rich folk, all mixed in with a vast number of transparent and evidently ghostly spirits, all of these in the nude, and almost solid-seeming except when they got in front of the firelights. Egan had a hard time understanding the state they were all in. For the most part *they had their eyes closed*, though many did not. They seemed in a state of drugged sleep, in which they could yet see and hear everything going on! As they passed a long board, several little and quite charmingly nude young witches pressed refreshment on Egan, and as Druga drank the bitter stuff down, so did Ruy Egan. Then on, pushing through the milling mob of dreamers, some floating overhead, some roosting in trees, some dancing back-to-back or cheek-to-cheek, all awaiting

something, and getting gloriously drunk with this strange brew they were handing out in quart size goblets. Their cheerful excited hospitality was the thing that struck Egan as most incongruous, as he had heard so many stories to the contrary.

Moreover the fact that nearly half of them were not even there in the flesh, but present in a most immaterial body fashioned seemingly of their own imagination, some very beautiful as only an imagination could make a body, others grotesque as only a person who thought very poorly of himself would shape a dream body. Moreover these very nicely colored pink and white nude immaterialities *changed constantly* to suit the tenor of the thoughts of those eyes that looked at them, melting into exactly that kind of personal appearance one desired them to be, so that as he went along after Druga's tall pushing form, Egan was treated to the sight of such hours as no man had ever seen before, that he had heard of. There was distinctly something to this Sabbath. Just how these transparent people got into that shape Egan hadn't the faintest idea, but they seemed to be having by far the best time of anyone present.

ONE OF THESE lovely spirits lay a hand upon Egan's arm, and he stopped, thrilled to the core of him by the surge of electric delight sent from her fingertips into the core of his bones.

Softly her body moved, and as it moved it melted subtly and changed, just *there* where he thought the hip a trifle bony, he saw that it had been the light and that in truth her hip was nobly rounded and quite perfect, and *there* where he thought her inner thighs lacking flesh, they became full and touching as she walked, and her eyes that had seemed at first

small became as he looked tremendous wells of green fluorescence sparkling with strange and secret eroticisms, and as he looked into those depths, his inner clutching self *was dragged out of his mouth* and he fell to the ground, a dead hulk! The female spirit, with his hand in hers, whirled him in a wild dance up and up into the air, then down and down, thrillingly, ecstatically, free as the air and daringly flying better than any bird!

Now Egan and his companion hovered over the strong young witch, nude and outspread upon the altar. Her silken net of midnight hair dragged in the dust, offered up as a sacrifice. And Egan settled over her face with his body very close, his eyes peering into hers, and she was real living flesh and not any dream-walking, as he knew himself to be that night.

Now upon her flat belly the offertory of the faithful was deposited, in the shape of a great heart-shaped cake, a cake of black texture, Devil's Food indeed. Egan was too excited by the electric arms of his flying nymph about him to remember the words, except that some ancient deep thought of life was invoked, strangely enough, for the purpose of making fruitful the fields, and for the enfranchisement of the oppressed. Which did not seem strange at the time, and contrary to report, but did so later as he thought back.

Egan noted Druga now, foremost of the males about the altar, his eyes taking in each detail of the wild pagan scene carefully, and the drink that had driven the soul right out of Egan's body into arms of a temptress had not seemed to affect him at all!

The wild ritual went on, the horned Demon who was the Officiary for the still absent Dark God let loose a flight of birds, one each of several different kinds, from between the

bright breasts of the naked altar, and what the pretty ceremony was for Egan did not know.

Pan-pipes were tuning up in the background, and big kettle drums, little drums were beginning a slow and steady beat, which was constantly gradually added to and increased in tempo. Whatever that music was, it was like none he had ever heard in its effect, for every sound seemed to go right through his immaterial dream-body, and Egan danced in spite of himself to the sound, as if the music and himself were become the same thing.

Then a handful of wheat grains were sprinkled over the prostrate body of the witch-altar, and the cake was distributed with care, one bit was passed here and one there, so that all touched it at least once.

Then the Devil's Bride, as Egan thought of this nude altar of flesh, rose to her feet, and Egan saw she was a beautiful and mature sorceress of a full thirty years of age, with the face of a Medea and the beauty of a Madonna, her eyes deep-set and restless, tragic with the woes of mankind, her hair a torrent untamable, reaching below her hips, wildly writhing as she moved in a posturing dance of supplication to the Dark spirit who had not yet graced the festival.

As she moved thus, wholly beautiful but forbidding as death itself, she chanted—"Lord, preserve us from the traitorous and the overbearing. Keep us to the ancient path of life that is good for all and not only for the few, help us to preserve the ancient teachings of Pan and Bacchus and Priapus, help us not to fall into the dark ways of morality and suppression of all goodness in life."

AS HER CHANT went on thus, Egan was vastly confused not to hear *evil* from her lips, but this de-

fense of debauchery of the most convincing kind, as if it were a God's gift from the past much abused in the present time here on this earth. And Egan left the arms of the sweet transparent nymph, and settled down beside Druga, who stood with eyes hypnotically glued to the dark magic of the Sabbath Queen's beauty, and asked:

"Explain this to me, Druga. They do not think of themselves as evil but think of what they call morality as evil afflicting mankind. . ."

"Every man to his own philosophy, Egan. It is an ancient relic of a life vastly different from modern times. Once it was good wholly, and wisely preserved man's delight in his kinship with nature and with the beasts., But it has become perverted into acceptance of true evil as necessary in life, which is untrue entirely. They have lost some of the true wisdom, and preserved some. The Moderns have likewise saved some and lost some, hence they are at opposite points of the compass, both partly right, and both wholly wrong in thinking these things are opposed in nature itself. By the way, how did you get into such an airy shape. Were you beguiled out of your body?"

"Eh! Why, yes, a pretty witch pulled me right out with the touch of her lips to mine. Why?"

"Just be sure you get back into the right one afterward, there are a lot of others lying about like yours."

"I thought it was the bitter wine they gave us."

"My God, man, you didn't drink that witches brew? Why, I only *pretended* to drink it, to keep my wits!"

"Now he tells me," groaned Egan, and flew off to join his witch again. For the Sabbath only comes once a year after all.

Now the Queen of the Sabbath

went thoroughly into some very picturesque activities with the great body of the statue of darkness in the back of the place where she had served as altar, and Druga was vastly diverted by the fancies these people held to be true. As she purified herself afterward, Druga edged nearer, and examined the drugs and other things laid out on a table for her use. She turned from her late employment, and for an instant their eyes met, and Druga felt that he knew this woman from of old, but could not remember where.

"It is odd to see you here, virtue!" she murmured in his ear, and for an instant he would have sworn it was Feronia's voice, but it was not, of course. There were violets in her hair, and vervain, and ivy, woven into a wreath, and Druga knew these things had to do with death. And Druga did not desire to have any thing whatever to do with death, and kept his mouth firmly shut.

Then she took up a handful of white powder, and tossed it into a low fire under a kettle, and put things into the kettle, and writhed her sweetly formed dancer's body about the fire in a way that would have made the dead rise out of their graves. And this seemed the necessary medicine, for out of the pot began to emerge a mist far darker than steam. which mist coagulated swiftly into a man's body, black and scaled all over. This personage stepped out of the steam of the little cauldron calmly, and embraced his Queen with fervor and much too great frankness of affection.

Now the dark lovely queen appealed to the lightning to strike down this new-comer if it were able, and the black scaled man glanced up calmly, as if knowing it would do no such thing.

The tom toms and kettle drums had

been steadily increasing their tempo and their volume, and the music of fifes and pipes as well as strings joined in more and more. The whole assemblage were dancing now, back to back, touching their bodies and lifting their feet in a very ancient dance of great meaning.

* * *

NOW THE BLACK Man decapitated a toad, which seemed to Druga rather a strange proceeding, but he called it by a name that Druga had little time for as he did it, so that Druga realized it *had* a meaning, for if the one so named had been able to resent the insult, he would have done so.

Druga had learned that the Red Dwarf had nothing in common there this night with the Black Man, and one of his purposes had been accomplished. But there was a deal to learn, for one interested in magic, and Druga was keeping his ears open, as well as his eyes.

Now this Dark one raised his hands, and by a miracle, every one of those unattractive people who had remained back to back became at once handsome beyond words, and at once turned about, facing each other delighted and astounded at the sudden improvement. Which to Druga seemed the height of kindness, for some of them had been most infirm and ugly of body. Now, for one night at least, they would appear as they would like to appear to one they loved!

As the Black Man relinquished the Queen to the waiting stag line, and the dance went on into transports of utter madness or delight, according as the view-point is. Druga engaged this gentleman in conversation, which he seemed to resent, but Druga had things to learn.

"How is it that you are supposed to be the God of Evil, yet here to-

night I have seen no evil as yet?" asked Druga the Bold, and inwardly wondering if he did not deserve the name Bold for being so forward with one who is feared so generally.

"Ah, a stranger in our midst! I have not the honor of your acquaintance, sir. Have you been initiated, or are you just an observer?"

"Why, I am Druga the Bold, of Erdis Cliff, and I was curious. I wanted to talk to you. It is a part of education, you know, a most necessary part. So I came to the Sabbath in quest of wisdom."

"Well," and Satan, or the Black Man, or Lucifer, or whoever he might really be if anyone knew, rubbed his hands together, "I've heard of you, and I'm glad to make your acquaintance. You are considerably older than you appear, and Mors herself was so kind as to take you under her protection. So you come well recommended, and I am glad to have you here."

"Yes, I am glad to be here, and I think your ritual a most charming one so far, and most exciting and well conceived. But what is all this talk of dreadful evil in your person and customs, and why are these delightful witches said to be distributors of disease and storms and such like inconveniences of life."

"Well, I'll tell you, Druga. It is an old custom of the "ins" to blame everything on the "outs", and I have been "out" of favor with certain great responsible parties for a long, long time. So it is that people generally have come to the belief I am the one responsible for what is really the gods' fault. They designed the earth themselves, and not a bad job, but let it drift afterward, and it got into a very evil part of space where all kinds of ills befell the people who had trusted fate so fully they forgot to take care of them-

selves. Naturally they needed a scapegoat, and they drove me out of heaven as the color of my skin lent itself to calumny most handily. You know the old saying: "There's a black man in the woodpile".

"So there is a heaven, after all?"

"Well there was, the last I heard, but to tell you the truth, I've heard it's vastly run down and not nearly so attractive as it's trumped up to be.

"Now the Devil put one leg upon the bare wood where the naked Queen had so lately lain in his worship, and began to expound even more interestedly to Druga, so that he felt that here he had met a man who was really interested in Wisdom and in himself, except that he hated very much to waste the time with him, as the night was drawing on, and he had hardly danced with any of these delightful young witches and sorceresses as yet. But he could hardly be impolite to the Devil himself, so Druga composed himself, only casting a wistful eye out over the madly capering throng of them with their eyes tightly closed and seeing everything in the perfect form and color that is only possible on this earth when the eyes are closed.

NOW THERE came scampering up to the two men talking by the vacant altar two twin sisters, with black hair and young sharp breasts and every capable appearing hips and limbs well shaped and their cheeks red with dancing, their bright little red tongues hanging out upon their soft lips, panting, and squealing a little as they pushed and shoved each other to get closer to either Druga or the Black Man. And one of these set herself astride the Black Man's extended leg, and the other mounted up on Druga's shoulders and back and made herself comfortable with her legs about his neck. And the Dark

One and Druga went on talking while the two girls chattered to each other in whispers, and that made the time seem less wasted to each of them. For on the Sabbath everything must be as one would wish it, for the faithful, and certainly no men would wish to stand alone and talk without the company of women.

"I have always heard you had a hand in creation, and then did your best to tear it all down again!"

"Why no, Druga, the truth was very different from the tale told generally. The White God and I had an argument of some length, you know. I objected strongly to exile and slander, and besides I knew what was going to happen to earth and I wanted to get off it and go the proper direction through space. But he had to make me seem responsible, and the punishment seemed just, to make me accompany the earth on its unhealthy journey into the worst plague spots of all space—so here I am, making the best of a bad deal."

"So you think that White God is a very poor astronaut who could not give his universe a proper course through the tides of space-energy. I see, and he blames you for it all, and goes scot free in the heavenly tribunals."

Now the Medea's face of his Queen appeared between Druga and the Dark One, and she seemed to desire to know just what was going on to keep the guest of honor, the Devil himself, from taking proper part in the Sabbath activities. But the Dark One only put his arm about her wonderful shoulders, and introduced her to Druga formally, and he learned her name was *Morganstern*.

Her dark torrent of hair was moist with sweat, and the satin-smooth hide of her glistened everywhere with moisture, so that in the firelight she seemed jeweled with blood-red rubies

and little pearls everywhere on the whiteness of her. A well developed and mature Sorceress, of uncertain age, Druga knew, maybe a hundred years and maybe only twenty five, or perhaps a thousand. Who was he to say, who should have been in his grave many years ago except for Peronia's work? She bent a somewhat suspicious eye upon the tall purple-skinned self of Druga, but as she examined him more closely a certain acquisitive glint came into her eye which Druga knew of old, and which tonight of all nights he knew he would be unable to circumvent.

Druga excused himself hastily, and was about to lose himself in the now quite frankly cohering multitude, nearly inosculant as they were, he found among them no interstitial crevices to insert his large self between, and so turned back perforce to find Morganstern whispering in the Dark One's hairy long ear, who poured fluid into a large cup.

The Dark Man tasted of this fluid, then as Druga still did not any longer press himself upon the two beside the Altar, beckoned to him, saying:

"Can't have you leave without tasting this particular wine, brought here at great trouble myself for my special friends, and I know that you *are going to be one*. It is not every day that I meet a man so broadly educated as yourself, who has read *the three books* and knows all the words, whether he realizes what they truly import or not. Drink, Druga!"

His tone admitted of no refusal in good taste, and as Druga took the big cup, Morganstern raised a cup very similar, except that two green snakes seemed to twine living about it, shining about it, shining green and scaly in the reddish light, which was very odd.

"To the good old days, before men forgot how to live and stay alive,"

cried Morganstern, in a voice neither gay nor sad, but excited as at the prospect of some infernal joy beyond understanding.

"To the good old days," murmured Druga mournfully, and drained his cup with utmost misgivings.

CHAPTER FOUR

NOTHING at all happened to Druga, as it had to Ruy Egan, after drinking this draft, except that everything got a deal rosier and more attractive upon the edges, including Dame Morganstern. But then Druga had been equipped with great care with an immortal constitution, which on that planet called earth was a constitution indeed.

Nothing at all, that is, except that shortly thereafter he had thrown one arm about Satan's shoulder and one about Morganstern's, and was singing with them a strange song about:

"The sly serpent, in the golden
flame,
The magic circle of her voice, her
voice, her name,
Her everlasting lair, her emerald
throne
And Universal Pan, these twain
vernant
Within the mountains adamant,
Where the quick heart of the
world doth pant."

and a deal more which he could never remember or get into the same silly rhyme again, when he tried later on. The three then joined the revel, and what they did the rest of the night Druga conveniently forgot.

Now the three, arm in arm, took three steps forward, three right and three back, turned and spun dizzily in a whirling that was to Druga like nothing he had ever been through,

and in a moment they sank straight into the earth. Druga knew it was near morning, for he heard a cock crow as this occurred, but he was past worrying just then about anything.

Ruy Egan found himself back in his body about the same time, and got up with an aching head, to see around him only a few bucolic gentlemen and ladies who paid him the least possible attention and made their way off into the morning.

Now Ruy knew that he could not go back to Feronia without her Druga, and so he searched about till he found the bare spot of deserted earth where the altar had last night been surrounded by golden flames and where a throne had been set behind, and where a great black statue had sat—and there was now nothing at all of those things or the wonderful entertainment which had gone on so divertingly.

But there was a very charming young witch sweeping up the numerous leavings of the feast, scraps of food and bits of torn clothing and cake and what-not, and Egan went up to her humbly, inquiring:

"Have you seen a tall purple fellow about in green jerkin and hose, with a wide golden belt about his middle?"

The little minx smiled disturbingly on Egan's rueful face, and wiggled her hips unnecessarily, and went on with her sweeping saying:

"Why yes, strange one. I saw such a one dancing hell-bent with the Queen of the Sabbath, and with his arms about the Devil's shoulder and about the Queen's shoulder, and it seemed to me he went with them when they left. And they went straight down!"

"I've got to find him. I can't go back without him."

"You'll have to look in Hell, if I'm any judge, and I am, if I do say it

myself. Morganstern took a liking to the tall purple fellow, I could tell, for she chased me off his back herself. I didn't want to argue with her, I can tell you."

"But how do I get there, charming witch that you are?"

"Why I would take you myself, if I could, and I can, for there is nothing I'm afraid of in this old earth you know, after what I went through last night. But I can't promise to bring you back, even to come back, and I don't know as I would want to if they let me in, and they might, you never can tell..."

The girl went on at a great rate in this vein, and Egan gathered that she knew the way from hearsay, and not from experience, and that people who had been there described the place in distinctly glowing and fiery terms.

So he sat down on the ground to wait for her to finish her sweeping, and presently she took her broom and shoved it between his legs where he sat, and then sat down on his lap and said:

"Fly low, fly high, where the Devil goes, there go I. Come hail, come sleet, come death or fire, why still I'll follow and admire..."

There was more of it but it was unfit to mention and Egan forgot it anyway. Then she snapped her fingers and the broom rose in the air! Egan clutched the little witch firmly about the waist and she looked back over her shoulder at his sudden ardor, saying:

"Are you scared or just trying to squeeze me?"

"A little of both, of course, my dear," replied Ruy Egan, smiling very anxiously. He had no wish to antagonize this particular female just then.

After a dashing time of up and round about as if she were chasing a smell through the windy air, a smell

of brimstone that Egan could scent for himself, she flew down the open mouth of a volcano, and Ruy Egan gave himself up for lost as the smoke rose black and stifling about them.

* * *

NOW DRUGA and the Queen and Satan passed down through a strange tube of rock, and came out in a huge cavern, still singing a song that went on and on about

"Centaur and satyrs, and shapes that haunt,

Nymphs and dryads and Cerberus gaunt,

Wet clefts, and lumps neither dead nor alive

Oh give me hot Hell, and there I'll thrive."

So the three of them progressed along a path of green malachite, laid out in weird designs with porphyry and garnet insets dividing, and Druga got even dizzier as the Devil insisted on not stepping on the cracks between the parquetry of stone, which was well nigh impossible. Druga had a suspicion that his companions were drunk, and that he could himself not fully remember everything that had happened last night, for he remembered whirling a certain witch up over his head, but couldn't remember her coming down again at all! But he was quite sure he himself was not quite drunk and proved it quietly to himself by pronouncing the name "Asmodeus" and went on to clinch it by saying one after the other "Aphrodite, Zeuxippe, Zosteria and Venus Mechanitis."

Satan swore a black oath at these names.

"Leave those old fogies out of this. Do you want them down here moralizing just when things are getting warm?"

"Why, does this Venus Mechanitis go in for moralizing?"

"Not her, but Zosteria is Minerva and is she a nasty old frump! She has never been a friend to me, I can tell you."

"Very well. I was just proving I wasn't drunk by pronouncing the names correctly."

"Now what a way to tell," murmured the Queen of Hell in his ear. "I can think of a dozen ways more entertaining than that."

"For instance?" asked Druga, feeling a bit lost in the immensity of gouting flames and gloomy corridors and glorious sculpturings of a most vague antiquity which he could not remember ever having heard mentioned before.

"Why, count your fingers, and if you have ten you are sober. There are still other things you can count too, like noses, lips and limbs, if you feel so inclined and you can't get up to ten. Why think about being sober, anyway? Its a most depressing state?"

"Two legs, two eyes, two lips, one nose—a most attractive nose it is too. Did you ever have that glorious cascade of hair counted, Morganstern?"

"No one of my acquaintance ever took time to count them that I recall. Would you like to try, Druga the Bold?"

"S'beautiful hair, you ought to keep better track of it all, you know. Why, last night it was positively dragged in the dust, and it broke my heart to see it so, too. Ah, Morganstern, I can't think at all what I ought to be thinking, or why I am here and all the other things that were so important yesterday. You must forgive my condition and not notice. I am afraid I'm drunk!"

"Wonderful, you're a most diverting fellow when you're loosened up a little. Wherever have you been keeping yourself?"

"S'funny, but I can't remember a

thing about it?"

"It'll all come back to you, I'm sure, if you don't worry about it too much. Now let's have some more fun before everything gets spoiled."

"S'poiled. What'cha mean spoiled?"

BUT THE witch did not answer, only leading her two somewhat irregularly erect companions on into a chamber where a great emerald throne sat among a score of tall golden flames. There were dozens of scurrying black servitors here, who brought them immediately a flagon of something or other which they poured down their burning throats, and Druga said:

"Y'know, Satan old fellow, there's a deal of talking we have to do yet about certain points you brought up last night. I remember I had a lot to learn that I didn't know, but what were we talking about?"

"Never mind, never mind, we've got to tend to the judgment here, and then there're several other duties to be got through, and then we'll have the dancing corps amuse us. I'm going to show you Satan is no niggard before you go back to your Cliff. However do you entertain yourself shut up in...." but here Morganstern shoved her elbow into Satan's ribs and he forgot to continue. But Druga was watching a very pretty red-skinned native with a pointed tail and provocative horns who was filling his cup which somehow still remained in his hand.

"Now you two make yourselves right at home while I'm gone," said Satan, mumbling his words a little. "I've got some business to attend to, you know, and then I'll join you." He waggled a thick black giant finger at Druga sagely; "Don't do anything I wouldn't do, Druga old man, or I'll keep you here for a sinner, you know.

Ha-ha-ha. Sinner's sinner, sinner!"

As he moved off Druga heard him uttering— "S'funny things they tell people about poor old Satan, say I lie, make them uncomfortable, and such tales. Incredible how credulous people are about slander. Why, take that charming young fellow, well educated and yet he has the most astounding misinformation."

"Now who would have thought he was such a hospitable old gentleman?" murmured Druga into Morganstern's ear, where she had drawn him beside her to the tall emerald throne, and he was surprised to note the flames did not burn him, but were extremely pleasant of sensation, exhilarating and not at all what ordinary fire should be.

"Never mention his age to his face, he's most sensitive about it," said Morganstern, stroking Druga's flushed face with her hand, and bending and pressing a kiss to his lips.

"Ya know, Morg, old girl, I never met a woman appealed to me right off the bat, as it were, like you." Druga began to laugh. "That's funny, Morg, right off the bat. And him with bat's wings, and all."

"It's not very funny to make fun of the old man, Druga, nor smart."

"S'unintentional, my girl, strictly accidental speech. I meant nothing whatever derogatory. I mean everything just the best by the two best friends I've met since....since.... I can't remember when."

It wasn't every day she met a man so much larger and stronger and smarter and superior in every way to the general run of mankind, mused Morganstern, wondering just what blood this extremely attractive male had in his veins, to be so very different. But she was not the first to make a fuss over the big handsome animal, she realized. He thought pretty well of himself. As soon as the

drink was out of him he would leave here, but meanwhile he was amusing and there was no hurry. It was odd that a few drinks should make him lose his memory, for she was anxious to learn all about him herself. But perhaps one of those designing witches that had been pussycatting around him when she met him had slipped a potion in his cup. You never knew, these degenerate days, what deviltry the profession might be up to their necks in practicing. Strictly against the rules, too!

"The one thing most apt to make him lose his temper would be to have him hear you call him an old bat, my fine purple-skinned male. Wherever did you get such an oddly attractive coloration, sort of an old rose with orchid trim, as it were?"

"S'been in the family for generations, all the people of my generation were like that, before I went searching for wisdom and got lost in the wiles of Diana—Hecate—you name her and you can have her. She is a—hiccup—she is, the old bat."

Druga was seated upon one of the steps of the dais of the emerald throne, his arm casually about the waist of Morganstern, and quite gradually his head slipped lower and lower until he was asleep with his head in her lap, and she sat brooding and holding the man's head, the tall golden flames flickered ceaselessly, and the dark shadows scurried on nameless errands.

CHAPTER FIVE

NOW INTO the tremendous chamber that was certainly big enough to hold an army comfortably with all their baggage and cavalry and horses, too, there came flying a broomstick carrying double, and accomplished a high banking turn, skidded with a fishtail sweep to

a right and left and then turned turtle entirely, dumping Ruy Egan and the young witch onto the stone floor right in front of the brooding Morganstern and the sleeping Druga.

Morganstern frowned severely at the pretty young witch, and remembered her from last night. She asked:

"Aren't you the slick young puss I saw astride this man's neck last night? Don't answer, I remember you. Just what did you give him to make him forget who he is?"

"Just a little *bhang* in his cup, Queenie. I couldn't help it. He's such a large one, you know, and such a rare color. The collector's instinct in me got the better of my judgment. You won't report me to the council, please, Queen?"

"Not if you give me the antidote and that in a hurry. I want to bring back his wits when I get ready, you know. What good is a man who doesn't know his own name?"

"What good is his name? You got the man, haven't you? My goodness, I always said they give me the name, I'll take the game that's what I say. So I took him, and you got him. I'm the loser, not you."

"Give me the prescription, puss, before I lose my temper."

"Oh, all right, here it is, and you have to use it while it's hot; it changes in the air. But you don't need it, he'll recover in a few hours. It's no wonder he's drunk, though, drinking the Devil's own wine on top of what I gave him. And walked all the way down here— It took us hours to fly the distance. Whatever do you do with yourself all day here in the, shall we say, nether regions, or shall we say, warmer climes?"

"Does she go on like that all the time, you....whatever your name is?"

"My name is Ruy Egan, and I accompanied yon sleeping giant to the

Sabbath against my better judgment. And she does go on like that whenever you ask her a question. Other-side she's an amiable well-mannered witch, kindly and obliging and contrary to what I expected to find in a black witch."

"Ruy Egan, eh. And you know who this gentleman is and his home and friends, eh? Well, make yourself at home till the entertainment the old Master of the Netherlands is preparing is over, and I fancy you will want to be returning again to the surface."

"Do I have to go back, Queen? I always wanted...." began the little red-cheeked witch, but Morganstern only frowned at her and she fell silent, only muttering: "Not to have to build a fire every time I want some tea! It's so nice and warm and all and now she won't let me stay. I'll see the Devil, that's what I'll do...."

Morganstern sent one of the lithe black things off to the prescription department with the paper the young witch had given her, and presently Druga had his wits back nearly as good as before. But he did not seem in a hurry to leave, which worried Egan, as he kept expecting Feronia to come around a corner, scolding, but she did not appear. Indeed, she hadn't the faintest idea where they were. Or did she? Druga wondered as he looked at Morganstern. Where had he heard that voice before?

The two men and the two witches sat there about the great green throne, and presently the Black Man came back looking considerably refreshed and glowing a little over his black body with little flames now everywhere, as if he had been basking in a fire. He sat himself down beside the large and lovely body of Morganstern upon the throne and clapped his hands, and from right and left swept a troupe of female demons, very loose in their hips; and into a sinuous dance

that took full advantage of the hip motion which they seemed to have developed far beyond the normal human movement.

NOW ABOUT this black man, Druga noticed a vast dark majesty which he had laid aside the night before, a brooding timeless abyss of thought active behind the broad horned skull of him, a magnificence alien and inhuman but not evil. This intrigued Druga, and he resolved to make the most of this chance to acquire wisdom from an ancient source.

As he was about to begin to draw out the black man upon various philosophic and esoteric topics that occurred to him, Morganstern leaned to the black man and asked: "Did you shut off the dream beam. No use wasting the power on an empty heath."

The black man got up and went to the dim side of the chamber on the left of the throne, and there in the dimness Druga noted a vast whirling cage of metal and a panel of dials and switches beside it. From the top of the metal circular grillwork a vast beam of dream-colored force shot up through the rock, blue and violet and gold, misty and seeming filled with spinning globules of whitish mist.

As he returned after pulling a switch, and Druga watched the spinning cease and the beam of force die away to nothing, Druga asked:

"Now what the devil is that?"

"That is what made it possible for the dream bodies of the feasters last night to leave their flesh bodies and frolic as they were meant to do, in an illusion of perfection which the mind is equipped to engender about the sensing of the dream body. Didn't you notice how many revelers kept their eyes closed, how many were not possessed of normal fleshly bodies?"

"I noticed it, but I did not understand it."

"You don't understand it yet, but I can tell you a little about it. That beam of force created up there a static field of nourishment for the dream perceptions, for the mind even inside the body but most particularly for the imaginative faculties of the mind. Not one of the participants of the revels last night can give the same account this morning, because each saw what his will made his imagination form in the dream force. Each in that way receives those pleasures he most desires at the Sabbath. It is the least I can do for the poor benighted citizens of my lost world. It is one of the reasons the Gods hate me, my pity for his abandoned people shows their own lack of pity for them. Not nice characters, my opponents."

"I don't see why you consider God an opponent? According to other statements you made, he hasn't set foot on this earth for a long long time."

"Well, he is a jealous God, you know. He deplores the fact that because I am also exiled from Heaven to Earth for the rest of my days, I have the capacity to sympathize with others so exiled, the human kind of mortal, you know. He wants them waiting and ready to accept him as he desires to be accepted whenever the world swims back into the natural fields of beneficial force where he keeps himself, and where we should be if the world had not been improperly directed in its orbit."

"But was it really his fault, Lucifer? Aren't you blaming him for things, willy-nilly, the way he blamed you? Is it all true, these tales of responsibility for cosmic happenings. Isn't the God you blame for such things just a myth, and no one res-

possible but the natural vagaries of an imperfect and totally unconscious universe, which may be a living and vast life but which is blind to the welfare of such motes as ourselves, and unable to see or do anything at all for us or against us."

"Are you suggesting I don't know anything about the beginning of things. Are you implying that Beelzebub, the Black God of the Fire-worlds, doesn't know whether his opponent is alive or not?"

"Why yes, your majesty," said Druga, grinning. "I can see that you are humoring my young innocence in these matters with the usual talk so that I will hear what I expect to hear, rather than the truth, which would be vastly more effort on your part to impart."

"You're right, Druga. The truth is vastly more than all that antique fol-de-rol people inherit from the past lies and misinformations. I'll try to picture the truth of the matter out to you simply, though it will be necessarily skeletal and quite inadequate, still it will be better than such a picture as one gets from seeing myself and the great White Father in a titanic struggle for men's souls. I wish I did have a use for those dream bodies and could keep them alive, but I can't."

MORGANSTERN, listening to all this with her pretty ear cocked and her eyes trying to follow the gyrations and curiously attractive undulations of certain muscular male dancers now performing before the throne, put in:

"Must you men bore us with this discussion just when we are supposed to be amusing ourselves. Couldn't we have a drink all around and liven up the party?"

Lucifer-Beelzebub etc. turned to

his beautiful witch; "Morganstern, you have been an understanding and lovely Queen of the Sabbath, but you should remember you are not Queen of Hell yet, and that the Sabbath will be officially over in a very short time now." He looked at his wrist, on which a tiny affair was strapped by a leather thong. "You should also remember that men like ourselves think *nothing* so important as the wise and able handling of many high-sounding words. Not even sex is so interesting as this pastime of thinking we indulge in, and however much you want to get into the usual rut of eroticism, you must always humor the male in his desire to display his erudition."

"Well, I like a chance for display, myself. It isn't fun for a girl to sit ignored when she's only Queen for a day!"

"Why don't you join the dancers on the floor and get a nice workout. Just what *would* satisfy your desires, lovely Queen?" Lucifer had had his eyes on Morganstern for several seconds now as he talked, and you couldn't do that without being distracted.

"I'll let you know, Dark Master, when I get around to it," murmured the near nude witch as she got to her feet, from beside his hot body, and descended to the male dancers whose musculature had so drawn her eyes.

"Now, where was I?" asked Lucifer as he turned back to Druga. "Women take one's mind off things so, yet it is their greatest virtue."

"You were just about to set me right in regard to the prevalent myth of your contention with the Good God and his followers." Druga's eyes and his whole quite urgent desire was to join the revelers who were now falling into quite a Bacchic dance, if you could call it a dance, led by the now quite nude and wholly exciting

Morganstern in mystic and terrifically provocative movements about herself and each other, winding in and out in a procession that seemed to be leading toward some unimaginable culmination of which Druga could not but fear to imagine the nature...but Lucifer, sitting there beside the tall purple Druga, the two of them easily the most striking and magnificent spectacle in all that gloomy fiery magnificence of ancient splendor and immortal glory—was talking, in profound syllogism:

"You have observed, Druga the Bold, the multi-bodied existence of certain surviving Gods still remnant from the old times of earth. You have observed the repetitive Nows of which the many walled world of worlds is constructed. You have observed God-hood in various manifestations, but have you stopped to consider that the great God who permeates all is *not* as these?"

"I have observed and considered, and decided that the great God must be vastly more than my mind can grasp of being."

"Exactly. And myself is then but another who goes about in a human-seeming body, pretending to a majesty he does not possess as a serious rival of the one Great God?"

"Such would be the obvious conclusion."

"Well, what else *could* be true? Do you think I shall pretend any rivalry with such a vast omniscient all-permeating life as your true concept of God must necessarily embody?"

"So you are just another accidental survivor from the time of the Gods upon earth, who has been unable to escape from the universal fate of the fields of energy-life about this solar system?"

"Just another immortal, Druga. And one vastly maligned, I can tell

you. Once I was worshipped properly as Pan, as Faunus, as many another of the Gods who preceded me, but assuredly I have always been myself and none of these others. Once they may have existed really, but I have humored all these worshipers of the various Gods which led to a deal of confusion in the writings of mortal men who did not live long enough to get at the truth of anything. There has been but the one great Lord of the Underworld, myself, of course, but there have always been others, lesser Lords living in the underworld, who also pose as Gods and amuse themselves with the antics of their worshippers as I did at the Sabbath last night. Just between you and I, this immortal life gets very tiresome unless one is equipped with special talents for amusements."

"Still, that mortals should blame all their ills on you is a peculiar fact I cannot understand."

IN CLASSIC times, during the Greek and Roman dominance of the thought of the world, there were other scape-goats among the immortals upon whom men blamed their troubles. There was Pluto, and I do believe that many of his doings and ways of life have been confused with my own. Pluto became a rather ill-tempered monarch in his decline, and did do some pretty devilish tricks. But in his prime he was as good-natured a God as the next one."

"Then Pluto was an immortal who died?"

"Yes, Druga, as we all must die if we do not get away from earth. The energies about this earth will reduce us all in time, struggle as we will. I am not at all the powerful being I once was."

"Just why do you encourage all these sensual and mystic and sup-

posedly decadent and enervating excesses that go on during the Sabbath and among your followers everywhere?"

"When one is young, Druga, one absorbs ideas of virtue from one's forebears which, in a long life, one finds impossible of observance. It is such individuals, who expect even Lucifer's followers to observe his own strict code of conduct, who malign us most greatly. We believe that life should be sensually as full and complete as possible, considering it is so short and unsatisfactory at best, and conduct ourselves accordingly. We take pleasure where and when we find it, and provide for more of the same as well as we can in the short future, and the more strict moralists and philistines and other sterile and unimaginative mortals condemn us as an evil influence in consequence. But, Druga, *just what is Evil?*"

"Why, Evil is a practice or custom that harms and corrodes the character; Evil is a character that delights in giving pain and destroying the good things of life."

"And am I such a character, Druga?"

"I have failed to observe any such failings in you as yet."

"I believe that such sadistic delight in giving harm to other lives is a product of a madness in the mind. I believe that such Evil stems from a detrimental and disintegrant penetrative energy in the circumambient fluids of the solar system, which affects the minds of weak and idiotic human beings in such a way that they seem to have a "Devil" riding their backs and driving them invisibly to destructive acts. I know that, Druga, and I am telling you the truth. It has nothing whatever to do with immortal beings or mystic doings of any kind; it is an affliction. Of course there are cults of evil where such

creatures get together and commit the acts of cruelty that satisfy their will to commit harm upon their fellow passengers into death. Such cults do sometimes take my name in vain and commit these acts in my name. But I deal with these creatures when I can and in so doing help men quite a bit. But I myself and my followers are not in truth allied with such doings."

"But you have the power to do away with such humans, and with such longer lived sub-gods or near immortals who are so maddened, yet you do not annihilate them utterly. Are you not to blame for not ridding earth of them all?"

"The energy fields of our planets are breeders of such sicknesses, Druga. I myself could no more rid life of such illnesses than I could wipe out syphilis, or diptheria, or any other plague. When men learn to doctor themselves for evil, it will gradually disappear, as have other plagues. But men lack organization, and I am too enervated by years and by cynicism, by my inherited scorn for life in general, to bother with it. I love life, Druga, but what we have is not truly life—it is to me a kind of kindergarten which it amuses me to attend at times. That is all. I do lack sympathy for these children. I could try harder to be what men call good—going about and dispensing cheer and medicines and benefits generally. But my cynicism tells me that unless the will to cure themselves arises in man's self and defeats evil, it would all be to no purpose. *I do not believe in men*, Druga. I have known them too long and too painfully. That is one reason I was interested in you; you are of an alien blood, not man as I know him."

So Druga sat behind the dark alien majesty of the Lost God, and let his

mind drink in the deep chill brooding thought of his waiting there in timeless, forgotten cavern, and watched the mad delight in the dancer's bodies and the curious pleasures of which their bodies were capable which the swarm of dancers was indulging everywhere before their Dark Master. And Druga came thus to a greater understanding of the chill and terrible fate of the race of man, who cannot find within himself his own salvation, but must always pray to some ignoring great one to bring it to him on a golder plate, with fluttering golden wings of haste, and Druga felt a great weariness and a despair with this world of his well up in him, and he tried to drown it in drink from the hot goblets borne to him in the sweating hands of little red-skinned nymphs. So presently Druga had joined the mad revelry, and was stepping off a measure beside the tall and utterly too seductive naked Morganstern, and whirling beside him was Egan in the arms of the apple cheeked young witch who had brought him there.

THE PARTY went on for some hours thus, and that Dark Lord was generous with the supporting energy fluids which he poured out flooding throughout the enclosing walls of his throne room, and everything was getting very rosy and delightful for Druga. The dark despair he had absorbed from Lucifer's ancient brooding thought had drowned itself for a time in the hot pleasure of his body, and he was finding the arms of Morganstern more than diverting, when he looked up to see his own Feronia standing with her hands on her hips and her lips in a tight line of terrific anger, watching the performance from beside the throne of Lucifer. Beside her was the flaming

hair and tall form of Lua of Vole, and Ruy Egan had left off dancing and was standing there before the two women like a boy caught stealing who was trying to think of a satisfactory lie.

So Druga relinquished his too-firm grasp of the satin smooth waist of Morganstern, and went to Feronia, smiling and feeling like a greater fool than ever before in his life.

"The minute my back is turned, you manage to get yourself right smack into Hell itself." Feronia's voice cracked like a whip, and Druga noticed that even His Dark Majesty upon his emerald throne winced at the sound of it and threw up an arm to ward off some invisible harm.

"Why, Feronia, I came here of my own accord, in my usual search for Wisdom wherever it may be found, and the trip has been wholly worthwhile. His Majesty has been most kind in elucidating many obscure points that have troubled me about the past, and about Evil and its source, and about the ways of life in general."

"He has been seducing you into his own degenerate and dissolute ways with his talk of futility and helplessness in the face of human shiftlessness. I know his ways. *And I'll have none of it, you understand!* He'll not turn my Druga into a wastrel and a ne'er-do-well like himself, who has wasted a score of lifetimes trying to figure out that if you never try to do any good, why no one will believe but what you are the whole source of Evil itself. To Hell with Lucifer; he's a bad influence, a confirmed rake and libertine, and has led more ambitious lives into lazy self-indulgence than any other immortal ever dreamed of doing."

Druga was about to defend the poor lone dark gentleman, who had risen and was quietly making his way to-

ward the door in the rear, but Feronia held up her hand with the fingers extended, and began counting off: "First you go astray with Dionaea, which I forgave as unavoidable. Then you fall for Eos with her blond slinky ways and her unnatural oversexed body, but I forgave you, for I was temporarily turned into stone and you had an excuse. *But*, then you fall into the clutches of dear Doris-Anthea, and I begin to suspect that these women are not wholly to blame! Then you let Circe turn you into a pig, as if you couldn't resist her at all, but let her have her way with you, a better Sorcerer than she could ever hope to be. You could have done any one of a thousand things to her to get her to let you alone, but did you? No, you sat there like a pig and took it from her...."

"But, my dear...." managed Druga. But her voice went on, curdling Druga's blood with the anger in it, and he quailed before her snapping eyes and angry red cheeks and flying black hair and her beautiful body so intensely alive in her fury:

...."As if you wanted only to sit about in a pig's body and look at her. Then I began to wonder if you were my Druga or a weakling whom any woman could wrap around her finger. Then after I decide that after all you do love me and can't help being human, I turn my back and you run off to the Sabbath and God knows how many wenches have been with you—and I find you with the very Queen of the Sabbath herself. Just how much wool do you think you can pull over my eyes, Druga the Meek?"

MORGANSTERN came up behind Feronia and winked at Druga over her shoulder, and Druga did not feel at all comfortable or correct in his attitude of "am I a man or mouse?" Just then Ruy Egan winked,

too, and said.

"Tell her, Druga the Bold! Are we men or are we mice. If we're always underfoot they will take us for granted and forget to love us. Tell her, Druga. Be bold, man, be bold."

"Er, ah," said Druga the Bold.

But Feronia did not stop to hear him:

"There is a black way and there is a white way, and you must learn soon to distinguish or I shall give you up to the black entirely and God help you then. Do you think Mors would take an interest then? She works for the future of man, she doesn't sit around swilling rot-gut and indulging every bodily whim toward pleasure that occurs to her. These fatalists have no hope; they can't imagine there is anything in life that could be better or worth striving for; they are not really alive. Have you no wits at all? Do you want to sink utterly in the deathly mire that enfolds these half-lives? Are you Druga the Bold or a mere creature of weak desire for pleasure and only pleasure? While you were gone Tom Hob stole off to the Sabbath himself and left his brother to watch the twig, and Branchus nearly got stolen by a Wheeger. That's what your indulgence nearly cost us—our son! Have you anything to say to that, Druga the Bold? Bold, indeed! I'll make you sincere before I'm through, you great hulk of appetite, you!"

Now Druga saw that it was indeed a bad time to leave Branchus to the guardianship of a mere witless hob, and that Feronia was, as usual, wholly right in her indignation. Which only made himself worse in his own eyes.

"Oh dear Dark Goddess of mine," began Druga, "to hear that my son has been endangered hurts me as much as I can be hurt. But you must

know that I am not exactly immune to temptation, and am not wholly a God of rectitude as yet, and overlook a few of my failings. I have always wanted to understand and observe the Black Mass of the Sabbath, and to talk with the Black Man himself, and to meet and observe the whole life of the shadows of the field of magic. Now I have accomplished the project and no harm done. I have learned a lot, and made some very good friends, however little you may approve of them, still they are as correct in their attitudes and analyses of life's problems and their conduct in life as are you in yours. They are different from us in their interiors, and cannot be expected to live up to our strict regime of virtue which we set ourselves. After all, Feronia, it takes all kinds of people...

"And all kinds of women," cut in Feronia.

"You must remember, Feronia, that when I first met you I thought that you represented the dark and mysterious paths of something very near to evil, and loved you still in spite of that, because you were too beautiful for me to do otherwise, and because you were Feronia, who took an interest in me and made me whole when I was injured. You should remember that I cannot help but be drawn by any opportunity to express or relieve the natural sybaritic tendencies of all flesh. You must be tolerant, remembering always that our own love sprang from these same springs of emotion, the dark and hot springs of all life, and not frown upon it anywhere. I loved you for a votarie of sinister and mystic revolt against ascetism, for an exponent of love for love's sake, for a witch who understood and was expert in every augmentation of attraction that woman holds for man. For an immortal woman beyond all other women in

ability to attract me, and I still love you so. But cannot you see that the very source of my love for you is a strength between us as well as a trap into which I can fall?"

"No!" said Feronia.

"You must understand, dear lubricious witch of my heart, that the things I love in you are in part present in every votaress of Love, in every Cyprian, in every Delilah, and that all strong men whom women love are liable to be drawn by that same terrific magnetism at times, even in other women. So long as I am able to love you with a virile love, just so long will it be possible for me to go astray, as you call it. I am only a man, however dear you are to me in every other way, too. Why there it is, I am a man, and attracted to women everywhere, at all times. And especially so when they set out to so attract."

"You twist the truth!"

"That hot sweet image of you which dominates my heart, Feronia, do you think it will survive these virtuous rages of yours when I for a little time indulge my love for people and places and doings of a warm and lively kind? You know it will, or you would not strain at that tie as you do! But must you, dear, dear Feronia, must you so misguide the craft of our love? Can you not indulge me a little and understand I am not *really*, always and exactly, as you *dream* I am?"

FERONIA did not say anything, and her head came down a little from its proud set erect upon her tapered neck, and two little tears formed in her eyes and rolled down her hot red cheeks. And she was far more beautiful and wholly heart-rending then in her tears than she had been in her fury.

So Druga took her in his arms, and The Black Man came from behind his

throne. Morganstern took her place beside *Him* on the green throne, and the yellow flames which had seemed to recede, shot up more gracefully and exhilaratingly than before.

After a time, Druga led Feronia before that throne, and she bowed one knee, and touched the old Black Man's toe with one finger tip, and he said—

"Bless you, my child. Do not withhold your bright wisdom and your charming self from we who can no longer struggle, but have a warm spot in your heart even for our own sinful hearts."

"Bosh, I suppose you are no worse than others, if we were better acquainted. You must visit us in our place in the cliff, you old fraud, and see our work, and get closer to us. The ancient dividing lines merge, it seems, and what is good and what is bad are hard to distinguish, as you perhaps know better than I, who see more of the evil. We are shut up with our work too much always, to understand. Forgive me, Lucifer. You are a much maligned character, you know. I would not have my Druga so misunderstood when he becomes a myth like you."

"I am not a myth, Feronia!"

"Well, I mean when Druga gets more years and wisdom and retires from active life, I would have him thought of as a good force, rather than a temptation to evil."

The Old One tapped his long pointed foot a little petulantly, and Feronia went on:

"It will be hard for us to meet eye to eye, Lucifer. Do not be impatient."

"I have not retired and I am *not* a temptation."

"The ritual of the Black Mass includes an exhortation to 'preserve us from the traitorous and the overbearing, to keep the ancient path, and not to fall into the dark ways of in-

tolerant suppression of natural expression of joy in life," murmured Druga into Feronia's ear.

"Then he and his witches and warlocks are not wilful destroyers?"

"Not that I have been able to observe. He says there are cults of evil who use his name falsely, which gives rise to that impression."

"Do you believe him?" Feronia asked and then,

"Why don't he change his name?"

"It is too late for that, it seems. After all..."

So talking, Feronia and Druga stood aside from the dread majesty of the throne of so-called evil, and went on talking about *Him* most politely, and the revel went on and on.

"Still we know there *is* a source of evil, conscious and working to destroy man and man's works entire, to make of him a chattel and a slave and an ignoramus who hides always behind some such facade of black mysticism!" Feronia looked at Druga with suspicion in her eyes.

"If we two were really good, white immortals, we would make public to every human all we know of life immortal and the pleasures we keep to ourselves from those who live in towns and cities and with each other everywhere. We would not observe the ancient precept of secrecy, but would teach everywhere all we know of healing and magic and thaumaturgy of all kinds, so that it would be open to all!"

"Yes, Druga, but we cannot face the consequences. Let us ask this kindly old Black Man, as he seems to be, to tell us what the consequences of such activity would be in reality?"

So Druga and his wife went up and sat upon the steps of the throne familiarly, and the Devil put the warm body of Morganstern down, and an-

swered their soft question.

"They would band together, a great many who benefit by the secrecy, who make of it their chief means of sustenance, preying upon the ignorance and the appetites of man for such electric and terrific pleasure, and for woman when so augmented, and would try to kill you. If you were but two alone, you would be killed."

"Would you, Satan, be one of those?"

"It is not necessary to answer that, as they would not need my help to kill you two alone. It is not good politics in the underworld to take a stand on that question."

Even for you, Satan, the overlord?"

"**H**AH," CRIED Satan, a lightning gleam in his eye as he pictured revolt and himself putting it down. "I have not the energy even to think about such efforts, but if it becomes necessary, why I could handle the situation."

"For us, or against us?" pursued Feronia, relentlessly.

"For myself! I do not subscribe to any notions of raising all mankind suddenly to any peaks of superior health and happiness. I am cynical of all such attempts' success. I have seen them fail before."

"But you would not war against us for such humanitarian work on our part, would you, you old Devil?"

"I would protest, dear Feronia, verbally or by letter, but only to save you the waste of your sweet time and breath in such useless attempt to elevate those who do not want to be elevated. They accept death and war and ignorance of all true pleasure; they have cursed me for some eighteen centuries. Must I love them, dear dark witch?"

"No, you black infidel, you do not have to love them, but I do wish you could leave them alone."

"I will leave you alone in your work, dear witch. But I must have my fun, and my Sabbath, and my ancient rites and my worship. A man gets so used to things."

"Well, that should satisfy me, but I have plans and for a moment you gave me hope. But I see you are incorrigible."

"Quite. All I can tell you is to go ahead and see what occurs, to stop you, if you really desire to waste your time. They are not competent to handle the ancient wisdom; only exceptional people grasp magic at all, such as you and your precious Druga. As for taking sides with you or against you, I scorn the thought."

After which exchange of views, Feronia and Druga left the deep warm caverns of Hell, and Ruy Egan and Lua left the dancing and followed them after bidding goodbye their host.

And when magic and witchcraft and the knowledge of the long dead Elder-Gods becomes general everyday knowledge of every man, and death becomes a thing of the past, and youth remains with men and women as long as they have breath—and pleasure such as the Gods indulged themselves becomes the daily fare of all men everywhere—why you will know the white witches such as Feronia, and the bold men such as Druga, have managed to defeat those ancient practitioners of the dark art who want only secrecy for what should be in the public library and in the laboratories of the world.

Until that time, you may know that Satan is right, and we are not worth worrying about because we are too ignorant and too incapable of learning for ourselves.

Now the Red Dwarf turns the pages of his book of time, reading in the simultane. Thinking of an old acquaintance, his eye-of-view swings

in and down and across:

A valley lies open and unmisted under the green bright rays of the bizarre sun.

Through the center of the wide-flowered valley meanders a river of pink liquid, a wide and many-curved river of most strange appearance.

The sands that line the river are purple and poisonous to life.

Above the purple ribbons of treacherous sand are the grassy banks of the river, with spangling, garishly flowered plants among the twisted grasses. Beyond the grass the trees move their limbs slowly, rhythmically, waiting; waiting for what is to come to them.

High on the ridge of the grassy bank lies an old stone god. He is the God - who - never - moves - and - swears - he - never - will. He lies awaiting what can never be again for him. His limbs are half imbedded in the blue soil; it has been an age since he desired to move those strange, mottled, sculptural limbs.

Stonily the God stares over the lazy pink river, and over the groping limbs of the far hungry trees.

Softly the Red Dwarf murmured: "This Druga the Bold, what do you think of him? He came from this valley, long ago."

Within that despairing mind of that God, the image of Druga and his doings moved, and a smile came on the stony lips, his eyes sought the Red Dwarf through the shimmering veils of reality, piercing into the simultane where he sat.

"Now the Day," said the stone God. "'Tis Eldir and low point of the course. May he live to see sweet night again. May he rise when life rises, and with his lady take his place among the great, course the ether with the best."

Time moved, invisibly, trying to set her destroying grip upon this

valley that waited, regarding her not. The Red Dwarf spoke into the stony mind.

"'Tis Eldir time, as you say, and the deep point of the misery of Day. The night will come, and joy and life fountain again. All this embroidery of pain and ugly death will vanish, the flowering of the living night descend. We will again meet the ethereans as in the latter time, before the Day. Meanwhile it amuses me to record the doings of the ephemerae, and most especially of such as these two, Feronia and Druga the Bold, who yet make headway and gain lifetimes against the destroying light of Day. The old Love moves in me for them. I feel again the vaunting fountain of life-strength as it used to be. And will again! Adieu, my friend, till the night comes again."

The stony mind made effort, and the thought trickled toward the far shimmer of the Red Dwarf behind his veils of thin-sliced glittering repeating Nows. And what else they said is for their endless contemplation alone.

* * *

DIM SLOW shift of dawn-rose clouds coming brighter above the jagged outlines of Erdis' cliff edge. The eye fled down the sheer clean rock face of the cliff, to come softly to rest among the drifting, rising morning mists in the small sweet valley at the foot.

There where the rainbow bridge met the raw face of the rock, a great stone beast's face leered, and into the dark vast mouth of that impossible sculpture the glassy shimmer of the rainbow bridge thrust, stopped by the great bronze halves of the circular doorway.

One half the heavy ancient metal hung open, and in the gloomy opening a tiny figure stood, the morning breeze stirring timidly about the

smooth curves of her warm and perfect body.

By some magic of life inward and intense the witch-figure dominates the majesty of the vast cliff and rising tinted mists and stretching valley waking below into the day.

In her mind the little swift-glittering magics of her thought moved, picturing Druga as he had been when he had gone "to seek a weapon to whip the worst secretives once and for all, and so win all for all men."

Feronia sighed, as one lonesome and weary of self, and turned away from the waiting view; the soft sweet grace of woman's entire meaning in the knee-lift of the kirtle, in the sway of arching hip, in the line of her arm's glory as she gestured to some invisible, and disappeared within the dark opening of the stone beast's mouth.

At the closing of the door, a magic shuddered out over that thrice hidden valley, the whole vista slid down some subtle scale of changing values, and presented now a face of utter desolation and malignant unwelcome to the chance life happening that way. The mists grew thicker, clinging concealingly about the still shimmering magic of that impossible bridge, making the whole valley and vast face of that cliff into one seeming of ghoulish haunted wasteland.

The witch-woman's step died away in the echoing halls of ancient stone, the small chattering shadows moved...

THERE IS A planet ultra-simultane with the vast veils of Time and Now fluttering about it, as you probably know. And Here and Now and Then and There become strangely intermingled, and there are worm holes eaten through the ancient pages of the book, where one can cross through to another page called Now,

in the otherwhere.

So crossing, and so reading, you have—this tale of Erdis Cliff, and of the infernal regions, and of the Red Dwarf who pokes and prys into it all.

The Red Dwarf says the inconsequential and irrelative are not so, but that in this time of Eldir there is really only an insane kind of life to record, and so he bides his time and amuses his mind with such work. As do I. And both of us are waiting for the Day to end, and the Simultane to roll on into the more favorable tides of force where life can fountain into sanity and the creation of true growth.

But there are those bold spirits like Druga, who maintain stoutly that waiting is not the part of a man. These intend to battle for more of life's fluids brought to more of our race, and for greater minds for us all, so that we may cross as we will into more favorable planes of life-energy, and there grow into a truly great form of life.

You can hold with the Black Man, who says we are not worth the vast effort necessary, or with the witch-woman, who both works for better Now and waits for better Then, or with Druga, who goes out to strike boldly for man against those who would object to our progress.

Or you can hold with the wise savants of the Mortal school, who hold that all such work is infantile and abortive, and that there is no Immortality, no witches and no magic, no Gods or Goddesses or Sorcerers or other substance to any fairy tale. These hold that dry death is ordained for all of us, immutable and unarguable, that hope is a child's dream, and that atom bombs are the best product of science.

I prefer the whispering feet of the

Concluded on page 119

A JOKE FOR HARRY

By RICHARD ASHBY

The secret of invisibility can be a mighty valuable one to its possessor — but he should be sure, first, that he wants to be invisible! Out of sight could easily be out of mind!

DOCTOR Philip Smilax chose the largest scalpel in his locker. After he had wet the blade in a solution of curare he walked across the lab to where Harry was working with the microtome unit. For a few moments he watched the young biologist crank off trail slices of tissue.

Smilax put the scalpel behind him and gripped it tightly.

"Harry," he said.

The man looked quickly around. "Yes, Phil?"

"Hold out your hand, please. I've got a surprise for you."

Harry slid down from his stool. "Good deal," he said, grinning. "I never grew up when it came to surprises."

He held out his right hand. With a quick slash Doctor Smilax cut deeply into his wrist. Harry screamed only once. Then he grabbed at his wrist in an attempt to check the bright geyser that was spewing out over his hand and down onto the tiled floor.

"For God's sake, help me! Do something!"

Smilax shook his head, no. Cautious, still holding the scalpel, he backed away. He hadn't meant to cut so deeply. It was important that he got no stain of any kind on himself. He had scrubbed very clean for this evening. Stain would delay him.

"Phil—you crazy fool—this is bad,

I tell you. Help me. Please. Please, or I'll bleed to death!"

He didn't though. The curare got him first. Still grasping his injured wrist, Harry doubled over. Shock wiped his face into an idiotic mask that expressed nothing. Then he fell to the floor, shook a little, and that was it.

Doctor Smilax let out a long breath. It had not been as bad as he'd anticipated. Interesting even, though a bit messy. Poor trusting Harry.... a blind fool to think two men could share such a secret as their's for long.

Smilax had never before watched curare kill. Too bad he didn't have the time for a leisurely examination of the body; muscle constrictions, blood coagulation, pupil dilation—but there were only minutes to spare.

The radioactive solution had been in Smilax's body for almost seven hours now, and the pigment de-colorizer must be injected at exactly the proper moment....which would be (Smilax looked at his watch) in four minutes. He returned to his locker at the far, shadowy end of the lab. As he knelt before it he realized his hand still clenched the bloody knife. Heedless of finger-prints certain to be on it he tossed it disdainfully aside. Prints? They'd need more than prints to ever catch up with Doctor Philip Smilax....the job would more likely call for blood-hounds with built-in Geiger-counters. Smilax chuckled,



He groped about for the invisible guinea pigs . . .

then frowned thoughtfully, Geiger-counter. That could prove dangerous. His body's new radioactivity might be noticeable for several years.

His watch showed he had three and a half minutes to go. Cursing time's swift passing, the man reached into a plush-lined case and took out a large hypodermic filled with a cloudy gray liquid. Carefully he placed it on the nearby desk, and from the top drawer he removed the two large note books—his and Harry's. These he carried to the incinerator chute, but before chucking them away, Doctor Smilax thumbed through his. The efforts of three difficult years were recorded there... a shame he couldn't place these notes under the astounded eyes of his fellow biochemists. Then they'd know what he and Harry had accomplished... then they'd cease their prying, their snide remarks.

Abruptly he snapped shut the book and flung both volumes down the brick-lined shaft. Turning to the tier of animal cages to his right, he swung open the little wire door of one and thrust in both hands.

AS ALWAYS, it was extremely difficult to locate either of the guinea pigs. For unless there were dirt or food upon their bodies it was impossible to see them. They were utterly, perfectly invisible, and one had to find them by touch alone.

The doctor's hands swept methodically about the cage. At last he encountered them both and hauled them squealing from their cigar-box of straw. Even after six months of handling them they never failed to thrill Philip Smilax... to hold these warm, struggling animals in his grasp... to feel them, hear them, even smell them, and yet to look through them as though there were nothing in his hands but his own imagination.

Two and a quarter minutes left. The doctor stuffed one jerking twisting guinea pig into the chute and let away. The other animal kicked and fought in silence. As the man was putting it into the shaft's opening, the little creature scratched him. Smilax swore, his hand tightened around the invisible neck. In a moment it was choked to death. He dropped it after the other.

With only a glance at Harry's twisted corpse Doctor Smilax returned to the locker. He stripped quickly, hung his smock, trousers, and shorts neatly above his shoes and socks.

One and a half minutes, now. Smilax removed his watch. He put it on the table beside the hypodermic. In one and a half minutes its contents would enter his body—every bit of pigment would fade swiftly to a neutral gray-white shade.

And the other fluid, the radioactive solution already within him, would react. His reflective and refractive indices would be lowered to nothing—he would vanish like a diamond dropped in water—like the two animals before him.

Philip Smilax leaned over the desk and snapped on the lamp. Then he smiled and closed his eyes. His great dream was at last coming true... freedom such as no man before him had ever known. There could be no stopping him... there was nothing, no one immune from his God-like power. He would rove the earth... taking his pick of its riches, its secrets... its women...

The doctor's mind darted to that rented room in another part of town. There he would go tonight, walking down the summer streets like a ghost, to his well-stocked retreat. He had thought of everything. No bungling mistakes like that fictional invisible man; he had clothes, food, medicine,

even a fine wig and grease-paints ready.

Thirty seconds! Near enough. Doctor Smilax picked up the hypodermic. He clenched his left fist until a large bloodvessel stood out hard and blue against his pale forearm. With fifteen seconds to go he slid the needle expertly into the vein. At the proper moment his thumb pressed down on the plunger. The hypodermic emptied itself into his bloodstream. It was done!

The naked man put down the instrument and settled himself into the cold chair. In the pool of light from the shaded lamp he spread his hands flat against the surface of the desk. A great excitement welled within him, but he forced himself calmly to watch the thin webbing of skin between his fingers.

IN A FEW seconds the change began. The webbing seemed to shimmer slightly. Then it faded completely away. The more solid flesh of the hands went next, then entire groups of muscles, then the bones and blood-vessels. At last only the faintest suggestion of nerve-endings remained. Soon they too vanished.

Smilax felt a great awe. Beyond that, nothing. No accompanying sensations—nothing unpleasant. He watched entranced as the invisibility consumed his wrists, his arms, raced into his shoulders.

But the lights went out. All over the laboratory they flickered once and were gone. The doctor swore aloud in the darkness. What a hell of a time for a power failure. Damn! Was it local? City-wide?

He pushed away from the desk and stood. Hands outstretched, he groped his way through the inky black to the windows.

Smilax found the shade. He pulled, then let it fly loose and clacking to

the top. He could feel that the window was open. He could feel the soft and fresh night air sweeping in over his body. But he could see nothing.

A scant block away, traffic roared down a busy boulevard. Something was wrong! For he could see no lights, no headlights.

Why? Was this some unexpected reaction to drugs? Some momentary aberration of vision? What?

The man's mind was a spinning wheel of conjecture. Answers came by the score—each one to be rejected. That is, until the right one.

When it came, Doctor Philip Smilax tried to banish it, but even in his dismay he recognized its irrefutable logic. It was so beautiful an explanation, so right; it was the ultimate triumph, in a way. Invisible body. . . . invisible eyes. Invisible lens, retina, rods, cones. . . . nothing visible. Nothing functional! Light now passed *through* the eyes. Light could not now be caught and registered and interpreted into vision for the brain.

Smilax began chuckling. Began laughing. Began walking about, hands feeling through the darkness. It was so funny. . . . he would have to tell Harry about it. Harry liked jokes.

When he found Harry he sat on the floor beside him and laughed and laughed about the invisible blind man.

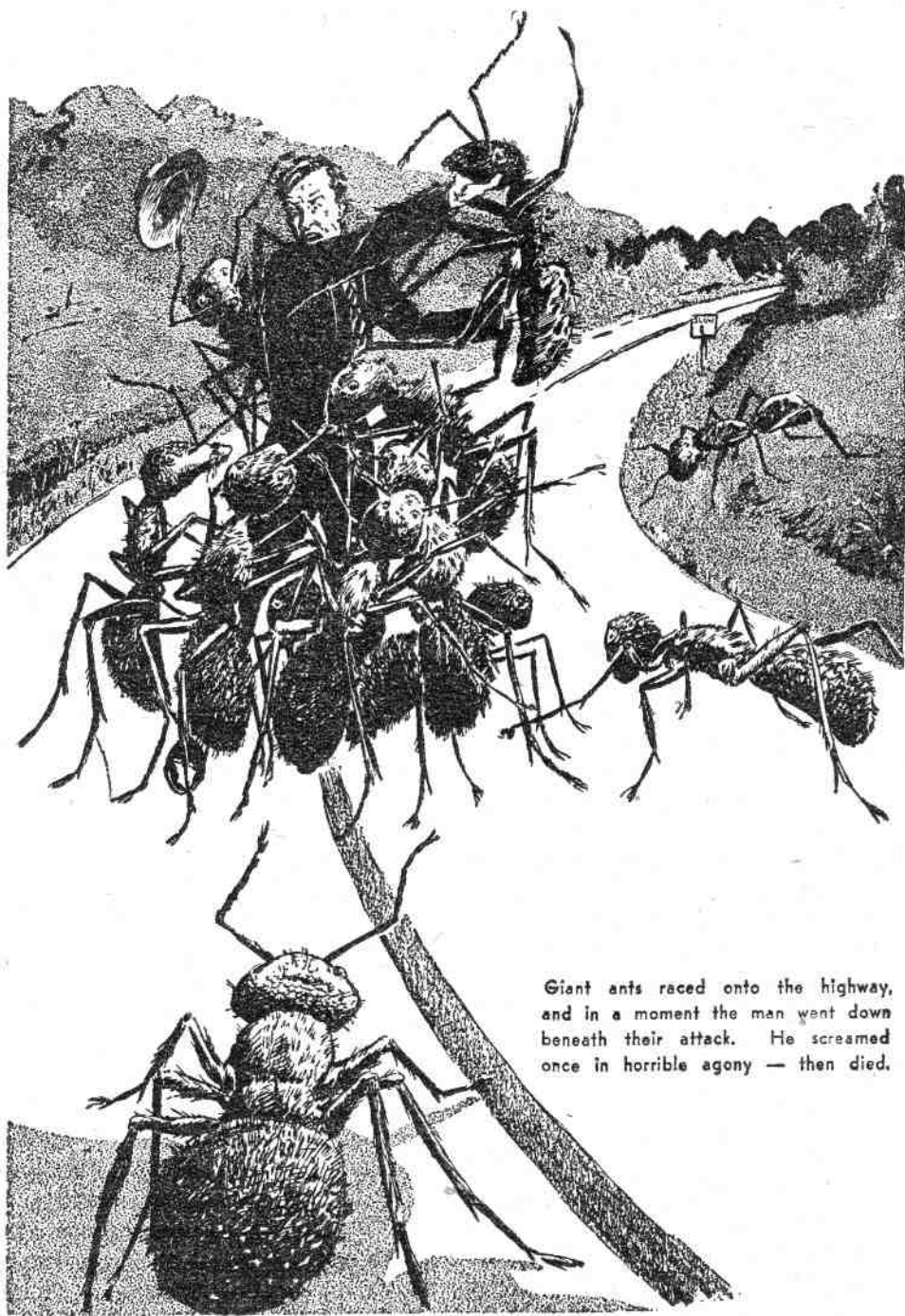
ERDIS CLIFF

(Concluded
from P. 115)

white witch, to the dry dusty scraping of the dead bones of savants across their books of awful error. . .

Besides, there are the writings of the Red Dwarf! He contends that if we spent our mortal effort on the study of the integrative, we should have a longer life than as we do—spend it all upon the disintegrative atomic power. And I agree. Besides, who can argue with the Red Dwarf?

VON HULCKMAN'S PETS



Giant ants raced onto the highway, and in a moment the man went down beneath their attack. He screamed once in horrible agony — then died.

By GEORGE D. LEWIS

The peculiar object from space proved to be a space ship, but inside it were no human beings. They were ants bent on conquest . . .

THE EARLY twilight stillness was shattered by a scream that rose up the scale and hung quivering on the warm air. Startled faces jerked toward the sound. It wasn't the scream of a woman or a child, but the ugly cry of a strong man in mortal terror. Again it came in a beating wave that ended in a choked gurgle. Amazed glances flashed from face to face as the crowd surged toward the origin south of Veldtville.

A running man met the first wave of curious just outside the town. "Ants! Huge ants! Thousands of them coming this way!"

"What? What, man, what?" demanded a policeman.

"Ants. Huge ants," gasped the runner. "Marching in formation completely covering the road. They tore Jake to pieces. It was horrible."

"Back, everyone, until we can see what's going on," ordered the policemen. "Several of you come with me to investigate."

With half-dozen men behind him the officer sped along the road. The group had traveled only a short distance before they stopped in amazement.

Marching along in perfect formation covering the width of the road and stretching as far back as the eye could reach was row upon row of huge ant-like creatures. In the rapidly fading light their size and waving antennae sent cold chills through the viewers.

The officer emptied his revolver into the front ranks of the creatures. Without a break in their stride the fallen ones were picked up and carried toward the rear while other closed the ranks. The entire formation increased its pace to a rapid run.

Startled out of his frozen disbelief by a shout from one of his rapidly retreating comrades, the officer joined them in headlong flight toward town.

A large crowd had collected just outside of town. As the group pelted up, a babel of questions were hurled at them.

"Spread the word that everyone must lock themselves in their homes. I don't know what we are facing, but it's nothing to play with. Now scatter and spread the word. Police orders."

Speeding to Police Headquarters, he reported to his chief. "And, Sir," he concluded, "if they are ants, they are of a species never seen on earth before."

Grabbing his phone, the chief barked orders. "Man all machine guns. Every man to his station. Train all searchlights toward the South Road. Prepare to repel invasion of strange insects."

Turning to the officer, he said: "Come on, let's get up to the lookout tower and join the men there. We'll see what these things look like under a strong light."

The town was bathed in a strong glare by the many floodlights trained

toward the southern end of town. The brilliant lights threw into sharp relief the horde of advancing insects. They appeared even more monstrous than in the half twilight. Standing some three feet high, they were four to six feet in length and were covered with dark brown plates. There was a low, buzzing drone in the air.

Their ranks split into several groups and headed in as many directions. Seemingly moving under a preconceived plan they were maneuvering completely to surround the town. Behind the leaders the line still stretched as far as the eye could see.

"Gad! What a sight," whispered the chief. Again he spoke into his phone. "Fire at will." At the same time he fired a green flare.

MACHINE GUNS began to chatter, punctuated by the snarl of rifle fire. Slugs tore into the ranks of the creatures. Many fell, but the others kept moving. Hand grenades were brought into play.

Then the creatures broke ranks completely and began moving with express train speed. They moved so fast and shifted so rapidly that most of the defenders' efforts were wasted.

Suddenly a terror-stricken man opened his door and darted out. Immediately two of the creatures changed courses. Instants later they had seized him and jerked him in half. The horrible scream lasted only a second. Other creatures sped into the open door and two more screams died aborning.

There were other exclamations and cries as the invading creatures continued their raid. The gunfire was almost a continuous roar as the men poured round after round into their ranks.

"Good Heavens! Look!" cried one of the defenders. "They're climbing

the walls."

From all sides the creatures came pouring onto the roof. Those who had been firing over the edge were forced back by sheer weight of numbers. All guns were turned on them, but they still came forward.

"It's no use men," called the chief. Grabbing his phone he barked into it. "Attention all roof fighters. We are in danger. These creatures know we are defenders and are out to get us. Retreat in order to your trap door. We must devise a different method of battle. Steady now—cover each other as you fall back—keep firing until you close your door."

Steadily the defenders retreated before the advancing invaders. The ammunition poured into their ranks didn't seem to bother the insects as they rushed after the men. Several of the last men died at their posts. The final trap door closed with a bang leaving the huge insects completely victorious.

Inside the headquarters building a shaky group of defenders watched the creatures rushing about. Shots still rang out as the defenders fired through holes designed for that purpose. The creatures rushed about and completely ignored the ineffective gun fire.

The watchers saw many of the creatures attack the warehouses where food were stored. They moved about the doors seeming to spray them with something and in a group hurled their mass against them. To the amazement of the defenders the thick steel doors crumbled away.

Into the opened warehouses rushed a second group of insects while the first stood guard. Every place where food was kept fell to the invaders. Unerringly they selected these places ignoring all the other buildings. Pitiful screams of livestock filled the air as they were at-

tacked by the gigantic insects.

SOME THIRTY minutes after the creatures entered town they began leaving. Most of them were loaded down with loot. The burdened ones were in the middle of the formations while along the edge patrolled others with bared teeth and claws. They left as rapidly as they came despite their burdens.

Inside the headquarters the shaky men watched the retreating insects with mingled emotions. Sporadic firing was still going on but the insects seemed to ignore it. Most of the defenders were too nervous for accurate shooting. Relief flooded the haggard faces as their conquerors departed.

"Break out some whiskey," ordered the chief. "I think all of us could stand a drink."

"What are those things?" asked a sergeant. "I've never even heard of anything like them."

"If it wasn't for their size I'd say they were warrior ants," ventured a patrolman.

"Whatever they are, they're a bloodthirsty lot," said a civilian. "They're certainly more dangerous than anything I've heard about. I saw several with half their bodies blasted away still running toward objectives."

"We certainly have something new in our jungle," the chief admitted. "Well I have to check over the damages and wire the news to Cape Town and other points. I am afraid that these creatures have destroyed all the hunters who've been working hereabouts."

"Come to think about it," remarked a civilian name Elrod, "remember, I told you I didn't see any game when we drove through the jungle this week? These things must have accounted for them."

"At least that could be an answer," agreed the chief. "I am going to wire for a search plane to scour the area. But right now I must check the damage done. Come on, men, let's go."

THE DEEP scowl on Alvin Ray's face couldn't express his inner feelings. His mind seethed. His steel grey eyes were bleak and his nostrils flared as the heavy, musky air shot through them. His lean body was taut as he stalked through the wrecked camp.

"If only I could get my hands on the thief," he growled through compressed lips. "Dammit, why does everything happen to me?"

He spent several minutes looking over the site. It looked like a band of vandals had wrecked it, destroying everything they couldn't use. All the food was gone. His clothes were scattered about, his spare rifle and ammunition was lying on the ground. The bed had been overturned and everything ransacked.

"Must have been animals," Ray muttered to himself. "Only the food was taken. A thief would have taken the rifle and ammunition. But what kind of animal would so completely wreck the place?"

Ray sat deep in thought for several minutes. He had sunk everything he had in his venture. While in the army a dying buddy had given him a map showing an ivory cache. The cache had been buried by a hunting party to keep it from falling into enemy hands. Ray had worked two years to save enough to make this search, and now all of his hopes had been destroyed.

"Dammit, no animal can do this to me," he growled. "That odor shouldn't be hard to follow."

His jaw set, he picked up his rifle and set out following the trail of the musky odor. Automatically he fell

into the mile-eating trot that had made him an outstanding member of the Commando raiders. Again he thanked that forgotten ancestor who had given him the stamina and endurance to run tirelessly for hours. A half smile lighted his face as he recalled the amazement of his commander when he remained fresh after the most arduous task, his thirst for adventure still unsated.

After ten miles the scent he was following began to grow stronger. Slowing his pace he checked his surroundings. He had left the trees behind and was traveling through a plain of tall grass and scrub bushes. The waving grass stretched for miles in front of him.

"What kind of an animal am I following," he asked himself. "This grass couldn't hide an elephant or hippo. But whatever it is he is not too far ahead and I'll get him."

Suddenly Ray halted in his track. A quarter of a mile ahead a spot of open ground had appeared. Moving across this patch was a line of what appeared to be huge ants. There were hundreds of them walking in formation six abreast. Floating back to him on the soft breeze came a low, humming buzz as though they were talking to each other.

Ray stood and stared in disbelief as these creatures moved across the cleared space. He realized how close he had been to them as the line took several minutes to complete the crossing. He noted with interest that they were moving in a direct line with a large mountain in the distance. He estimated their size at about five feet long and two to three feet in height. Foot-long antennae waved about their heads and their bodies shone like polished metal.

He stood in indecision for several minutes. He liked adventure, but he wasn't crazy. His mind told him that

only a fool would invite trouble with that horde of nightmares.

"Maybe I can find their hideout and bring help," he muttered. "They're certainly a menace to everything in the jungle. If I turn back I'll lose this chance of trailing them."

He moved forward in a half crouch. Many Commandos could tell glowing stories of that crouch. They had watched Ray spring from it to destroy many of their enemies.

He closed the gap between him and the creatures, moving silently through the grass. Thus, he followed them mile after mile.

The trail led directly toward the mountain range.

The buzzing of the creatures drifted back to him on the soft breeze. It wasn't a continuous drone like a flock of insects, but sounded more like a group of people talking and trying to listen at the same time. As they neared the mountain the buzzing intensified to an excited pitch. Wondering what had excited them, Ray edged closer.

Suddenly six of the creatures charged him from each side. Quickly but effectively he was surrounded. His hand darted toward the automatic, but twelve pairs of jaws opened threateningly revealing rows of vicious teeth amid angry buzzing. Dropping his hands, he stood motionless.

CURSING inwardly at the ironic turn of things, Ray listened to the hum of satisfaction. Two moved behind him and gently nudged him toward the mountain. Resignedly he allowed himself to be herded onward, wondering how he had been discovered.

His eyes took in the creatures at close range. They moved on three pairs of legs. From the front of the bodies two large claw-like appendages extended. From the large heads

pairs of antennae reached upward and seemed to emit the buzzing. The bodies seemed to be composed of multiple plates arranged in an interlocking series and shining like highly polished wood.

They came up to where the main party waited. Immediately Ray was the center of attention. Amid such buzzing he was inspected thoroughly. He stood rigidly, scarce daring to breathe. Finally all were satisfied and again they moved toward the mountains.

Ray's mind seethed with unanswered questions. He could almost swear the creatures were holding a pow-wow about him. There were definite pauses between the buzzes. For insects, they appeared highly intelligent.

They skirted the series of low-lying hills and crossed a small vale to the base of the mountain, approaching a waterfall cascading down its side. Unhesitatingly the leaders entered the fall. When Ray hesitated, two of his captors seized him gently, but firmly, and carried him into the water.

He was thoroughly drenched when a moment later he stood in a tunnel behind the fall. Again he was forced forward by the creatures behind him. Twice they stopped while he was inspected by guards amid excited sessions of humming. As they moved onward he could hear heavy objects being replaced.

After what seemed miles, they entered a huge, dimly lit cavern. The cavern was aswarm with countless numbers of the creatures.

The leader finally halted at a closed door. His excited buzzes were answered from behind the door. For a full minute the conversation was carried on, then Ray was pushed forward.

The door opened. Seated behind a large table was a man. The man was taking off a set of headphones connected to a powerful shortwave set.

"Come in. It's good to see another human. One gets tired of looking at nothing but these creatures—even though one is treated as a god."

Automatically Ray moved into the room and sat down. His dazed mind refused to accept this turn of events—a man in the midst of these huge insects. His eyes took in the tall, heavily-built body, deep blue eyes and thinning blond hair. Vaguely he seemed to remember the haughty, cruel face.

"Yes. I know you are surprised to find me here in the midst of my pets." A large automatic appeared in his hand. "I'll just relieve you of your weapons lest you get some foolish ideas. I'd hate to turn them loose on you before I have a chance to talk to you."

After disarming Ray, he reseated himself.

"It gets very lonesome when one doesn't see another human for months at a time. I've had several natives brought in alive, but they were scared out of their wits and had to be given to the young to practice on. But, allow me to introduce myself, I am Karl Von Hulckman."

Immediately the picture came into focus.

"Von Hulckman, the man who was denounced by International Scientists for his plan to graft human brains into gorillas!"

Eyes flashing, Von Hulckman bowed.

"But yes, a genius at whom the world laughed. A man called demented because fools could not understand my mission. My pets will make them beg for mercy. Already the world has felt the first sting. But wait until we move into high gear."

RAY STARED aghast at Von Hulckman. The bloodshot blue eyes roved nervously as he talked through twitching lips, his unkempt vandyke beard trembling.

"Come, my friend, you are so silent. You were most anxious to find my pets. Now when you have—you just sit and stare. Come say something. But, again I warn you—don't try any heroic stunts."

Fully appreciating Von Hulckman's remarks, Ray sought information.

"What are these creatures? Are they an earth species or are they aliens?"

"Ha! so my pets still intrigue you? But it feels good to tell of one's achievements. When the fatherland was tricked into surrendering, a huge price was placed on my head. I was branded a war criminal of the first magnitude. But I had prepared for such and eventually I escaped by special plane and after several pre-arranged changes arrived at my laboratory hideout in this mountain. The laboratory contained supplies and equipment enough to last for years.

"Being a scientist I was curious about my surroundings and made research trips in the region. One day I came across a chunk of meteorite rock. Chipping away the surface I was amazed to find a smooth metallic wall of an unknown composition. My interest aroused, I hurriedly brought my tools and set to work.

"The strange metal turned all my chisels and drills until I resorted to diamond points. Even with these it took me two days to break through. I had to drill a complete ring of holes before I could gain entrance. Inside the metal wall was another of glassite composition. My torch conquered this. But as the torch ate through, a blast of frigid air rushed out, extin-

guishing the torch and chilling me thoroughly.

"When I had thawed out, I finished cutting through the wall. Inside this second casing were many large oval pellets arranged in racks around the wall. In an elaborate case in the center was a larger pellet draped with a thin glassite material.

"I realized I had discovered the eggs of an alien form of life. I was certain that these eggs had been preserved by some unknown freezing process.

"Selecting the central eggs and several others at random, I hurried back to the laboratory and placed them in an incubator. For two days I waited impatiently, wondering what type of life they would spawn.

THEN THE first eggs hatched, and began growing into the first ant-beings ever seen on earth. They grew rapidly, eating anything and everything. In two weeks they reached their adult stage. From the large egg had come a beautiful light tan creature larger than the rest, with the carriage of a queen. Another gaudily hued one followed her around. The queen immediately assumed command of the group. A niche was dug in the wall of the laboratory and these two set up house-keeping. The others found the door and left. They returned shortly, loaded with all sorts of small game and laid it at the queen's niche.

"The next day, the queen began laying eggs. Then I noticed there were many more of the creatures than I had hatched. Hurrying to the meteor I found that all the eggs had hatched and the other creatures had been either directed or found their way to my laboratory.

"Unable to keep this discovery to myself, I tried to get outside on my

shortwave set. To my surprise, instead of being able to raise a station, I received alien thoughts and impressions through a lot of buzzes and humming. Here was a great possibility and I went to work on it.

"Watching the actions of the creatures, I began to understand what various buzzing sounds meant. For several weeks I studied them and their actions, absorbing a rudiment of their language. Then one day I cut into their conversation. There was utter consternation—then intense throbbing silence.

"After a long time, a thought came. 'I am Queen Asyxima. Who and what are you?'

"I described myself and the world to her. I explained how I had found the space ship and incubated her and her followers and how I had struggled to learn their language.

"The queen replied 'Yes, we know that you opened the ship and placed us in a chamber to relieve the suspended state we were in, and later fed us until my subjects were able to gather food themselves. For this we are very grateful. As a reward I appoint you our guide and counselor.'

"She explained to me how they came to be in the space-ship. It seems that a cosmic disaster was about to hit their planet. The sun in their system was about to blow up and in order to perpetuate, their race eggs were placed in spaceships, and headed into the universe. How many ships were launched, she didn't know, but there were many. Before each ship was launched the queen egg was treated with a memory machine, giving her the history of their race so that she could carry on their culture.

"They are an unusual creature. Remotely related to the ants of earth, they have much higher intellect.

They have a radar system in their antennae that makes the developments of earth seem like children's games. Their hive is built around the queen. She continuously sends out a carrier beam that is augmented by all the others in the hive. Those out on forays pick up this beam and use it as a guide or to transmit their findings back to the others. Thus, this carrier wave becomes an invisible communication line keeping every member in contact with the hive at all times. There is always a group in the hive who direct the activities of those on expeditions. Their jaws are equipped with teeth that will bite through anything living and they secrete an acid that will eat away even steel. Their strength is proportionate to their earthly cousins and you know their speed.

"I know you are wondering how you were captured. We at the hive knew that a human was following them for miles before you were seized. Your image was transmitted here with a request for orders. It was I who told them to take you alive and bring you to me. Whenever a party leaves the nest, they are instructed to check their back trail every half mile to see if they are being followed. So when your presence was discovered, we played with you until we were ready to pick you up.

"They have given me a perfect weapon for revenge on a mocking world. For months I trained them before sending them out on their first raids. They have sacked dozens of native villages, leaving no inhabitants alive to tell the tale. In these warm-ups, they perfected their technique for bigger things. From now on they will really go to work.

"I am their supreme commander. They will obey me, for the queen has

given me complete authority."

"So now you are god of the ants," said Ray sarcastically. "A man who rules an army of efficient destroyers, a threat to every human on the face of the earth."

Failing to detect the sarcasm in Ray's voice, Von Hulckman bowed.

"Yes. But they will only destroy what and when I tell them. They are under perfect control. My destiny is assured."

RAY SHUDDERED at Von Hulckman's mannerisms. He detected something in the creatures that Von Hulckman hadn't seen. In his thirst for revenge the scientist had failed to see that these creatures were warlike by nature and would obey him only as long as he gave them assignments of conquest. Here was a threat that would sear the entire human race if it didn't destroy it. With the queen laying eggs at a rapid rate and with maturity taking only two weeks, the thousands would be millions before many months and then there would be no stopping them. If he could only get away to lead others to this giant nest.

As though reading his thought, Von Hulckman's voice cut in.

"I forgot to mention that insecticides won't touch my pets. Their constitutions are too strong. They are almost invulnerable."

Ray's voice simulated grudging admiration when he spoke.

"Yes, you certainly have a powerful weapon for revenge. Humanity will have its hands full trying to stop them."

"Hah!" snorted Von Hulckman. "They couldn't stop them short of a full scale war and by the time they prepared for that, we will have depopulated this entire continent. Their acid secretion will eat through anything short of diamond-hard steel.

Your tanks, guns and other weapons of war couldn't stand one treatment. They could burrow underground and come up in the midst of a camp and destroy it before they knew what had happened. And if you tried to attack from the air, they would move deep underground where they couldn't be reached. When we open up, we'll dictate the peace terms to the world, and believe me they will be my terms."

"What would your terms be?"

"Unconditional surrender of the entire world and the naming of me as Emperor. Think of it! Von Hulckman, the first ruler over all mankind with the power of life and death!"

Ray stared at Von Hulckman. The man was completely mad. If only he wasn't helpless. His eyes swept the room seeking an avenue of escape.

Von Hulckman's cunning eyes watched Ray, and his lips wore a cruel smile. The fingers of the right hand rested significantly on the butt of the heavy automatic strapped to his side.

"I had you brought in so that I would have someone to talk to. You will remain alive only so long as you behave. Any time you get any ideas, remember that this gun is not just an ornament. I get tired of not having any other human to talk with but nothing can interfere with my destiny. I hope I make myself clear."

"Quite clear,"

Von Hulckman laughed nastily.

"The first time you make a wrong move I'll wound you and then turn you over to the queen's attendants as special food. All of her food is kept alive for her. The attendants will treat you with a special preservative that will keep you living indefinitely while she and her mate feed on you. There is an old native they've been feeding on for two weeks and he is still alive. Just remember that, when

you get any ideas."

Ray's face was emotionless and his voice steady as he replied,

"I'll remember."

"Come on. I want to take you on a tour of the nest. It's a most interesting place. This was a mountain of solid rock before these creatures chose it for a home. In two weeks they carved and hollowed it out so that it's really only a shell now. The acid secretions softened the rock to putty consistency and the entire mountain was honeycombed to their desires."

"It must be an interesting place."

"Just wait," Von Hulckman's voice was proud. "It's really something to see. But first I'd better spray us with this synthetic scent of the nest. Sometime the young warriors are overzealous. Most of the creatures know my scent. But these young ones are difficult. I concocted this scent after I was molested several times and had to fight my way clear. I don't take unnecessary chances."

VON HULCKMAN sprayed Ray and himself with a fine shower of liquid that matched the odor of the creatures. Replacing the small syringe, he took an electric lantern and a heavy stick wrapped in oil-soaked rags before turning to the door.

"Why the light and the stick?" Ray asked.

"The nest is entirely dark in most parts. Since these creatures' eyes are adjustable, they need little light. Unfortunately we are not so equipped. The oil-wrapped stick is just in case some of the creatures start to get gay. Fire is the one thing they fear."

Von Hulckman led the way through the large central cavern and into another chamber.

"This is my private entrance to the queen quarters. We'd have to satisfy a hundred guards if we entered the

main door. They guard her door at all times, but this one is always open."

The light revealed a large glossy, fat creature sitting in the middle of the chamber. Her tan body, clean and shining, reclined majestically in a bed of white moss. Several smaller creatures moved busily about the chamber. Huddled in a far corner was a gaily colored creature who seemed to be trying to go unnoticed.

"This is my queen, the mother of the hive. That one who is trying to disappear over there is her mate. He fathered the entire lot, but now is more tolerated than anything else. It's his wife who rules his past deeds. Come on, there is much to see."

"This is the hatchery," Von Hulckman said as they stood before another entrance. "Here all the eggs are brought for hatching."

Inside row upon row of eggs were arranged in neat order. Several dozen workers moved about inspecting, turning and re-arranging them. All over the room eggs were in motion as the attendants shifted them from row to row. At the lower end new ones were being brought in while at the upper end newly hatched creatures were being taken from the hatchery.

At the next door they were carefully inspected by guards before being allowed to enter. Inside the large room were hundreds of the young creatures in various stages of development. They were arranged in graduated order from the newly hatched to others who were half-grown. Workers swarmed about feeding them, cleaning them and teaching them how to handle their bodies. Moving among them were several adults with vastly distended bodies.

"Those are the living storage tanks," explained Von Hulckman. "They are trained from infancy for this job. They fill up at the store

rooms and then distribute the liquid food to the young until they are able to take solid food."

"Quite a system," observed Ray. "How long do the young remain here?"

"Their nursery period is six days. During the time they are here, they are watched and checked closely for traits and abilities. When these are determined, they are marked as warriors, workers, attendants or one of the other nest jobs. Once they are graded they cannot become anything else, for from that moment everything they learn is pointed toward doing the best job possible in their assigned field. When they leave this room they are separated accordingly."

AFTER ANOTHER inspection they entered the next room.

"These are future warriors," explained Von Hulckman.

Hundreds of the youthful creatures moved about the room in various formations under the directions of older warriors. Ray watched them shadow war against each other, baring teeth and pinchers. Over their angry hum Ray could hear the sharp snapping of pinchers and grinding of teeth.

"In four days they will be full-fledged warriors, ready to fight for the Von Hulckman empire!"

Ray's mind seethed. If only he could get away for help. He held his voice steady with an effort. "Let's see the rest of your diggings."

"The other training rooms are merely variations of this one and of no great interest, so we'll skip them. There is the store room, however."

Unlike the other places the store room was unguarded. It was as large as the central chamber. Ray's eyes followed the light as it swept over the interior. Stacked about there were all sorts of foodstuff. Small

animals, large animals, piles of grain, cans of fruits, bags of sugar, potatoes and other items.

"How do they get all those heavy objects here?"

"They work in teams when an unwieldy object has to be handled. They are really quite capable in most things. Their civilization is very highly advanced. We can't really measure up to them. But wait until I set up my empire."

"They are really something," agreed Ray. "It's too bad that they had to be of a bloodthirsty nature. They would provide an interesting study for science and could probably have a useful place in our society."

"Hah! I like them as they are," sneered Von Hulckman. "Come on, let's go up to my laboratory."

Von Hulckman led the way back to the central chamber and up a series of steps. Emerging from the stairway they entered the laboratory. Von Hulckman snapped a switch and the room was flooded with light. Ray's eyes traveled over the large room filled with all sorts of equipment. Several laboratory tables held glassware, testing equipment, and other scientific items. It was a modern laboratory, complete in every detail.

"This was my greatest project before the advent of my pets. It took quite a bit of planning and effort. All the others who knew of its existence will never tell. After my pets built the nest with the special staircase inside the mountain, I destroyed the outside entrance. Situated here midway up the mountainside I am completely safe from prying eyes."

"Quite a place," said Ray.

"Oh, yes!" boasted Von Hulckman. "It's as good as any in the world. My power comes from the waterfall, and for emergencies I have the diesel-powered system and enough fuel oil to last me for years. My stores of

food, chemicals, laboratory equipment and concentrates will last me for another ten years. I have nothing to worry about."

RAY WATCHED Von Hulckman closely, his mind racing at high speed. His voice was calm as he answered; "I must agree you are very well fixed."

"I overlooked no bets. You will be my guest here until you forget who is master."

"I won't forget," returned Ray grimly.

"Ha, ha," laughed Von Hulckman. "Care to join me in a drink?"

"I can use one," returned Ray. "Make it big."

Von Hulckman poured two stiff drinks from a bottle and handed Ray a glass. Raising his, he laughed: "To Emperor Von Hulckman."

Ray raised his glass watching the other closely. As Von's glass touched his lips, Ray hurled his whiskey into the other's eyes.

With a cry of pain, Von Hulckman grabbed his eyes. Ray swung with all his power.

Von Hulckman hit the floor and Ray fell on him. Again and again he hit him until the other lay still.

Moments later he stood looking at the bound and gagged Von Hulckman. "Now Emperor we'll see about your empire. So your retainers can't take fire, huh? Well, we'll give them some."

Rapidly Ray rolled the drums of fuel oil, ether, and alcohol over the stairs leading to the nest. Breathing sharply he opened the taps on the drums sending their contents flowing down the steps in a thick stream. Moments later he touched a match to an oil soaked torch and hurled it below.

There was a great WHOOSH—then a flaming roar from the opening. Thick black smoke and intense heat poured into the laboratory amid a stench and the sound of frying.

With a great sigh Ray turned to his bound captive. Von Hulckman's eyes were rolling and he thrashed about the floor. From under the gag came pitiful whines and groans.

Ray removed the gag and helped the other to his feet.

"My pets, my pets," screamed Von Hulckman. "You're destroying them! You're destroying them!"

"Yes, Von Hulckman. And you are next. Let's head for town. You have a date with a murder court."

THE END

MATRIX

By ROG PHILLIPS

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OCTOBER ISSUE — ON SALE AUGUST 10

THE ANCIENT GEOMETRICAL MONUMENT

Article 3 — Its Ramification

By ROCKY STONE

(Note: This is the third of a series of articles which bring to the public an understanding of amazing discoveries which are of priceless practical value today, and which were also keyed in the geometrical monument, whose base cornerstone has been called for centuries the Great Pyramid.)

IN THE LAST two articles of this series, it has been shown that the physical form of the Ancient Geometrical Monument is a gigantic and tremendous cube which is composed of six truncated pyramids 'anchored' and oriented to a much smaller cube which naturally cannot be seen by the physical sense of sight, and that this apparently tiny 'keystone' cube is called the **CHAMBER OF THE ENLIGHTENED**, while down through the centuries it had been known as the **CHAMBER OF THE GRAND ORIENT** of ancient prophecy.

In Article 1, "Its General Form", it was shown that beyond any question or shadow of a doubt there is always this tiny 'keystone' cube, which is eternal and unlimited—being *the cube of infinity*.

In Article 2, "Its Simile", it has been pointed out that the six truncated pyramids, which with *the cube of infinity* compose the Ancient Geometrical Monument, symbolize the past, the present subjective instant, and the future of man, as well as the past, the present objective instant, and the future of the physical events of nature.

Attention has already been drawn to the fact that the Great Pyramid,

the chief cornerstone and displacement model of the Ancient Geometrical Monument, has different linear measurements than those of a 'standard' truncated pyramid with a slope angle of approximately forty-five degrees which represents *the past of man*, simply because it contains man's "footprints on the sands of time" from a past time to the time of our generation—which necessitated the part-displacement of five truncated pyramids, causing the Great Pyramid to have symbolized on its South side *the present subjective instant of man*, on its West side *the past of the physical events of nature*, on its North side *the present objective instant of the physical events of nature*, on its East side *the future of the physical events of nature*, while its vertical height or altitude is greater due to its displacement into *the future of man* from long ago.

Because of the reasons just mentioned, the slope angle of the Great Pyramid is approximately fifty-one degrees, and the mental giants, the M-giants of long ago, appear to have been very clever, resourceful, and foresighted in thus establishing the validity and genuineness of present-day discoveries. Figure J. shows the

displacement of just four of the six truncated pyramids of the Ancient Geometrical Monument.

The readers of *Amazing Stories* can perceive that since the measurement of the corridors or passageways of the Great Pyramid point to 1952-53 as the genuine and real world beginning of the New Order, the slope angle of the sides of the Great Pyramid becomes important, while hope can now be reborn in world people, providing the genuine correct knowledge or wisdom keyed in this *great wonder of the world* is not only understood, but is also actually used and employed for the benefit of the human race.

The five 'chambers of construction' which are above what has been called for many years the "King's Chamber", are symbolical of the five truncated pyramids which are displaced by the great and wonderful displacement model, the Great Pyramid. During the centuries down to the building of this great wonder of the world, it appears that the Pharaohs were aware of its importance, especially the Pharaoh who was responsible for organizing the people for its construction. The word *Pharaoh* has been translated, "The man who lives in the big house," which does not refer to Alcatraz or Sing Sing, as perhaps can be surmised.

For those interested in 'numerology' or prophecy, it is pointed out that the CHAMBER OF THE GRAND ORIENT together with the six truncated pyramids anchored and oriented to it composes the number 7. The 'number' of the Ancient Geometrical Monument is 5-10-5, while the 'number' of its displacement model, the Great Pyramid, is 363, while it will be fully realized by or even before the end of this series of articles why the 'number of the beast' is 666.

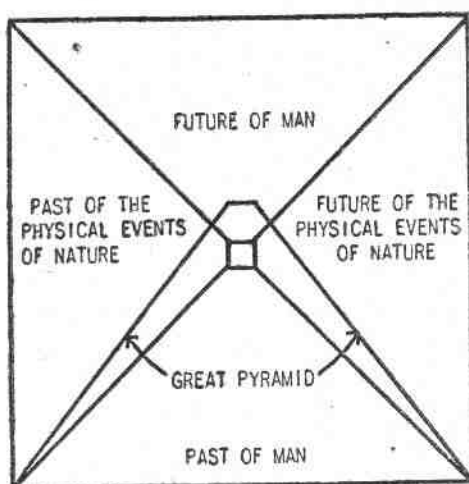


FIGURE J

Displacement of the Great Pyramid in the Future of Man, The Past, and the Future of the physical events of Nature, completely covering the Past of Man naturally in our time, which was displaced into the Future of Man at a time long ago. The front and the back truncated pyramids, representing the present subjective instant of man and the present objective instant of the physical events of Nature are not shown, but the Great Pyramid displaces these also.

The M-giants apparently realized how the physical sciences, such as chemistry, physics, etc., would have progressed to our time—and they appear to have had a great understanding of the impasse which our generation would reach regarding the genuine science of man in relation to government, jurisprudence, psychiatry, psychology, etc.

Those wise men of long ago, the planners of the Ancient Geometrical Monument and its chosen displacement model, the Great Pyramid, apparently knew and entirely understood what some of today's theorists and scientists are seeking—the 'tesseract' which mathematically and geometrically contains the keys to the problems of the universe and man, and which naturally also contains an exact scientific basis for genuine and actual science that is capable of un-

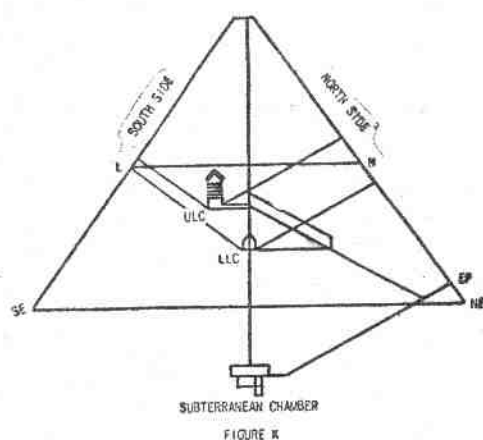


FIGURE K

East view of cross-section of Great Pyramid. ULC, upper light chamber, which has been called also KC, "King's Chamber".

LLC, lower light chamber, also "Queen's Chamber". EP—Entrance Passage

VN—Symbolical of violet wave-length.

SE-NE—Base of Great Pyramid, symbolical of red wave length.

limited expansion. Such an exact scientific basis is true or permanent and can be applied in use like when a complete premise in logic is verified, the correct conclusions are naturally and normally reached when an exact scientific standard for logic is employed—and an exact scientific standard for logic is included among the keys of the Great Pyramid, the chief displacement cornerstone which contains the displacement factors for the finest of today's 'tesseract'. The Great Pyramid is constructed of stone—and stone is and has been used as the symbol of truth or correct knowledge for many centuries.

The light of the sun, symbolizing the energy of the universe, bathed the outer white limestone casing of the Great Pyramid with its rays, and the symbolical energy of sunlight was used as the *visible*—the cube of infinity being the *invisible*—capstone.

The spectrum has been defined as the images formed when a ray of light (radiant energy) is broken up, as by a prism, and then brought to-

gether, so that its parts are arranged in the order of their wavelengths, as in a rainbow (Merriam-Webster). The *visible spectrum* has wavelengths between 3,800 and 8,000 angstrom units and when of sufficient intensity evokes in the eye a series of colors ranging from red (evoked by waves 760 millimicrons in length) to violet (385 millicrons) (Webster's Collegiate 5th).

The wavelengths of the violet are to those of the red, as (roughly) 1:2. By 'coincidence', the length of the base of the Great Pyramid is 760 feet, 11 inches (Worth Smith), while red is evoked in the eye by wavelengths of 760 millimicrons. By using the proportion, 1:2, the length of the violet wavelength in the Great Pyramid is symbolized by approximately 380 feet, which—in Figure K, brings the symbolization of the violet wavelength to just above the "King's Chamber" (which is also the 'upper light chamber' of a camera lucida) and the five 'chambers of construction' (which symbolizes the five truncated pyramids of the Ancient Geometrical Monument displaced by

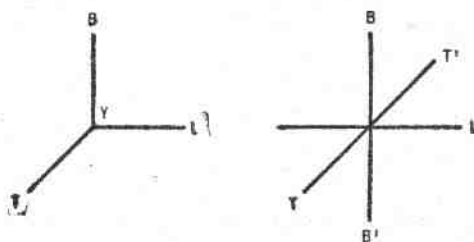


FIGURE L

Illustration on left shows B (Breath), L (Length), and T (Haight or depth) perpendicular to each other at the same point Y.

Illustration on right shows 'follow thru', whereby BB', LL', and TT' are at right angles to each other at Y.

Both show the linear measurements of the third dimension.

the Great Pyramid).

An objective happening in a physical event cannot be seen by the physical sense of sight, if an objective happening, like a small object—a part of an 'atom', is less than one-half, 1:2, of the wavelength of the light used in trying to see it. The wavelengths of the energy spectrum above extreme visible violet apparently cannot be seen unaided by the physical sense of sight—and these, which include the life rays of man, are symbolized in *the cube of infinity and unlimitedness* which is the *invisible CHAMBER OF THE GRAND ORIENT*. (The new giant "hydrogen eye", reported in news on April 19, 1949 from the atomic science journal, *Nucleonics*, is said to be able to magnify 600,000 times—far beyond anything ever before attempted—altho the interior structure of atoms will not be seen apparently without further aid—due to the rapid motion or speedy action of atoms and their parts which cannot be 'stopped' by the human eye. The advantage is the very short wavelength of these hydrogen protons. An analogy can be given in saying that it is not altogether true that the hand is quicker than the eye—in fact, untrained thought is unable to follow thru the lens of the eye the speedy action of the hand.)

Below the base of the Great Pyramid are symbolized the infrared, and the heat radiation rays wherein the Subterranean Chamber—called for years the pit—is set symbolically (remember the 'hell of fire and brimstone'?). Below the heat radiation wavelengths are those of radio, etc.

In the Subterranean Chamber, there is a square shaft, between six and seven feet square and approximately seven feet deep, set diagonal-

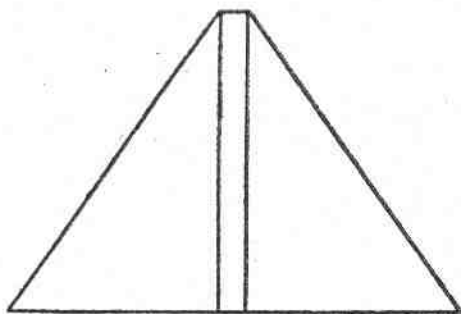


FIGURE M

'Standard' truncated pyramid, similar to each of the six truncated pyramids of the Ancient Geometrical Monument, from side view.

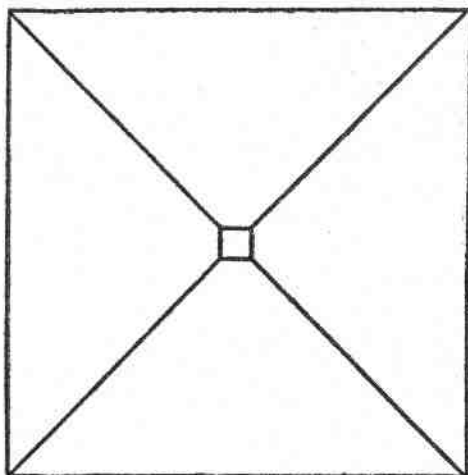


FIGURE M (CONT)

Small dimensions of length and breadth of truncated top of pyramid, as seen from view above it.

ly—in the North corner of which is a smaller square shaft, between four and five feet square and between three and four feet deep. (Mentioned by Morton Edgar in Vol 1., "Great Pyramid Passages".) The Great Pyramid, being a displacement model, is actually of complicated design and construction, since almost the whole of the Ancient Geometrical Monu-

Four-sided 'bar' made from altitude and the length and breadth (which are exactly the same) of the square at the truncated top, as shown in Figure M.



FIGURE N

ment is therein epitomized.

The third dimension has been symbolized during our time by three lines perpendicular to each other at the same point in space, which naturally comprises the linear dimensions of breadth, length, and thickness (height or depth) in Figure L. Most persons are today familiar with the fact that thru the human eye or the physical sense of sight a plane figure of just breadth and length cannot be seen, whereas as soon as thickness (depth or height) is added, the mental picture of the physical object is then perceived in the mind thru the lens of the eye.

Time and what time measures, the energy of the universe which grows into, permeates, and resurges from mass or physical forms, were naturally used by the M-giants to show, among other disclosures, the mental evolution of the human race. Albert Einstein, a fine mathematician and theorist, pointed out years ago that time is the fourth dimension.

The energy of the universe, in all of its forms, is shown keyed, as *life itself*, in the wonderful displacement model, the Great Pyramid. Even Herodotus, the Greek historian, re-

ported the Great Pyramid to have been looked upon as the symbol of life (Americana). The energy of the universe is composed of wavelengths and or particles of energy which graduate in the energy spectrum from the long lower wavelengths and or particles of energy to short and very short higher wavelengths, just as the base of a truncated pyramid graduates to its truncated top and beyond the sense of sight. As the rainbow is the symbol of victory, as purple is a 'royal' color, as Joseph's coat of many colors symbolized understanding, so the understanding of the Chamber of the Grand Orient and its oriented pyramids of the Ancient Geometrical Monument gives victory in man's conquest of the mysteries of the universe and man—all life, itself.

It has been pointed out that the third dimension is symbolized by three lines perpendicular to each other at the same point. The fourth dimension, it has been theorized, could only be symbolized by having four lines perpendicular to each other at the same point in space—which has been regarded as manifestly impossible. The actual way in which this problem was solved by the M-giants will always be remembered in history.

As has already been pointed out, the six truncated pyramids of the Ancient Geometrical Monument are oriented to *the cube of infinity*. The *cube of infinity* contains the symbol of the powerful penetrating rays of the energy of the universe which permeate all physical forms.

In Figure M. a standard truncated pyramid is shown not only from the side view, but also from a view above it. The tiny square of the truncated top is relatively of very small measurement.

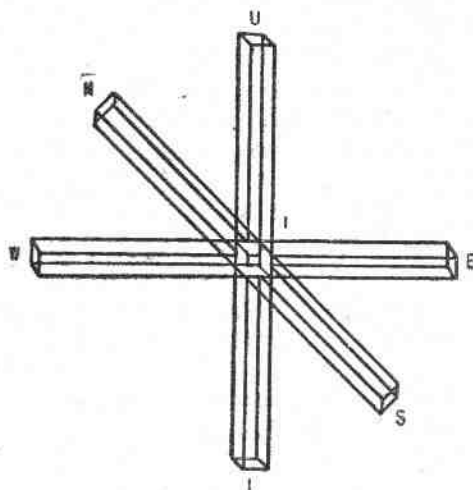
In Figure N. the tiny square's two linear dimensions are used, while the vertical height or altitude of the truncated pyramid gives the third dimension for the perfect four-sided 'bar', the symbol of the pyramids vertical height or altitude, which extends from the center of the base to the truncated top of the truncated pyramid, fitting into the top exactly and with perfect measurement.

There is such a four-sided 'bar' in each of the six truncated pyramids, perfectly measuring the vertical height or altitude of each one.

The truncated pyramid on the West side of the Ancient Geometrical Monument is connected to the truncated pyramid on the East side by the *cube of infinity*. The West side shows the symbol of the past while the East side shows the symbol of the future of the physical events of nature. The lower and the upper truncated pyramids show the past and the future of man, and are likewise connected by the *cube of infinity*.

Since man is only aware of the present objective instant of the physical events of nature *AFTER* physical events happen, man is only cognizant within himself thru the physical senses of that which is already past, while the present subjective instant of the human mind of man, or any man, contains the mental pictures which are pictures of events already past, a former present objective instant of a physical event or happening. The North and the South truncated pyramids are connected by the *cube of infinity*, the North truncated pyramid symbolizing the present objective instant of the physical events of nature, while the South truncated pyramid symbolizes the present subjective instant of man or any man.

Since man in the human mind is only cognizant of the mental picture



{ FIGURE O }

UL — The 'altitudes' of the upper and the lower truncated pyramids, representing the past and future (U) of man, each extending from a 'face' of the cube of infinity.

NS — The 'altitudes' of the North and the South truncated pyramids representing the present objective instant of the physical events of nature and "its past" in the mental pictures of the present subjective instant of man (S), each extending from a 'face' of the cube of infinity.

WE — The 'altitudes' of the West and the East truncated pyramids, representing the past and the future (E) of the physical events of nature, each extending from a 'face' of the cube of infinity.

NS WE, and UL are perpendicular to each other at the cube of infinity, which is the basis of the finest 'resseract'—since infinity contains all time and time is the fourth dimension, the measurement of universal energy which grows into, permeates, and resurges from mass or physical forms.

or pictures of physical events or happenings, man only experiences effects from physical events or happenings. This is the reason why physical scientists have used the inductive method, from effect to cause, in the physical sciences. When the actual facts of the genuine science of man which are now known, are understood by people generally, both the inductive and the deductive methods will be used, and the inductive method will give way to some de-

gree before the deductive method which will be used more and more as more and more correct knowledge of life is garnered thru experience.

In Figure O. each complete bar or four-sided symbol is made up of two four-sided bars from two truncated pyramids, one bar symbolizing the past and the other bar the future. *There are three complete four-sided 'double-bars' perpendicular to each other at the cube of infinity.* Infinity contains all time, and time is the fourth dimension which is the measurement of the energy of the universe.

In Figure O. there is the symbol of time, the fourth dimension, and the M-giants went even farther when they graduated each complete four-sided bar with two truncated pyramids.

The M-giants squared the circle and they also cubed the sphere, which means that the Ancient Geometrical Monument of which the Great Pyramid is a displacement model, is the symbol, among other things, of the earth, your planet.

Perhaps you can begin to comprehend that the Great Pyramid contains the clues and the keys to an exact scientific 'tesseract' which composes the methods of action or the laws of nature for the understanding and the use of them by man.

It is interesting to observe that the methods of action of nature in relation to man do not need to be passed upon by the legislative body of any government, since these laws are always enforced, and the only privileged persons are those who understand and obey those laws. The M-giants, those wise men from long ago, apparently knew that when man finally attained the stage of mental evolution where superstition was eliminated and correct knowledge was acquired, that it would be dis-

covered that nothing is impossible to man, if it be natural and normal ethically, since altho man is not the creator, man is nevertheless an imitator who has free will or choice, and there is nothing new under the sun or thruout the universe of which the earth, your planet, is a part. When ignorance is eliminated in the human mind and thinking, the human mind then becomes an expression of and is tuned in on the energy of the universe.

The M-giants apparently knew that the scientists and the theorists of our generation would be cognizant of the actual fact that there is nothing that can be seen thru the physical sense of sight which does not change—even tho it be the toughest glass, the finest steel, the most beautiful jewel, etc. Too, they apparently realized that in our time it would have been discovered that everything cognized thru the physical senses is more or less curved—and that a straight line could only be perceived in the human mind as the shortest distance between two points in space. It happens that the human mind, when stripped of ignorance, is the finest asset imaginable.

The M-giants apparently foresaw that our generation would finally become aware of the facts of life and that this generation would begin to realize that there are so many specific things in the world that they cannot be counted, let alone be experimented with, during an earthman's short lifetime. People will finally realize that it is important for the welfare of the human race that the talents of its members are allowed to route themselves thru the proper channels, and then all of the countless specific things in this world can be classified, known, and understood, especially when human society becomes organized so that

people and nations of this earth have a sane civilization.

The M-giants apparently knew long ago that human society would be about ready to emerge from the dark ages and vales of mental evolution during our generation, and the Pharaoh responsible for the actual construction of the Great Pyramid contributed to the welfare of the human race in a way that can be of the greatest assistance in the attainment of a sane world civilization during our time.

The M-giants could apparently square a circle in theory and in actual practice (See proportions in "Miracle of the Ages" by Worth Smith and the contributions of Taylor, Davidson, etc. McCarty, in "The Great Pyramid Jeezeh", theorizes that the Great Pyramid was built by a race of people that preceded our race, with vastly more intelligence than we now possess, or will possess at the end of the twentieth century). The M-giants could apparently cube a sphere and 'cone' a pyramid which better discloses the spirals of time. Retranslation brings the Ancient Geometrical Monument to the form of a sphere, the symbol of the earth, your planet. Retranslation allows Figure O. to be contemplated as having rounded 'double-bars' perpendicular to an invisible sphere of infinity, which sphere of infinity is symbolical of not only the 'atom', but also of an infinite curved universe. (The recent test-scan at Palomar with the 200-inch telescope shows that the universe is apparently infinite.)

The "Holy of Holies" of King Solomon's Temple was a perfect cube of 20x20x20 cubits, twice the linear measurements of the 'standard' cube of 10x10x10 cubits, which gave a volume capacity of eight thousand cubic cubits, seven times greater than

the one thousand cubic cubits of the 'standard' cube. Too, a 200-inch telescope has more than twice the capacity of a 100-inch in the scanning of space.

The ordinary 'jack', which with a ball has been used by children in the game of 'jacks', has a proportionate and similar form to Figure O. retranslated.

From the point of view of some persons, the past, the present objective instant, and the future of the physical events of nature appear most alluring. From the point of view of others, the past, the present subjective instant, and the future of man are important. According to the M-giants, the really balanced person is an actual realist-idealist, which means that a really sane person should know and understand not only how to think and concentrate correctly, but should also be able properly to interpret and sanely employ the physical events of nature.

Since the Great Pyramid, the displacement model of the Ancient Geometrical Monument, contains the clues and the keys to everything basic in mankind's experience, it can now be disclosed that the M-giants epitomized therein an exact scientific basis and standard for psychology which not only coordinates the sciences, but unifies knowledge. Included is an exact and genuine scientific standard for ethics which is completely natural and normal, being wholly in accord with the action of universal energy and mass with the conditions and the measurements of space and time in relation to man.

In coming articles in this series, the exact scientific methods for the prevention and the cure of the majority of mental illnesses should be of importance to everyone, especially since there has been such a tremendous rise in this type of illness.

The mental health of any nation should be of paramount importance to its citizens, and psychiatry can now have a standard and method which allows it to become a genuine science.

The NS and WE of Figure O. represent a cross, THE CROSS WHICH WAS INDICATED IN FIGURE I. OF ARTICLE 2. The NS and WE cross represents and symbolizes the present subjective instant of man in relation to the past, the present objective instant, and the future of the physical events of nature. The UL and NS cross in Figure O. represents and symbolizes the past, the present subjective instant, and the future of man in relation to the present objective instant of the physical events of nature. The UL and WE cross

represents and symbolizes the past and the future of man in relation to the past and the future of the physical events of nature. All crosses contain the *cube of infinity*, the symbol of the *penetrating energy of the only power, the energy of the universe, which is life, itself.*

When the Spaniards first landed in what is now called Mexico, they discovered that the natives of that time were reverencing a cross symbol which had been held in awe for centuries. The natives actually revered and venerated the cross symbol without apparently realizing its full and true significance. *Is it self-evident that reverence or veneration without correct knowledge (which is truth), is merely superstition?*

(Article 4 Next Month)

MAN IS IMMORTAL

By
CHARLES H. COLEMAN

Does a part of the original man live
in each one of us? Is that the true
meaning of the idea of immortality?

ALMOST ever since man has been man, he has searched after that fleeting dream the fountain of youth, that gift of the Gods, that thing called immortality. And man (in the vast majority all unknowingly) has searched in vain after that which he already has, for man is immortal. Yes, each man is immortal, because each man began in the beginning with Adam and each man lives, in part, as long as there is a descendent of him. A part of Adam lives today in each of us, a part modified in some ways, but still a part of the ori-

ginal Adam. And a part of each of us is infinitely old, as old as the history of man is old, dating back to the beginning of man. And each of us shall live as long as there is a descendent of ours. And if there are descendents of ours to infinity then a vital part of us lives to infinity. In a sense this is immortality.

August Weismann (1834-1914) an ardent disciple of Darwin, and not content with Darwin's theory of pangenesis, developed the *Germ Plasm Theory of Heredity*. This theory is held today and is the basis of the

sciences of heredity. Weismann based his theory on the concept that living matter is of two kinds, the somatoplasm composing the body tissues, and the germplasm, the immortal substance carrying the traits and producing new. The somatoplasm is separate from the germplasm and produces no change upon it. Actually the somatoplasm is merely a device for reproduction, as in the famed case of the chicken; the chicken is merely the device of an egg to produce more eggs, the chicken being somatoplasm and the egg being germplasm.

We now have need of a diagram to see the relationship of somatoplasm and germplasm and to see how germplasm began in the beginning and extends through the last descendant, while somatoplasm goes back to the dust from whence it came.

Figure 1.

Each triangle represents an individual, the parts of triangles represent mates to the main line. The shaded areas represent germplasm. The unshaded areas represent somatoplasm. The heavy broken line represents the continuity of the germplasm.

From the diagram it is easily seen that the germplasm originates in the beginning individual. The cell containing the germplasm grows and splits into two cells exactly like the parent cell; these two in turn grow and each splits into two new cells forming four new cells exactly like the parent cell, and so on ad infinitum. The point here is that the parent cell does not die, but simply grows and divides and each new cell is *exactly* like the original parent cell, in fact, it is the original parent cell in double. We see by this that the parent cell *never* dies unless *all* cells die. In mating the parent cells combines with a parent cell from the mate. The two cells form a new cell with all of the characteristics of the old cells and combining all of the germplasm, so that no germplasm is lost but lives on in the new cell which is the germplasm cell of the new individual. The old lives in the new, for the old is the new, and the germplasm continues to live as long as there are descendants.

It is often said of a son who looks like his father that, "he is a chip off the old block." Actually the grandfather, father, son, etc., are all chips off the same line of germplasm, and the germplasm lives on to the last descendant, hence we can say that a vital part of Adam lives on in us today since the germplasm lives on.

From genetic studies made with *drosophila melanogaster*, the cinderella fruit fly, we know that the vital, ever-living germplasm contains the genes which control the development of the somatoplasm, i.e., how we grow, our instincts, our color of skin and hair, how we think, and all of those other thousands of characteristics which make up the individual. All of these are controlled by the ever-living germplasm. Is this why we sometimes dream of strange

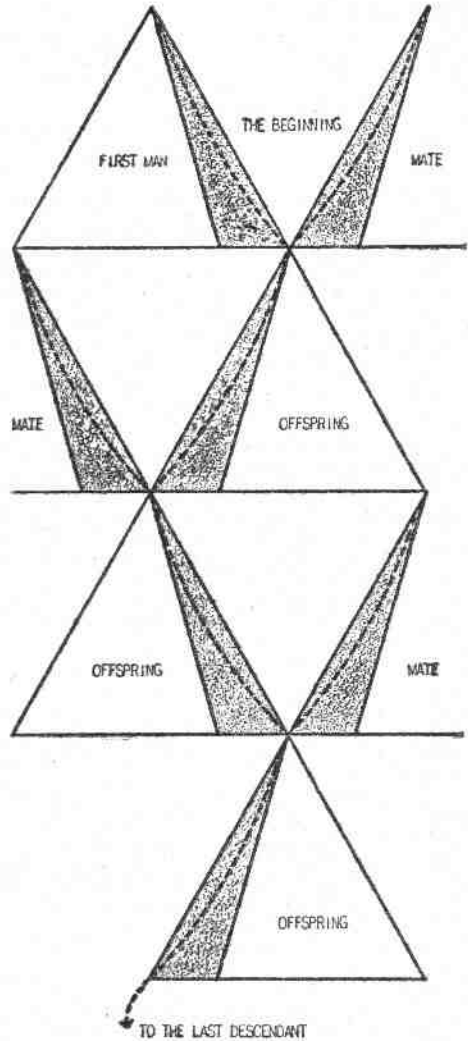


FIGURE 1

things which we as individuals have never actually experienced? Is this why all young children like red? Could it be that we originated upon the red sands of Mars and that the sole survivors of a crashed space ship, a man and a woman, slipped into the primeval jungles of earth away from the tragedy? We at times dream of falling from great heights. Are we actually strangers upon a strange planet? At times we feel out of place here, we feel that there are other places, other times, where we belong. Do the S.F. writers of Martian stories actually remember more than most of us? Is there someone amongst us who remembers even more....?

THE END

THE TIDES AND GRAVITY

By H. H. HYERS

A new theory about what causes Earth's tides

SOONER OR later, we must abandon the gravitation theory and return to the theory of Kepler. The gravitation theory violates the first, the second, and the third laws of motion. It has never been fitted successfully to tidal behavior. The theory of Kepler fits tidal behavior. It conforms the laws of motion.

To examine these propositions, let us begin where the error began: with Galileo and the pendulum. Says *The New World of Physical Discovery* by Floyd L. Darrow: "The motion of a pendulum illustrates beautifully both kinds of energy. When the pendulum is at the middle of its swing, its energy is all kinetic. At the end of the swing this kinetic energy has been translated into potential. Were there no friction or air resistance, the conversion would be one hundred per cent perfect, and we should have perpetual motion."

Says *Household Physics* by Walter Whitman: "Momentum gained in falling from an elevated position at one side to its lowest position being sufficient, were there no friction, to raise it to the same elevation on the other side."

These statements are not true if the laws of motion are true. The simple, or mathematical, pendulum, which is described as consisting of a particle, or material point, suspended by a thread without weight and oscillating without friction, must lose momentum and stop swinging.

According to the first law, the swinging bob of a pendulum seeks to follow the straight line of motion. It is restrained by a pull from the axis of suspension. Since it pulls outward from the arc of its swing, it does work upon the axis of suspension. Work is the transference of energy from one system to another. The swinging bob has only so much energy. On each swing, a part of this energy is diverted to doing work upon the axis of suspension, not to mention work done upon the earth on each upswing.

Galileo called the pull toward the axis of suspension a right-angle pull. In that, he was thinking in terms of geometry; whereas, the fact must be considered in terms of kinetics. The pull might be called a right-angle pull if the bob followed the arc of its swing naturally. But, it does not. It would move in a straight line naturally. Centrifugality itself, in any application, implies that work is done. The object whirled about one's head at the end of a string pulls outward. It does work

upon the hand that swings it. The moon, revolving about the earth, pulls outward. It does work upon the earth. It pulls the earth from its orbit and drags tides about the earth, according to text books.

These facts bring us to a universal principle: *A moving body does work upon anything which diverts it from the straight line of motion. If the energy lost by doing work is not replaced, and if the diversion continues, the moving body must become stationary in relation to its system.* This is the basic reason why mechanical perpetual motion is impossible.

BEFORE looking to see how this principle applies to the gravitation theory, let us consider the second law of motion in relation to a known fact. Every summer, the earth starts to fall toward the sun. As it falls, it accelerates positively. Two facts should be noted in this connection: 1) The attraction between the sun and the earth precedes and causes the positive acceleration; 2) The attraction never relaxes (according to the gravitation theory), but constantly increases.

We are told that the increasing speed of the earth causes it to swing outward from the sun because of centrifugality. But, the speed, according to the gravitation theory, has been increased by a pull (which never relaxes) directly toward the center of the sun.

The second law says: "Change of motion is proportioned to the acting force and takes place in the direction of the straight line in which the force acts." In other words: As the earth falls toward the sun, any change in the earth's direction must be toward the sun and not away from it.

This can be seen in exaggeration in the case of a comet. A comet approaches the sun, sometimes closely, because of attraction between the sun and the comet. What causes it to swing around the sun and move outward? If there were only attraction and no repulsion between the sun and the comet, and if the second law of motion is true, the comet must fall into the sun.

The theorem of areas takes liberties with the same law. Theorem of areas: "If a body move subject to no forces except one directed always toward the same point O, the line joining the body to O must pass over equal areas in equal intervals of time."

If we apply the second law, we get: *If a body move subject to no forces except one directed always toward the same point*

O, the body must move to O.

To consider the first and the third laws: According to text books, the planets of our system move forward under their own momentum, "initially imparted," but are held to the sun by gravitation and so must go around and around. The same applies to a planet and its satellite (or satellites, as the case may be).

The moon is supposed to have been thrown out of the rapidly-rotating earth. It is held to the earth by gravitation. It is thus compelled to go around and around.

The moon has only the energy of its momentum, initially imparted. It pulls the earth from its orbit and drags tides around the earth. In other words, it does work upon the earth. But, it works without losing energy. The earth, which was thrown, or dragged, from the sun, does work upon the sun without losing energy. Yet, "Work is the transference of energy from one system to another!"

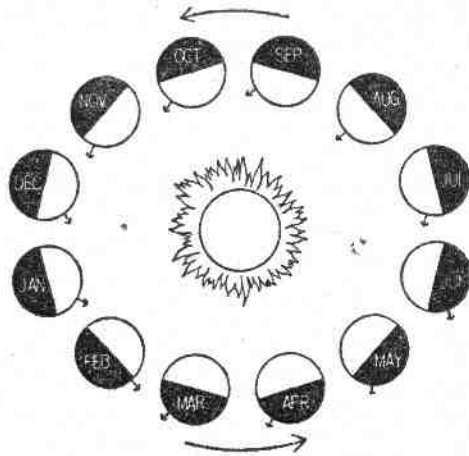
For the purpose of this demonstration, it makes no difference whether or not the moon was thrown from the earth and the earth from the sun, just as it makes no difference that a body, near the earth is attracted to the earth since the fact does not necessarily denote that every body in the universe attracts every other body directly as the product of their masses and inversely as the square of the distance between them.

The first and third laws of motion are ignored by the statement that two bodies tied together and set revolving around each other in an absolute vacuum will continue to revolve about each other forever. Each body seeks to follow a straight line because of its inertia. It pulls outward from its orbit because it seeks to follow a straight line. It does work upon the other body because it pulls outward. The energy lost in doing work is not replaced any more than if the moving body were pulling from an axis between the two bodies instead of upon another body beyond the axis.

To demonstrate that the pull between the earth and the sun is a right-angle pull, a physics teacher produced a false analogy: "an infinite succession of points." He said, when questioned, that each point is stationary and does not pull in any direction.

The New World of Physical Discovery offers another false analogy. It is as if, says Mr. Darrow, a hammer keeps tapping the earth toward the sun. To make a good analogy, he would have to say that the earth also takes a hammer and taps the sun toward itself. The false analogy in this case is important in that it diverts attention from the fact that the earth does work upon the sun: that it pulls upon the sun (according to the gravitation theory) as much as the sun pulls upon the earth.

The New World of Physical Discovery produces another false analogy in saying Galileo "realized that one force acting at right angles to another will have no effect



The arrows show the strange discrepancy in relation to tide and gravitational attraction of the sun.

in changing the momentum produced by the other force. It will only influence the direction of the resulting motion.

"This was the idea which Newton was to utilize in his development of a law of gravitation.... He saw that a constant force directed from a planet toward the sun would serve only to produce a continual change in the direction of the planet's motion, giving to it a curved path. The inertia of the planet, expressed in his first law, would keep the planet going."

But, the first law says that the planet will move in a straight line unless acted upon by another force. It says that the pull between the sun and the earth is not a right-angle pull, but is a pull from behind the right angle because the earth pulls outward from its orbit. The third law says that the planet will do work upon whatever diverts it from the straight line of motion and that work is the transference of energy from one system to another.

NOWHERE do advocates of the gravitation theory show us that the earth regains any of this lost energy except in its periodic fall toward the sun. The second law says that, once the earth starts to fall toward the sun because of the sun's attraction, it must fall all the way. We can see that it would without direct reference to the second law. Here are two bodies approaching each other because attracted together by a constantly increasing force. In that case, the forward motion of the planet will be positively accelerated, but only until the two bodies meet. The planet will not pass around the sun and go elsewhere any more than a steel ball rolling toward a magnet because attracted by the magnet will pass around the magnet and go elsewhere.

To look for an analogy that will fit this

case: If a ball is set into motion around the inside of a circular (or an oval) wall on a table, the ball, seeking always to follow the straight line, will try to pass through the wall at all points. The ball will do the work upon the wall and will lose energy while it continues in contact with the wall. Presently, it will stop. It would stop even if there were no loss of energy occasioned by the ball's contact with the table.

If the ball is tied to the center of the table by a cord that allows it to turn freely, it will do work upon the axis and will presently stop because it has done work.

If, on the other hand, the ball is tied to the center of the table by a force of attraction which is exactly the same as the force of gravitation described by text books, the ball will move to the center. It must slow down because it does work. If it slows down, it loses the centrifugal force which has held it away from the center.

The parallelogram of forces described in text books is a false analogy. It substitutes a specific force for a force which is different in fact.

According to the gravitation theory, a relatively slight difference in distance makes a considerable difference in pull. The equilibrium theory of tides leans heavily upon this idea, although the pull of the sun and the moon upon the equatorial bulge can not set the axis of the earth perpendicular to the orbit plane "because of its rapid spin...."

In passing, the spin is not rapid in relation to the size of the earth. If we back away from the earth until it appears about as large as the full moon to the ordinary view, we can not see that it rotates at all. A point away from the poles moves half as fast as the hour hand of a clock. Text books have described the earth as a gyroscope, with its axis pointing always in one direction "because of its rapid spin." It has been compared to a top. How slowly can a body spin in relation to its mass and still be a gyroscope?

At any rate, a slight difference in distance makes a considerable difference in pull. Accordingly, when the moon passes between the earth and the sun, it should be pulled toward the sun in a way that it is not. When the moon passes to the opposite side, with the earth and the sun pulling in line, it should be pulled toward the earth in a way that it is not. The moon ignores the gravitation theory in this as in other respects.

THE NEW WORLD of *Physical Discovery* says "Even Kepler imagined some sort of backward propulsion, as though radial spokes might emanate from the sun to shove the planets along in their orbits. He could not see that a body once in motion, however it may have obtained that motion, is powerless of itself to abate this state in the slightest degree."

The question of a body abating its own state does not enter. The question is: Is the state abated? The answer is: The state of every moving body in the universe is abated. Every moving body seeks to follow a straight line. Every moving body meets resistance of one sort or another—even an attraction to the side. Accordingly, every free-moving body in the universe follows a helical track of one kind or another.

Smoke rising through air; a bubble rising through water; water running from a faucet; a projectile shot from a gun; a moving plane; a fairly heavy object dropped from a plane; a current in fluid; a river on the earth, all follow helical tracks. A man can not swing a hammer through a flat arc. A point in a moving man, an automobile, or a slow-moving plane follows the helical figure-eight. So does a piece of paper dropped from a plane.

The gravitation theory has never been fitted successfully to tidal behavior. The equilibrium theory of tides was offered to the most of us in school; but, as one text confesses: "...it fails to agree with observed facts.... It is at times in error by the maximum possible amount." An attempt has been made to account for this tidal misbehavior by introducing a false analogy: "a wave set in motion." But, a tidal wave is not a wave set in motion.

The various weaknesses of the equilibrium theory have become so apparent to oceanographers that recently they have tended to return to the formerly discredited theory of Laplace. But, the theory of Laplace also fails to fit the facts.

In a book *Recreations in Astronomy*, published by Harper Brothers in 1879, Henry White Warren said: "It must be conceded that the profoundest study has not mastered the philosophy of tides. There are certain facts which are apparent, but for an explanation of their true theory such men as Laplace, Newton, and Airy have labored in vain...."

Encyclopedias discuss the various theories, but they tend to treat tides as an unsolved mystery. Says one: "The attempt to establish a complete theory from abstract principles has proved a failure; and the only true method by which to get an insight into the particular laws which govern tidal action at any given place is continued observation."

These attempts have failed because they try to fit tides to the gravitation theory, and there is no reason, according to that theory, why the highest waters should appear at certain ports in the evening in the spring and early summer and in the morning in the fall and early winter, regardless of the phase of the moon. Neither the equilibrium theory nor the theory of Laplace accounts for this periodic reversal of direction. All efforts to relate tides to the gravitation theory have failed for the best

(Concluded On Page 146)

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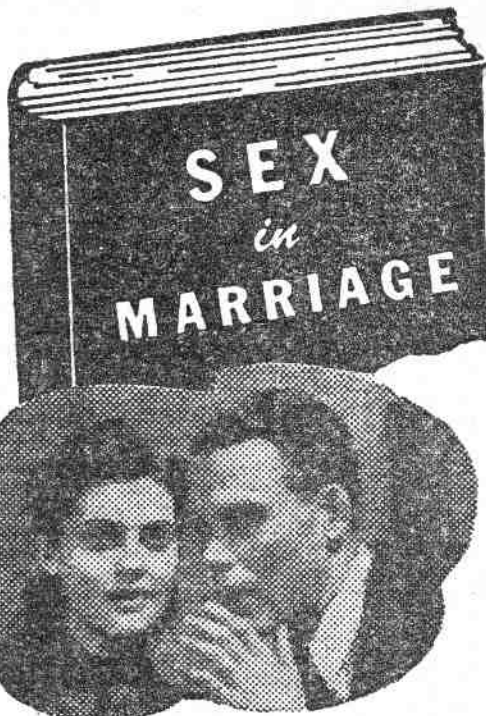
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of reasons the gravitation theory is untrue.

If we back away from the picture to view the tides from a point outside the system, we can see their relation to the system. The tides appear to be caused by interactions of alternate attraction and repulsion between the sun and the earth and between the earth and the moon. That is, they reflect these forces as a flag shows the direction of the wind. If we assume that the other planets are subject to the same attractions and repulsions, the solar system becomes a true atom of which the sun is the positive nucleus.

THE THEORY of alternating attraction and repulsion necessarily includes the idea that while a planet is moving toward the sun, repulsions occur, but are exceeded by attractions; that while a planet is moving away from the sun, attractions occur, but are exceeded by repulsions. Economy demands that the fullest use be made of inertia, so that a planet (or a satellite) can be moved about its orbit with a minimum application of force. A study of the tails of comets will suggest the relation of momentum to the forces of alternating attraction and repulsion.

If the perturbations of planets indicate that they always attract one another and never repel one another, the answer would be that the planets are magnets which have not entered into direct polar interaction with one another as they have with the sun and with their satellites. The relation of the sun to a planet is roughly analogous to that of the positive pole of a bar magnet to the negative pole.

In this connection, it is probably that a slight alternation of attraction and repulsion occurs between the poles of a magnet. An experiment was reported recently a year or so ago in *Time*, in which activity at the pole of a magnet was demonstrated; though no theory to account for the phenomenon accompanied the demonstration. This is not the place to go into the theory of the magnet; but this interaction of polar opposites appears to be universal in nature—or throughout the field of organic evolution, being, apparently, the basic cause of cycles. The theory of the atom can not be satisfactory until it includes the concept of repulsive as well as attractive forces, not in stable equilibrium, but in interaction of alternate attraction and repulsion.

The theory of Kepler is demonstrated thus: A point on the earth turns under the clock. Roughly, when a given port has turned to a point directly under the sun, it is noon. When the port turns to the opposite side, it is midnight.

Tides do not "roll around the earth." There are two tidal bulges. The earth turns within them. These bulges move slowly and vary in height slightly from day to day. The daily changes in height and time reflect adjustments between (principally)

two interactions: 1) alternate attraction and repulsion between the sun and the earth; 2) alternate attraction and repulsion between the earth and the moon.

In the spring, the earth swings outward from the sun, and its velocity decreases. At that season, the tidal bulges reflect a force pushing the earth outward from the sun and checking it back on its orbit. That is, the highest waters, regardless of the phase of the moon, are thrown toward that part of the earth turning between 6.00 p. m. and midnight.

In the fall, the force is shown by the tides to be thrown toward the opposite side: between 6.00 a. m. and noon. At this season, the earth is pulled forward along its orbit and inward toward the sun.

At both full moon and new moon in the spring, the morning tides gradually diminish from month to month while the evening tides gradually rise. In the fall, the morning tides gradually rise from month to month while the evening tides gradually diminish. These changes follow regular curves.

The tides at the quarters reflect the same forces; though they do not, of course, rise to single peaks in the same fashion.

Tides in all parts of the earth reflect the pull forward and inward in the fall and outward and backward in the spring except where local conditions prevent. Ports up river, or at the heads of long bays, show a lag. Where ocean currents are particularly active, there may be a lag or a teeter.

Tides in the tropics tend to be non-positive. A suggested hypothesis is that the earth is a magnet in active interaction with other magnets and that there is more force-activity toward the poles.

In the United States, ports not up rivers or at the heads of long bays tend to be positive, except in the Gulf of Mexico and immediately north of it. Our West Coast ports are positive.

The large proportion of ports that this demonstration calls positive: i. e., which exhibit the highest waters between 6.00 p. m. and midnight in the spring and between 6.00 a. m. and noon in the fall, fit the theory of alternate attraction and repulsion exactly. No theory which assumes attraction without repulsion fits the behavior of either positive or non-positive ports.

The timing and the quantity of forces in the interactions between the sun and the earth and between the earth and the moon, as reflected by tides, suggest intelligent control analogous to the control which maintains equilibrium in the animal body or the plant. According to the gravitation theory, the solar system is a lifeless mechanism functioning by miraculous suspensions of physical laws which are otherwise universal in application. According to the theory suggested by tidal behavior, the solar system is a living organism.

THE END

THE MYSTERY OF MAGIC DRUGS

By

VINCENT H. GADDIS

IN A Peruvian village, close to the Brazilian border, Kurt Severin, the explorer, watched a native witchdoctor. For hours the singing and dancing that preceded the *huasca bona*, or yaye ceremony, had been throwing echoes and shadows from the circle of light around the huge camp fire. Now the main event of the evening's ritual had come. A sudden silence fell upon the dusky villagers as their sorcerer slowly and dramatically drank the most powerful and mysterious of all jungle drugs.

It had taken a week to prepare the potent brew. Day and night gallons of the plant tea had been boiled down over guarded fires until only a few ounces of thick greenish liquid remained. Mixed with sugar cane liquor, the yaye had been ready for the miracle of mental magic at last.

Suddenly, in the midst of the silence, the body of the witchdoctor began moving—swaying in time to music inaudible to his spellbound watchers. Then, limited to his native tongue and primitive knowledge, he tried to describe what he was hearing and seeing—"strange music made by men with strange things—some blowing, some pounding—music different from here in jungle—a huge hut of stone going far up into the sky—many people watching, all sitting behind one another."

Haltingly, with great difficulty, he told of saxophones and violins, a stage and brilliant lights. Finally, as the effects of the drug wore off, he sank to the ground and fell into a deep sleep.

Was it possible that the mind of this witchdoctor, transcending the barriers of space and time, had reached out across the miles of jungle, mountain and sea, and observed the performance of a concert somewhere in civilization? Kurt Severin believes that it did, and he calls this incident one of the most amazing of his jungle experiences.

Many other responsible explorers and scientists have similar stories to tell—Dr. William M. McGovern, Dr. J. M. Sheppard, Charles Donville-Fife, Dr. Paul Joire—tales of prophecy, clairvoyance and projections of the consciousness by medicine men, *curacas* and *brujos*—masters of jungle witchcraft who have told of coming events, and have located missing persons and buried treasure. Behind these enigmatic feats are drugs, brewed from plants and herbs with secret ingredients, that open obscure doors deep to the labyrinth of the mind and release

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inexplicable, little-known abilities.

There is peyote, for example. Peyote-eating is a practice not only in countries to our south, but here in the United States where its followers among the Oklahoma Indians have formed a religious cult, chartered in 1918 as the "Native American Church." Every weekend they perform their rites, a combination of primitive Christianity and age-old native custom, and in their kaleidoscopic visions they glimpse, however briefly, all the loveliness and ecstasy of their Utopian hunting grounds.

The practice was introduced into our Southwest from old Mexico about a half century ago. Peyote or mescal "buttons" are the dried disc-like tops of the small spineless Mexican cactus which grows along the Rio Grande. When eaten they produce astonishing hallucinations that have individual variations. The user remains awake and conscious, but his sense of sight is affected—a shifting, flashing series of vivid colors, scenes and figures flying like ribbons before his eyes accompanied by an intense feeling of well-being.

There is no evidence that the drug is habit-forming or harmful. For this reason Indian commissioners, like John Collier, have made no attempts to prohibit the ceremonies of the cactus cult. Members are total abstainers and good citizens. In their weekly visits to a haven of fantasy they can forget their days of hard labor beneath hot sun—the sweat, the dust, the poverty of their monotonous, mundane existence.

But peyote is more than a mere producer of meaningless hallucinations—it is a stimulant for supernormal powers. Although no scientific investigation of the drug's effects has been made in Oklahoma to the writer's knowledge, such studies have been made in Europe and South America in recent years. Peyote and its companion drugs, yaye and ayahuasca, are not to be compared with hashish, opium, or marijuana. They are in a different class entirely; and they act upon different nerve-centers from those stimulated by the hems and the poppy—producing a condition in which extra-sensory perceptions are received.

It is the alkaloid principle mescaline in peyote that induces the colored visions, and this substance can be extracted and used in liquid form. Dr. Nando Fodor, of the International Institute for Physical Research, reports that after an injection of mescaline he saw a "glorious panorama of symbolic visions. There was an intelligent sequence in the presentation and it appeared to me as if I were being taught. I was conscious of a guiding influence...but this influence was not a personality." Dr. Fodor points out that mescaline does not inhibit the normal consciousness, but causes a mental dissociation or an awareness of a higher plane.

SEVERAL French scholars have made a study of drug-induced clairvoyance with remarkable success. The former Mexican

minister to Paris, Dr. Cabrer, and Prof. Apollinaire Marie, of Bogota, Columbia, assisted these students by sending the plants to France by special government permission. The drugs used were peyote and yaye.

One of them, Dr. A. Rouhier, a noted chemist, tested the influence of peyote on a number of Europeans. One of his subjects, an engineer living in Paris, was given the drug. A woman who was present tried to influence the subject by taking his hands and concentrating her thoughts upon a visit she had made the day before to a sick relative. The subject then proceeded to describe the bedroom in detail, but stated that there was no one lying in the bed.

Dr. Rouhier accompanied the woman that evening to the home of the relative. Everything in the bedroom, even the position of a certain bottle of perfume, had been described perfectly by the subject. Inquiry revealed that the ill relative had actually been out of the room at the time of the experiment, the nurse having disobeyed the doctor's order to keep the patient in bed. Dr. Rouhier published his report in the *Revue Metaphysique*.

ALTHOUGH peyote is preferable to yaye since it leaves the user awake and conscious, the yaye plant, a native of Columbia, is much more effective. And while peyote is apparently harmless, yaye is a dangerous narcotic. It is known to have toxic effects if incorrectly used.

Charles Donville-Fife, in his book *Among Wild Tribes of the Amazons*, states: "Preparations of yaye have...the curious effect of placing anyone who takes them in a condition in which full consciousness is lost, and the subconscious mind is thus open to receive telepathic communication."

Brewed from the oval, reddish leaves of the vine yaye—a long and graceful liana that hangs from the trees in humid jungles—yaye is prepared and made potent by a long boiling process in water. Sugar cane brandy is added to the syrupy potion, and it is then cooled for drinking. Yaye is a narcotic and an anesthetic, but it is not habit-forming in the sense that it produces a craving for continued dosage.

The native medicine men, or *curacas*, undergo a five-year apprenticeship to perfect their technique of using the drug. During this period they live alone in the woods, slowly building up an immunity against the violent physiological disturbances that frequently follow its early use. Having served their time, they return to their villages to become the spiritual leaders of their people.

Yaye has some curative effects. In small doses it is an excellent natural laxative; in larger quantities it has been found effective in the treatment of malaria. It is often used as an anesthetic for primitive operations and amputations. Over a hundred books in half a dozen languages indicate the interest that the drug has aroused among scientists.

The visions evoked by yaye are varied. Sometimes unusual and variegated geomet-

ric designs appear, and it has been found that similar symbols exist in the decorative motif found on prehistoric monuments at San Augustin, Columbia. As a result it has been suggested that the early cultures of the Putumayo natives derived the inspiration of their art from the visions induced by yaye.

Another effect of the drug is the appearance of diminutive human beings, the size of midgits or dolls, perfectly proportioned, who are called *yayepai*, or yaye people. They are friendly little apparitions and carry tiny tubes of cane on which they play music. As the addict watches them, he always feels a sensation of incorporeal lightness—a sense of separation from his physical body.

But it is the drug's supernormal effects—the telepathic, prophetic and clairvoyant qualities—that are the most amazing. So outstanding is this factor that the Columbian scientist, Dr. Rafael Bayon, has given the drug the name *telepatina*. Captain Custodio Morales, commander of a military post in the Caqueta region, volunteered for an experiment with yaye under Dr. Bayon. The officer at once became conscious of the death of his father and the illness of a sister living in a distant part of Columbia. Weeks later letters arrived confirming the death and illness.

Crimes have been solved with the drug. Several years ago the chief of the Coreguages, Miguel Pirange, while under the influence of yaye, described in detail a murder committed many miles away, a crime of which he could not possibly have had any direct information. After his supernormal revelations, the authorities were able to apprehend the murderer who then made a complete confession.

Columbian missionaries have reported many observations of the powers of yaye. They state that the Indians use the drug to mentally visit distant places, predict future events, and locate buried treasure. Tribesmen who have never left their native jungles are able to describe in astonishing detail the cities and buildings of faraway countries.

Dr. W. C. Jaaschke writes: "Many distinguished Europeans have taken yaye out of curiosity, either to see whether lost objects could be found or to get news of relatives at a distance, and they were amazed by the success of their attempts. It seems, accordingly, that the yaye plant excites the nervous system and puts it into a kind of hypnotic condition."

A mere hypnotic condition, however, does not explain these supernormal abilities. It is well known that certain chemicals, injected into the body, and hormones, produced within the body, have specific effects on definite glands. Possessing a precise goal and consequent action, they are chemical bullets. Prolactin, for example, affects the mammary glands; the iodine compound, thyroxin, a product of the thyroid gland, is the chemical key to intelligence.



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Various drugs produce different mental effects. These effects vary with individuals, and often vary in the same individual. Marijuana often stimulates latent musical ability, cocaine inspires extraordinary happiness, while forms of hashish slow up the sense of time. A very unusual classical case in psychological annals is that of a woman who under the influence of morphine read three books of a complex character in one day and remembered practically every word she had read.

All of these states and abilities are not in the drugs used, but in the mind of the user. The drugs merely serve to bring these states to the surface of the consciousness. They are chemical keys that open doors that lie deep in all of our minds. Like bullets, they strike and affect certain brain or nerve centers, and bring forth these varied mental powers.

Obviously, if man possesses certain abilities that are usually described as supernormal, there must be a part of the brain, a nerve center or gland that acts as a regulator in producing these phenomena. If so, it follows that there must be a drug or chemical compound that would act upon this regulator and thus producing the supernormal powers at will. Apparently peyote and yaye are drugs of this type.

But what organ or gland is the key to these perceptions? Present evidence points to the pineal gland. Sometimes referred to as the "third eye," it is a mass of nerve cells containing gritty particles (brain sand), shaped like a pine-cone, and is located near the center of the skull directly above the extreme top of the spinal column. It is supposed to be a vestigial organ, once an eye, that has taken on new duties, and like the pituitary body, it appears to be connected with both physical and mental growth. It produces a slight secretion which classifies it as a gland. There are many references to the supernormal aspect of the pineal gland (and the pituitary as well) in occult works, but there exists little scientific information.

The amazing knowledge of drugs displayed by the South American Indians has caused much speculation among scholars. Centuries of trial and error lie behind this knowledge, and it is said that the ancient Incas had special schools for the study of plants. We know that the Incas discovered the properties of quinine, and the explorer William LaVarre has told of the almost incredible ability of natives in Dutch Guiana to bend bones in living bodies in plant-drug solutions. Perhaps it is true, as some writers suggest, that this knowledge descends from a very great and ancient civilization.

DR. J. M. SHEPPARD, writing in the *South American Digest*, tells of another drug of the Amazons, ayahuasca—the drug of second-sight—similar to yaye but even more astonishing. Under its influence the consciousness is apparently projec-

ted to any point on earth, irregardless of distance, and events occurring there can be observed.

Two observations of this drug's incredible powers was made by Dr. Sheppard. In the first the *brujo*, or medicine man, who had never been out of the jungle and did not know how to read or write, took the drug and closed his eyes. Suddenly he started speaking in Spanish, and said that he was going to visit a great city in the country from which the scientist came. After naming the city, he "proceeded to describe it so well that only one who had lived there for years could equal it." Later the *brujo* explained that ayahuasca produces the flight of the seeing mind to any spot on our planet—"but I see it not as ordinary vision; I see it all at once as though I were a flying bird."

Dr. Sheppard's second observation occurred later with another medicine man. To prove the drug's ability, the *brujo* offered to submit to a test. After the drug took effect, Dr. Sheppard was to tell him where to go. And the investigator finally decided upon a startling destination.

"Go to the stars," he said. "Go to the lights, the other worlds, far above you. Find one of these that has human habitation, and tell me what you see."

Several minutes of silence followed. Suddenly the medicine man's body began to shiver and shake violently. Then he spoke: "It is far and I am cold—so cold. I am dying of cold. Never have I traveled so fast and yet I do not arrive. I do not understand. I am afraid. I am freezing and I cannot breathe. No, no, I must come back."

A moment later he awakened. He hurried over to the campfire and drank some native rum. For some time he shivered, his teeth chattered, and his flesh was like ice. Then he turned to the scientist and said bitterly: "You tricked me. You nearly killed me. If I thought that you knew what you were asking of me, I would kill you here and now."

After his anger cooled, the *brujo* related his sensations. "It was all space," he said. "I was hurtling upward through that space like a shooting star. Always I have that sensation of rapidity of motion and at first it did not surprise me. I thought I would arrive in a moment at the most. Instead I became cold and the vastness of the space terrified me. No land or water was beneath me; this time I was going upwards and there was nothing except the stars. They grew larger and their light dazzled me. They frightened me and the cold gripped me so that I feared I would die if I unless I returned. So I came back."

But the idea of attempting to reach the stars intrigued the jungle wizard. The next day he came to Dr. Sheppard and said: "I want to try again to reach one of those stars, but I must first work out some means of protection against the cold. You see, although my body remains here on earth, I feel the effects of heat and cold just as

though my body were with me. Actually it seems as though my body accompanies me, but not whole, not really solid flesh. It is so difficult to explain."

Commenting on his experiences and extensive studies, Dr. Sheppard writes: "No living man knows to what heights the mind is capable of reaching under certain circumstances or conditions or drugs. Is it impossible that a specific drug can release the mind? I think not. I truly and honestly believe that ayahuasca does release the mind and allow it to travel in some sphere or manner with which we are yet unfamiliar."

It has long been known that strange states of super-consciousness can be reached through the medium of various substances. Prof. William James, the famous Harvard psychologist, gave examples of this phenomenon induced by nitrous oxide, ether and chloroform in his book *Varieties of Religious Experience*, and he called it the "anaesthetic revelation." The late P.D. Ouspensky tells of some personal experiments in this realm in his book *A New Model of the Universe*. Fitzhugh Ludlow, author of the classic work *The Hash-eesh Eater*, reports a case of drug-induced mental projection, or separation from his physical body, and he adds: "This was neither an illusion of the senses nor a dream."

The effect of drugs upon extra-sensory abilities has been studied by Dr. Joseph B. Rhine and his associates, pioneers in the new science of parapsychology at Duke University, and they have found that caffeine has a stimulating effect, while sodium amytal, a sedative, decreases the mental perceptions. However, it is pointed out that drugs have no influence on the intensity of the impressions themselves, but rather determine the strength of the impressions that reach the conscious mind. Caffeine makes the brain more responsive to the impressions by simply increasing mental alertness.

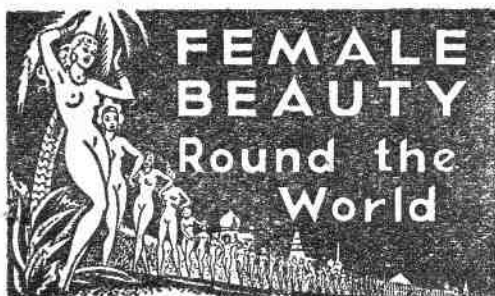
But in peyote, yaye and ayahuasca we have a far more complex series of problems. They are not merely plants among plants, but unique plants possessing qualities that tap the dark unknown of the human mind and its unfathomable, latent powers. Who can say what amazing discoveries about the nature of our inner selves will be revealed when tomorrow's scientific research approaches the mystery of these magical drugs?

THE END

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THE NIGHT THE STARS FELL

By

VINCENT H. GADDIS

It happened on November 12, 1833.

On that night America was treated to the greatest meteory shower in history . . .

ON THE night the skies flamed and the stars fell like the leaves of autumn, America witnessed the most astonishing and awe-inspiring celestial spectacle in her history. No announcement preceded the stellar drama, and nothing like it had ever happened before in the memory of mankind. It spread terror, brought forth predictions of the end of the world, and opened the way to a remarkable scientific discovery.

Even today, over a century later, astronomers comment on the event with words of wonder and discuss factors that still remain unexplained. Unique in the long story of heavenly observations, the meteoric shower that resembled a snowstorm followed a series of brilliant auroral displays that for several evenings previous had been visible as far south as Cuba.

Then, on the night of November 12, 1833, the visitors from the void of outer space arrived. A few scattered star-gazers noticed meteors as early as 9 p. m., but it was not until 11 o'clock that the streaks in the sky began to attract general attention. First reports came from various points along the Atlantic seaboard. The number of fiery trails gradually increased, then at 1 a. m. the full force of the stony storm finally struck.

As the sky burst into brilliant light, thousands of sleepers were awakened in their beds. They hurriedly dressed, left their homes, and stood in awed silence, their white faces turned upward. Flashes of flame incessantly transversed the heavens, and there was not a space three times the diameter of the moon that was not filled every second with the celestial fireworks. Blending with the long phosphorescent paths of the shooting stars, huge meteoric giants plunged toward the earth with dazzling, frightening glares only to dissolve into luminous dust that dropped like gleaming snowflakes.

Visible from Canada to the West Indies,

and reported by sailors far out on the Atlantic and trappers in the west as far as man had ventured, the display was at its maximum over North America. Cloudy skies hindered observations in England, but at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, soldiers were able to read ordinary newspaper print at 4 a. m. when the shower was at its height.

For six hours the blazing globes gushed forth from the night sky with lightning speed. One observer counted 650 of them in a small part of the sky in fifteen minutes. Scientists later estimated that they appeared at the rate of 10,000 an hour.

Irregular fireballs, almost stationary, glared in the heavens. One, as large as the moon, hovered over Niagara Falls, emitting streams of flame and mingling its light with the foam of the great cataract. Another, twice the size of the moon, was observed in North Carolina. Flashing in all directions in a clear, unclouded sky by the hundreds of thousands, the missiles from the mysterious stretches of space beyond sped with white, red, yellow and green lights, many leaving luminous trains that were visible for half an hour. Hurdling through the atmosphere at incredible rates of speed, some exploded with tremendous denotations, and the earth trembled below. Quakes and shocks, as a result, were reported from points in five states.

Never before had the skies of right seemingly portrayed such a message in flame and explosion. For many it was a warning of doom. Only the trumpet blast of Gabriel remained to herald the day of Divine Judgment. The signs and wonders in the sky, as prophesied, had come, and the fear of nature's vast unknown and limitless cosmic power was heavy upon them. They huddled in terrified groups conversing in whispers, or crept back to their homes to face the uncertain future with loved ones.

In the cities of the east, on southern plantations and in the forests of the north,

over the midwestern prairies where the Black Hawk Indian War had recently been concluded to the frontier outposts of the far west, men watched and wondered and feared with thoughts of sleep forgotten.

The meteoric shower continued until dawn. Then, with the light of a new day, came courage and hope, and the apprehensions of the long night disappeared.

THERE WERE strange aftermaths. From a turbulent, but cloudless, atmosphere, came rains in Hartford, Conn., and Cambridge, Mass. The fall of an unknown gelatinous substance, resembling boiled starch or the coagulated white of an egg, was reported from towns in Virginia, New Jersey and New York. According to the *American Journal of Science*, "the fact that the supposed deposits were so uniformly described as gelatinous substance forms a presumption in favor of the supposition that they had the origin ascribed to them."

Far more important, however, is the fact that this greatest of all meteoric displays led to the discovery that meteor streams have an orbit around the sun like a planet. Back in 1799 Alexander von Humboldt, the famous naturalist, while witnessing an inferior meteoric shower in South America, had noticed that the paths of the meteors, when parts of one display, led back to one point of common origin, or one point from which all the fiery trails radiated. This was true regardless of their subsequent direction. His observation was confirmed by American astronomers in 1833.

The scientific hero of the occurrence was Prof. Denison Olmstead, of Yale University, who patiently collected competent observations from all parts of the country. He found, to his astonishment, that all the meteors of that awe-inspiring night seemed to have emanated from a point in the sky below the bend of the sickle in the constellation Leo. This "radiant point," as it was called, had remained fixed in the heavens, slowly moving west with the shifting constellation during the morning hours.

As a result, Prof. Olmstead determined that the meteors were revolving around the sun in a stream, and that this stream had struck the earth's atmosphere at the point of radiation. Since this point was under Leo, he named the stream the Leonids. By checking back on previous showers as recorded, he decided that the stream had an orbital period of thirty-three and a quarter years.

Despite the hopes of scientists, the appearances of the Leonids in 1866, 1899 and 1932 were all disappointing. Now they are looking forward to the year 1965. Perhaps, then, the Leonids will return in full splendor, and once again, as in 1833, enact their flaming drama on the vast stage of American skies.

THE END

WHAT SECRET POWER DID THIS MAN POSSESS?



Benjamin Franklin

(A Rosicrucian)

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The CLUB HOUSE

Where science fiction fan clubs get together.

Conducted by ROG PHILLIPS

IT'S BEGINNING to shape up like the CLUB HOUSE is going to be just that. Several new local clubs are starting up. I doubt if anyone knows just how many such stf clubs exist now, but there must be a good many.

Those of you who live in Eugene Oregon should drop into one of the meetings of the ESFS. They have only seven members so far, with Rosco E. Wright as president. The meetings are at 7:30 P.M. the second Thursday of each month, at 146 E. 12th Avenue in Eugene. That's a nice town. I was there during the summer before Pearl Harbor on the installation of the new unit of the electric power station. I wonder if the fire department has changed their system of putting out fires? At that time I was living in a place a block from a rustic building near the college campus—College Inn, I think. Someone in a booth in the Inn accidentally set fire to the cushion. The fire department was called rather than the waiter bringing a glass of water to put out the blaze.

Those Eugene fireman had a well fixed pattern for putting out fires. First of all they would chop a hole in the roof—evidently to give the blaze plenty of draft. They did that. It was quite a sight to see the hook and ladder wagon back up and shoot a ladder up while firemen with axes ran up to the roof and knocked in a big hole.

Next, since the smoke was coming from the open door of the Inn cafe, they connected up a couple of fire hose and really poured water through that door, until it was running back into the street.

With phase two well completed the program went into its more critical phase—a determined attempt to locate the fire itself. This was accomplished by stopping to listen to the wild eyed waiter who had been trying all the time to tell them.

But the damage done by that blaze was as nothing compared to the one in the dime store a couple of weeks previous to that. That blaze was started by someone accidentally tossing a lighted match into an open quart can of paint in the paint department in the basement of the store. The clerk hesitated between a choice of picking up the can and carrying it to the wash room and running water over it, and calling the fire department. The fire department was called.

While customers and employees were evacuating the store the firemen went to the roof and chopped a large hole. It took a little doing to chop a hole through the roof. By that time the whole store was filled with fumes from the burning paint can.

I didn't see the initial phases of this fire, so I don't know if they used phase two and poured water into the store. I do know, though, that they broke out their gas masks to use.

One fireman after another donned a mask and rushed into the smoking—er—inferno, only to stagger back out a few moments later nearly dead because the smoke masks were no good. One daring fireman, on regaining the sidewalk, said, "Well, I made it as far as the candy counter."

The fire lasted two days. The damage was complete. When I left Eugene they were about ready to start building a new dime store.

I never quite understood why the hole in the roof all the time. But that fire department sure was systematic.

Another new fan club starting up is the UNIVERSAL MUSKETEERS, with Ronald Friedman president, 1980 East 8th Street, Brooklyn 23, New York.

Another, the AMERICAN ROCKETRY ASSOCIATION, is at 621-3rd St. N.W., Washington, D.C.. From the letter Clyde Hanback sent me it is already a going concern. Here's the letter:

Dear Mr. Phillips:

I wish to extend my congrats on the way your Club House has carried on such good work in the field of science-fiction fandom. I hope that it shall continue to stay with us and to flourish immensely.

But now to get down to the real issue which I am writing about.

The American Rocketry Association, which was originally started as Rocket Research, Inc. is now in the Science-Fiction and Fantasy fan club class. We need many new members, in order to be able to prosper.

However, this is not exactly our main objective, except for paying members. We have, of course, quite a number of members, which is 325. The thing is, though that about 300 of these are Honorary members and do not have

to pay any membership fees.

In the near future we intend to get out a fanzine, about 40 pages long; each page 8-1—2x11 in size. For this purpose, we would like to have the various fan clubs and societies, send us something about their clubs, so that we may enter them in a department we intend to have, called Fan Club Activities. Another department, which we are not going to put in the first issue, will be called Unusual Experiences. They don't have to be weird or such goings-on, but something which happened to the person which was out of the ordinary path they led.

Some of our Honorary members have consented to contribute something for future issues, but not the first issue. All persons contributing something for the zine will receive a free copy of the zine in which his or her contribution appears. If the contributor is a subscriber, he shall receive an extension to subscription.

If anyone would care to contact me on either the magazine or the Association, I shall be only too happy to answer all questions about them.

Cordially,

CLYDE T. HANBACK

National Director

Next is the OUTLANDER SOCIETY. Where is it? I'll tell you how to get there. If you're not there already, go to Salt Lake City, Utah and strike out toward the southwest, skirting the southern end of the great salt lake. Take plenty of water, because there're hundreds of miles of desert to cross. Cut down to the southwest corner of Utah and over into the Nevada desert. If you head just right you will miss Death Valley and cross the Mojave Desert, which, though larger, at least has living things such as cacti and rattlesnakes. And somewhere in that desert you will encounter an outpost. Here guards will stop you and search your belongings on the pretext that you may be carrying fresh fruit—but don't be fooled. What they're really doing is giving you the once over to see if you have the hoof and mouth disease. That is one of the strict requirements of the OUTLANDER SOCIETY. You must not have the hoof and mouth disease—at least not have it bad.

If you get past the guards you are practically in. There's still fifty or sixty miles of desert, with here and there an oasis which can be easily seen because of the thick swarm of flies that clouds the atmosphere over each coffee hole. Then, for a few miles, you pass through reclaimed desert where oranges grow. And suddenly you are in Los Angeles. But still you haven't reached the hideout of the OUTLANDERS. You must still go many miles.

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The next leg of the journey is on the F car which you can catch at the Union Depot. You ride south for ten miles, then transfer to the Firestone bus going east. Ride that to the end of the line, to Southgate, home of the OUTLANDERS.

I'll let John Van Couvering tell you about the club. He says in his editorial page of THE OUTLANDER, "The Outlander Society was formed by a group of dissatisfied people who gyrated back and forth upon the coattails of the mighty LASFS, and who wanted some identity of their own. And so it was. Perhaps some of you know Len Moffat, he-of-the-meaningless-initials, and—or Rick Sneary, the Grand Old Fan of suburban LaFandom. These are the two leading luminaries, but are only out of the eight composing the feverish stampede that converges on some luckless member's shambles-to-be. In the Outlanders there are no officers dues constitution or bylaws. To join, a person must only be a fan and live in the outlying districts of the great metropolis of Los Angeles, San Fernando valley excluded, I guess.

"Stan Woolsten, convulsive glutton, and yours truly, coolly calculating ditto, undoubtedly would be members of the Buddhist or Yoga doctrines except for the inability of one to see his navel and of the other to think that far. And then there are Alan and Freddie Hershey, a reasonably Null-A nuclear physicist and his spouse, who make Blondie and Dagwood look like Thalmic misfits. A clear case of complementary egos, they are both fans and yet manage to live together. Con Pederson and Bill Elias, the southernmost members of our happy family, live in the wilds of Inglewood and nearby Hawthorne, and read s-f, but otherwise are utterly dissimilar. Pederson is an emaciated looking high school junior (I may be skinny myself, but I'm a SENIOR, egad!) whose skull may plainly be seen through the so called skin on his face, has a festered imagination which turns out in mass production style surrealist paintings and odd poems, and dabbles in advanced semantics. Elias, on the other hand, is florid, jocular, short, and will never see 25 again."

That's Van Couvering's introduction to the OUTLANDERS of Southgate. They are a perfect example of a completely informal local club which is held together by the common interest in stf and the friendship of all the members.

Rick Sneary is beyond question the current number one fan. Among other things he is president of FAPA (Fantasy Amateur Press Association). Con Pederson is beyond question the number one boy-genius of fandom. He is burning his brain out on Null-P (non-poetic) verse, and will probably wind up devoting his life to working the "Tower of Hanoi."

If you want some really enjoyable fan reading send a dime to John Van Couvering, 10358 S. Downey Ave., Downey, Cal., for THE OUTLANDER.

Another correspondence club is starting up. Edward Dickmon, Box 143, Library, Penna., asks me to announce the formation of the AMERICAN SCIENCE FICTION CORRESPONDENCE CLUB. He writes, "Don't be a wallflower in the stf world. Join us and get in on the fun. We even have a club zine now. If you want to join just get in touch with me. No fees and no limitations."

And Wm. C. Butts, 2058 E. Atlantic St., Phila. 34, Penna., writes that he is going into the amateur publishing game in a new way. Instead of a fanzine he plans on publishing booklets.

He writes, "I am going to publish a series of booklets with stories by amateurs. These stories must run around 5000 words or more, and be strictly amateur by amateurs. For every story sent me and I accept for publishing I will give a set of booklets. These sets will run in a series of six to a set. The covers will also be by amateurs. Covers will be photo offset, while the stories will be printed. This project is by amateurs for amateurs using amateur material. But being amateurs we have no way of contacting the whole of fandom without appealing to you through the CLUB HOUSE. We have hopes of getting our first series of booklets ready in time for the Cincon."

S/Sgt F.D. Brownly of 3415 Fd. Ser. Sqdn., Lowry Field, Colo., writes that he would like the correct address of John Chrisman, publisher of Wierd Unsolved Mysteries, reviewed in the CLUB HOUSE in the March issue. He says his letter was returned unclaimed.

Perhaps Mr. Chrisman would write him. The thing for you fan editors to do if the address that appears in the CLUB HOUSE is incorrect is to put in a change of address from the incorrect address to your correct one right away. Typesetting errors can occur. Also I can make a mistake in copying the address. Also, quite often, addresses given in fanzines are almost illegible. So far, though, this is the first case brought to my attention of an incorrect address.

Last but not least in the letters for this issue is one from John O. Buzzard of the Acme Collection Agency saying, "Dear Mr. Phillips: Unless you make some sort of payment on the past due account you owe the Jones Artificial Limb Co. for your wooden leg we will be forced to repossess it."

That must have gotten in the wrong letter pile. Ha ha. Oh, well. If they carry out their threat, even though I will be down to my last leg, I will still have one leg to stand on. And that brings us to the fanzines themselves.

THE GORGON:—20 cents, 7/\$1.00; Stanley Mullen, 4936 Grove St., Denver 11, Colorado; vol. 2, no. 3. Circulation 600! The issue came out late. Star has quite a job, putting out GORGON, keeping up on his professional story writing which appears in various prozines from time to time, and his

book selling business. But even though GORGON appeared late, it kept up its usual quality, easily outdistancing every other fanzine. Fifty-six pages.

SPACEWARP combined with UNIVERSE—Art Rapp, 2120 Bay St., Saginaw, Mich.; 15 cents, 75 cents/yr.. The Great STF broadcast begins again, with chapter one of an infinite number, authored by Art Rapp himself, featuring John Upperberth. In the letter column Wilkie Conner complains because Art's idea of soaking a typewriter ribbon in fuel oil to renew it "plumb ruind his ribbon."

Spacewarp will continue to have very good stories and articles for a long time to come. It has quite a backlog of material, Art announced.

FANTASY TIMES:—10 cents, twice a month; James V. Taurasi, 137-03 Thirty-second Ave., Flushing, N.Y.. Three issues on hand this time for review. F-T is really a must for the average actfan, because it is the only fanzine that is devoted to up to the minute news of goings on in all fields of interest to fans. In addition, Jimmy has been publishing it a long time, and has probably the only fanzine that has come out regular since as far back as 1937. F-T not only gives out with what is coming next in all the prozines before they hit the stands, but each year has a feature, "1948 in Science Fiction," (or whatever the year before happened to be), written by that most competent of reviewers, Dr. Thomas S. Gardner. In the three issues on hand he is reviewing Planet, Startling, and Thrilling Wonder.

Another regular feature is reports on doings of fan clubs. If you are the secretary of a fan club send in a report of your meetings to F-T so they can print it.

In addition is information on current books in the stf field, and many interesting news items, including reports on the appearance of a science fiction story in any magazine outside the all-stf prozines.

No place else in fandom can you get complete—and I do mean complete—coverage of current stf events!

FANTASY REVIEW:—25 cents, \$1.50/yr.; 115 Wanstead Park Road, Ilford, Essex; is a professional printing job, bi-monthly, with many worthwhile articles in it, vying with Fantasy-Times in coverage, but stressing more the international stf picture.

In the Feb.—March issue is an interesting article by Arthur C. Clarke defending us tools of Capitalist Wall Street who write science fiction just to propagandize you into turning away from communism. If you remember, last issue of F-R contained a report of a Russian "attack" on stf authors.

For a dollar and a half a year you can keep up on things in England. That's a real bargain.

One thing that just occurred to me—every fan club should have subscriptions to several of the better and more comprehen-

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sive fanzines such as F-T and F-R, and keep them in their library. Of course the well established fan clubs already do that, but some of the new clubs might not have thought of that. Payment of the subscriptions to these fanzines would of course come out of dues from members.

QUANTA:—10 cents, 3/25 cents; W.S.F.A., P.O. Box 7595, Benj. Franklin Station, Washington 4, D.C.; official organ of the **WASHINGTON SCIENCE FICTION ASSOCIATION.** I feel a personal interest in this group because it was through the **CLUB HOUSE** that their president, Louis E. Garner Jr., found them, and they got started. Meetings are the 1st, 3rd, and 5th Sunday of each month at 8:00 P.M., Room 1030, Transportation Bldg, 17th and H Sts, N.W., in Washington. (Seems to me maybe they and the **AMERICAN ROCKETRY ASSOCIATION** of the same city ought to get together!)

There are nineteen pages in this issue. One of the articles is "History of WSFA" by Franklin Kerhof, who, with Russell Swanson and Bob Briggs, started the club after meeting for the first time at the Philcon, two years ago.

Most humorous article by an unknown author is "Splitting the Infinitive," which begins, "One of the most closely guarded secrets of the era can now be told, how an anonymous group of Grammarians, working in secrecy in a remote section of the country, have finally succeeded in splitting the infinitive. The so-called Bronx Project got under way in 1943 with the installation of a huge infinitron specially constructed for the job by Cal. Tech. philologists..." Another is a satirical fantasy titled "The Barber Mystery by Richard S. Barber."

Still another humorous bit is "The Case of John Smith." It goes, "John Smith, genius, has invented a plane that will go around the world faster than it rotates, thus enabling him to return before he starts. The big day comes and John heads for the airport. He gets in the plane, but, before taking off, decides to look around and see if he landed safely. He sees nothing, so he reasons that the plane must have crashed somewhere and he was killed. He, of course, doesn't want to be killed, so he doesn't take off. Naturally he didn't land because he didn't take off in the first place!"

An exceptionally fine fanzine. **ROCKET NEWS LETTER:**—Journal of the Chicago Rocket Society; 15 cents, \$1.50/yr.; Vincent Story, 5747 University Ave., Chicago, Ill. Meetings of the Society are held once a month at Roosevelt College. Of great interest and importance to all rocketeers is the new, "Collected Technical Reports of the CRS, 1946-1948," which is now published and is for sale at one dollar. Only two hundred copies were run off, so if you want one you'd better send to Mr. Story for it at once. It contains probably every bit of technical information about rocket development and space flight pro-

blems there is in existence.

The January and February numbers are on hand for review. In the January issue is a very comprehensive article discussing the problem of meteor hits in rocket space flight, written by Wayne Proell. It comes up with the startling conclusion that a major meteor hit can be expected in space about once every 400 days. Would you drive a car if you knew that within four hundred days you would have a serious accident—for sure?

In the February issue is another comprehensive article by Dr. N. J. Bowman, this time dealing with nutritional and other physiological problems on extended space flights. This discussion is promised to be concluded in the March issue.

ALIEN CULTURE:—Jim Leary, 4718 Forest Hills Road, Rockford, Illinois; 15 cents, 4/50 cents. Vol. 1 no. 2. An excellent general fanzine, with nice art work, several good poems, and interesting articles. R. L. Farnsworth unloads a gripe about the editors of the prozines writing at least a third of their stories under various pen names. This would be interesting if true. However, the editors I know personally have little time for writing of their own. The publishers, of course, are out to make money, and they do it by keeping the staffs small enough so that the luckless editors have to occasionally work at putting a magazine together, rather than letting their secretaries do it while they write stories.

There is also a perfect deadpan "scientific" article by Evan H. Appelman on a device called a turboencabulator, which in its present "form" consists of eight ounces of Radium, a hundred foot turbine, and a device for getting a hundred million volts from the Earth's gravito-magnetic field.

LUNA:—20 cents, Bob Johnson, 811 Ninth St., Greeley, Colorado. First issue, catering to the under-twenty-ones. A nice joint enterprise by five fans, all teen agers.

This first issue, though showing signs of too many cooks getting the pages mixed up, is just the kind of an entertaining and informal fanzine that you teen-agers will enjoy. And it's for boys AND girls. The LUNA staff has Norma Nesbitt and Sandra Osterland. This issue Sandra has a story, "Before the Fight," while Norma is in charge of the letter department.

SPACESHIP:—10 cents; Saul Diskin, 621 Crown St., Brooklyn 13, N.Y., and Robert Silverberg, 760 Montgomery St. in the same neighborhood of Brooklyn. A letter accompaniment this smallzine. It says, "Dear Rog, We are sending you a copy of our new Zine, the Spaceship. We hope you'll give it a 'Clubhouse' review. Our attempts are very crude, because Saul is fourteen and Robert is thirteen. Furthermore, it is our first venture into the stf field. Would you please tell us in your column if 'Spaceship' is a basis for a FAPA application? We are anxious to join and so gain a wider public."

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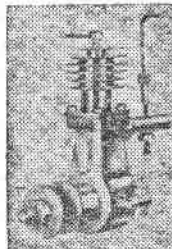
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or rather, will be after you bring out a couple more issues. There is a waiting list at FAPA, though. You see, membership is restricted to sixty-five because each member must contribute at least eight full pages of material each year, and experience has shown them that more members make too much material.

The stories in this issue of **SPACESHIP** are definitely well written, and all by Robert and Saul. I'm sure you other teenagers will be glad to welcome them and help them round out their fanzine with contributions of your own, for which they will give free copies.

And why don't you two boys drop over to 1980 East 8th St. in Brooklyn and get in on the **UNIVERSAL MUSKETEERS**, that new Brooklyn fan club that is starting up?

INSULT:—Well, whatta ya know! Another one from Brooklyn! Editor, Robert Stewart, 1004 Gates Ave. in Brooklyn. On reg-length paper with no price listed, but Bob enclosed a note with it asking me to mention the problem of return postage. It's a nice zine with lots of cartoon illustrations of its contents—something quite unusual. You will enjoy it, and maybe some of you faneds whose circulation has been dropping off might get some ideas from it on how to make your material more interesting by illustrating it.

It seems to me you Brooklynites, Bob Stewart, Saul Diskin, Robert Silverberg, and Ronald Friedman, could get together and not only get the **UNIVERSAL MUSKETEERS** off to a flying start, but also combine your fanzines into one that would top the field. Why don't you?

FLUB:—March issue, 5 cents, 50 cents/yr., Wallace Shore and Phil Waggoner, Box 1565, Billings, Montana. An excellent cover illustration by William Rotsler. It says on the index page that it is a "poetry number," but poems occupy only half the contents. Best feature is a fantasy based on the misinformation that the atom bomb is now no larger than a golf ball. A poem quite exceptional in that it is readable and makes sense and is entertaining is "Ode For the Love of a Louse," by Bob Norton. Its first stanza is:

There met two lovers—quadrupeds—
Upon a magic night so nice;
And on the tops of caressing heads
There met two enterprising lice.

THE ALEMBIC:—Editorial address:—"At the sign of the Black Cat," 26 Woodland Road, Thornton Heath, Surrey, England. "An occasional miscellany for fantasy fans, issued irregularly. Issued free to those fans I like—those I don't like can't even buy it! So there!" So says Norman Ashfield, its editor. This summer issue contains "Century's End" by Cedric Walker, a stf story about space travel in the year 2,000. A "Brief History of Fandom" is begun, by Wollheim. "Ghost Party," by Mike Tealby

winds up the largest issue of ALEMBIC yet.

VITON:—10 cents, Rosco Wright, 146 E. 12th Ave., Eugene, Oregon. Well, can you feature that! I start off this CH with the ESFS and wind it up with their clubzine! It says on the title page that "This is a limited edition which is circulated in England, Australia, Canada, and the U.S.A. (and rather thinly at that)."

One story, "Cancellation", by A. Fibber, who lived up to his pseudonym. Norman Hartman authors a very intelligible article on the neutrino and how its existence was proven. Fantasy Fireside is the editor's page in which he takes it easy in a very entertaining manner. Altogether a good zine, and the Eugene Science Fantasy Society shows promise of becoming one of the better clubs. It should. Eugene has probably the best and mildest climate in the country, and is the purtiest gosh darned city I ever saw. Only thing wrong with it is that nobody there is in a hurry, which makes a guy like me who drives his car in a hurry blow a fuse when two drivers meet in the middle of a narrow street for a ten minute conversation through their car windows and ignore honking of cars piled up behind them.

* * *

That winds up the issue. Next month maybe we'll present an article all about the Cinvention or Cincon by one of its guiding officers. I just this minute received a semi-promise of such an article in the mail. The Cincon, as most of you know, is this year's national stf fan convention, to be held in Cincinnati.

—ROG PHILLIPS

THE END

BOOK REVIEW

LIFE EVERLASTING, and Other Tales of Science, Fantasy and Horror by David H. Keller, M.D. 382 pages, plus a 12 page bibliographical supplement. Published by The Avalon Company, P. O. Box 8052, Clinton Hill Station, Newark 8, N. J. \$3.50 a copy.

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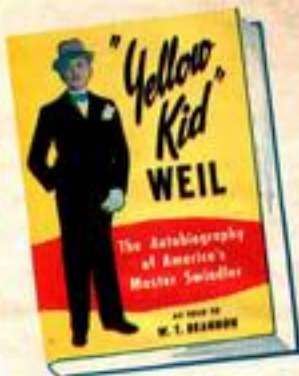
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