

STRANGE ADVENTURES



**METAPHYSIC
FICTION.**

**QUEER
SUPERNATURAL**

"Two weeks ago I bought a 'Joan the Wad' and to-day I have won £232 10s. Please send two more."
—B.C., Tredegar, S. Wales.

Extract From "Everybody's Fortune Book," 1931.



JOAN THE WAD

is the

LUCKY CORNISH PISKEY

who

SEES ALL, HEARS ALL, DOES ALL

JOAN THE WAD is Queen of the Lucky Cornish Piskeys. Thousands of persons all over the world claim that Joan the Wad has brought them Wonderful Luck in the way of Health, Wealth and Happiness.

HISTORY FREE FOR A STAMP

If you will send me your name and address and a 6d. stamp and a stamped addressed envelope for reply, I will send you a History of the Cornish Piskey Folk, and the marvellous miracles they accomplish. JOAN THE WAD is the Queen of the Lucky Cornish Piskeys, and with whom good luck and good health always attend.

AS HEALER

One lady writes: "My sister suffered very badly for years, but since I gave her a Joan the Wad to keep near her she is much easier. Do you think this is due to Joan or the Water from the Lucky well?"

AS LUCK BRINGER

Another writes: "Since the War my wife and I have been dogged by persistent ill-luck, and we seemed to be sinking lower and lower. One day someone sent us a Joan the Wad. We have never found out who it was, but, coincidence if you like, within a week I got a much better job and my wife had some money left her. Since then we have never looked back and, needless to say, swear by 'Queen Joan'."

AS MATCHMAKER

A young girl wrote and informed me that she had scores of boy friends, but it was not until she had visited Cornwall and taken Joan back with her that she met the boy of her dreams, and as they got better acquainted she discovered he also has "Joan the Wad."

AS PRIZEWINNER

A young man wrote us only last week: "For two years I entered competitions without luck, but since getting Joan the Wad I have frequently been successful, although I have not won a big prize, but I know that —, who won £2,000 in a competition, has one, because I gave it him. When he won his £2,000 he gave me £100 for myself, so you see I have cause to bless 'Queen Joan'."

AS SPECULATOR

A man writes: "I had some shares that for several years I couldn't give away. They were 1/- shares, and all of a sudden they went up in the market to 7/9. I happened to be staring at Joan the Wad. Pure imagination, you may say, but I thought I saw her wink approvingly. I sold out, reinvested the money at greater profit and have prospered ever since."

*All you have to do is to send a 6d. stamp and a stamped
addressed envelope for the history to:*

102, JOAN'S COTTAGE, LANIVET, BODMIN

STRANGE ADVENTURES

"THE GREEN DIMENSION"

By

N. WESLEY FIRTH

HAMILTON & CO. (STAFFORD) LTD.
LONDON

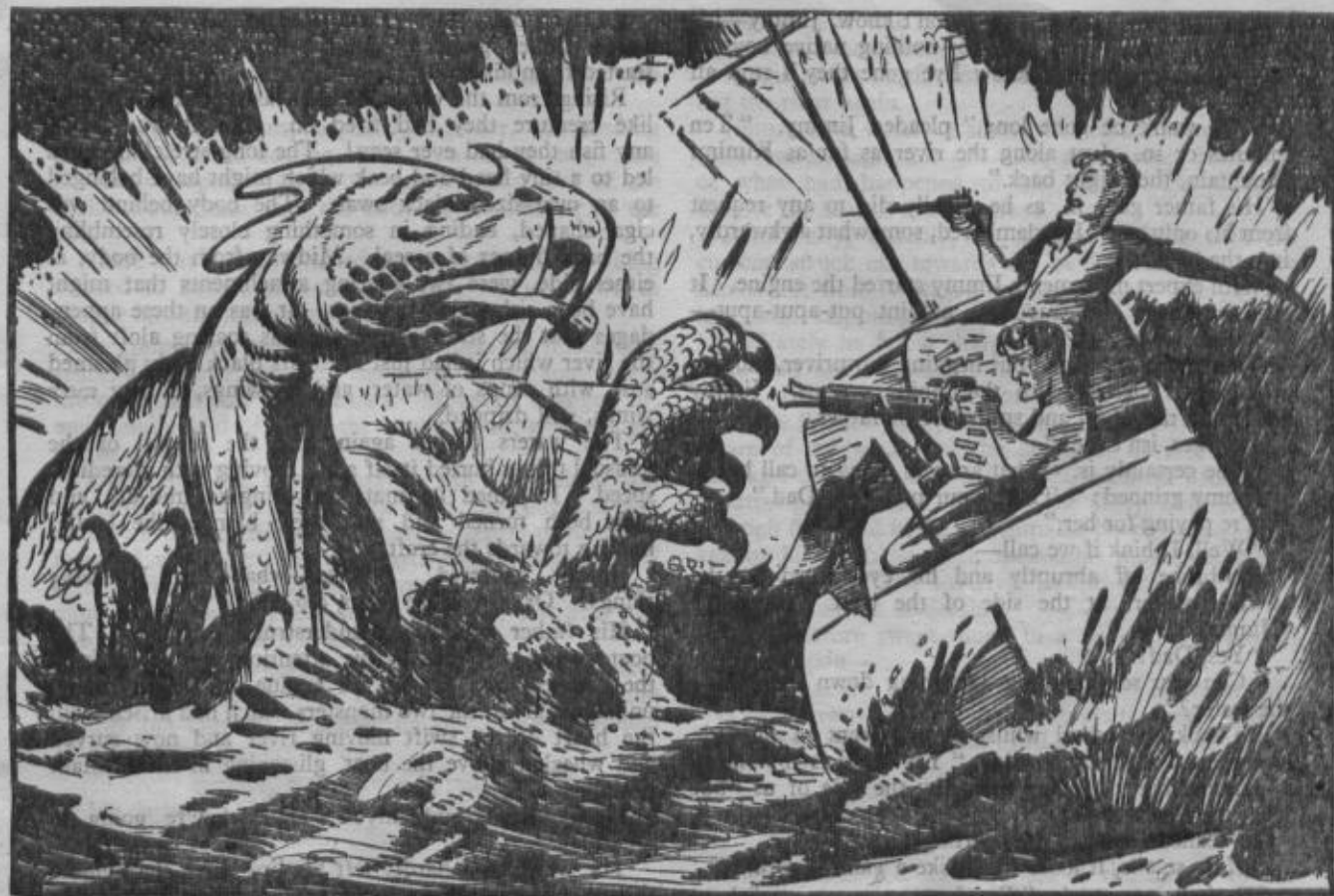
STRANGE ADVENTURES

*All characters in this book are fictitious.
If the names of actual persons appear it is
a matter of coincidence.*



Benson was clever—a little too clever. For in the end he played directly into the grim hands of the winged men of the green world. And Benson never came back! A thrilling, often amusing story of strange adventures in a world beyond the knowledge of man's mind.

HAMILTON & CO. (STANDARD) LTD.
LONDON



THE GREEN DIMENSION

by

N. WESLEY FIRTH

CHAPTER I

THE BLANKET BIRDS

Taylor pointed proudly to the neat, white speedboat moored at the side of the river.

"There it is, Dad," he told the white-haired, sun-tanned old man standing beside him. "Just the thing for us. With that we can get from the plantation to the mouth of the river in *three* hours flat—and that piece of artillery mounted on it may come in useful at times."

"So might the radio," agreed his father. "Yes, it's a fine craft, Jimmy. Where did you get it?"

Jimmy grinned: "A sale of ex-Navy equipment—went dirt cheap, too."

The old man turned and surveyed the neat rows of trees at the back of him. He said: "Anyway, it's worth the expense. It's high time we had some better mode of transport than the old paddle steamer which usually plies the river."

Jimmy hopped into the boat and said: "How about coming for a spin right now?"

The old man hesitated: "I don't know, Jimmy—it's the men. Those lazy good-for-nothing native boys of mine—the second they know I've gone they'll stop all work..."

"We won't be gone long," pleaded Jimmy. "Ten minutes or so. Just along the river as far as Kimimi Mountain, then right back."

His father gave in, as he usually did to any request from his only son. He clambered, somewhat awkwardly, into the boat.

With expert movements Jimmy started the engine. It ran noiselessly and smoothly, a faint put-put-put—"Here we go—"

The trim craft swung out heading downriver, moving swiftly and cleanly with the rapid currents. Jimmy relaxed at the wheel and smiled at his father.

"Corker, isn't she?"

"She certainly is. What are you going to call her?"

Jimmy grinned: "That's your privilege, Dad." "You're paying for her."

"Well, I think if we call—"

He broke off abruptly and his eyes fixed on the swirling waters at the side of the boat. He said: "Jimmy..."

"Yes, Dad?"

"Can you see anything—anything down there in—the water?"

He took the wheel whilst Jimmy went to the side and peered down. He said: "Yes—there's *something*—damned big. Moving along by the side of us—but what the devil—"

He leaned closer to the swirling waters.

"Holy smoke, it looks like—like a *giant starfish*!"

His father grunted: "But I never saw a starfish so large, and I'll bet you didn't either."

"There's two of them," Jimmy went on, staring. "They're black—"

He drew his revolver from his belt, said: "I'll give them a round or two—I don't like the look of them."

"I wouldn't, Jimmy—"

"Why not? They can't harm us. They're marine... here goes, Dad... hold 'er steady."

The revolver cracked out suddenly, twice, and there was a startled flurrying of the waters. Jimmy slid the revolver back in his belt.

"Whatever they were that did it," he smiled. "They've gone."

His father said: "Good. I don't like anything I can't explain—and I certainly couldn't explain those; want the wheel back, Jimmy?"

"No, Dad. Stick to it a while. Put 'er through 'er paces."

He stood looking backwards whilst his father, as delighted as a kid with a new toy, sent the craft cutting through the water smoothly. They were almost at Kimimi Mountain when Jimmy jumped several inches from the boards and gasped:

"I don't *believe* it! Dad—look at *this*!"

His father glanced round. And his eyes almost started from his skull.

Rising from the water behind was the large, starfish-like creature they had fired on. But it was unlike any fish they had ever seen! The long stretching neck led to a tiny head and beak which might have belonged to an over-sized black swan. The body behind was cigar-shaped, ending in something closely resembling the back flipper of a seal. Midway from the body, at either side, were two soaring attachments that might have been either fins or wings. It was on these appendages that the strange creature was soaring aloft from the river which it had just left. Its black body gleamed still, with drops of water, and its wings, if they *were* wings, still dripped.

The waters parted again, and the second of the unusual things hurled itself aloft, moving with incredible speed. It joined its mate, hovering in mid-air, and then both turned and sent their blanket-like bodies hurling towards the craft.

Jimmy stuttered: "What—what—am I *seeing* things? Or do you see them, *too*, Dad?"

His father was too thunderstruck to reply. The boat swung sideways as his attention was taken from the course—then he cut the engine and stood gazing unbelievably at the two monsters which had arisen from the heart of the swift moving river and now curved and wheeled above the boat, glistening in the brilliant sunlight.

Jimmy cried, suddenly: "Dad—they're going to *attack*!"

The words had hardly left his lips when the blanket things swooped down upon them, their long necks outstretched, their tiny, pointed beaks, red-coloured, glittering like bloody daggers.

Mr. Taylor gave a sharp cry as one of the beaks furrowed across his forehead. Jimmy struck upwards with a boathook, and caught the second thing across its flat head. The creature uttered a hoarse croak, and swerved away into the air.

Both soared aloft again, gaining height. Jimmy gasped: "Hold the boat steady, Dad. I didn't know we were going to find that piece of artillery of ours useful *so soon*."

He manned the loaded gun, swivelled it, sighted it, and sent a stream of tracer bullets racing towards the two creatures. They obviously possessed a degree of intelligence; for as the weapon spat, they veered sharply to the right, twisted back on their path, and thus dodged the second burst as Jimmy followed them with the gun.

The flying things swooped again; the two men ducked as they struck, avoiding the sharp beaks. One of the birds carried the fluttering Union Jack from the stern of the boat as it curved off.

Then they were aloft again, Jimmy was manning the gun, and tracers were pouring out once more.

"What the devil are they?" stammered Mr. Taylor, his hands clammy on the wheel. "They're as vicious as our ordinary swans; and the size and shape of them—what—?"

Jimmy, teeth clamped grimly together, was sending a stream of death dealing shells towards the two. And as they swooped down to the attack again, one of the shells drove home into the body of the smaller of the two.

There was a high-pitched scream of pain, the thing seemed to halt in mid-air, and then hurtled down to plunge into the river almost beside the boat.

Its companion seemed struck helpless by this occurrence. It dived, entering the water at the spot where the other had just disappeared. Moments dragged by, and Jimmy said: "Start the engine, Dad, and let's get out of this—"

The words had hardly left his lips when there was a mighty upheaval beneath the craft, the boards sloped under them, and they were thrown violently towards the front of the boat. As they struggled to regain their feet, the boat tilted sideways, wobbled for a moment as more force was applied—then capsized, throwing the two men into the swift river.

The very suddenness of it threw them off guard. Jimmy found himself in the murky depths, fighting against the current, momentarily blinded and winded by the sudden immersion.

He broke surface, stared round frantically for traces of his father. The boat was drifting, some distance away now, downstream. Mr. Taylor was treading water about fifteen feet away.

"Dad—the damned thing got *under* us—they must be strong as oxen. Are you all right?"

"I'm all right—let's get out of this, Jimmy—"

His words changed into a shout of agony suddenly; his face twisted in a spasm of pain, and he went beneath the surface.

Jimmy gave a cry of alarm, struck out strongly towards the spot. Below the river there was a mighty threshing; without pausing to think, Jimmy dived—

The threshing had ceased suddenly. In the thick waters he failed to see anything. All was still, except for the current which was bearing him away from the spot.

He broke to the top again, panting for air—and saw that just above him the surface of the river was dyed a dull red, a red which was even now carried forward to encircle him, and stain his shirt with watery blood.

His hands clenched by his sides—now there was no sign of the creatures.

His eyes fixed upon a black carcass some distance upstream, which was being carried rapidly towards him. It was floating, half in, half out of the water. It passed almost beside him, and he recognised it as being the body of the smaller of the two things—apparently dead.

A jagged hole was seeping some black liquid from its back, where the tracer had torn in.

It was swept on downstream; now there was nothing but the river again.

Jimmy trod water—waited—but of the second thing there was no sign, nor was there any further indication of what had happened to his father. He shivered despite the heat of the afternoon.

Reluctantly, dazedly, he stopped drifting with the current, struck out towards the bank. He was a mere fifteen feet from it when something, below water, struck him with crippling force, numbing his legs. Almost immediately he felt a sharp, searing pain, as if a long knife had been jammed into his stomach, and twisted there. He gasped, sank below the surface.

Water flooded his eyes, ears and nose. Dimly he was aware of the second of the creatures darting towards him again. Then, despite his upraised hand with which he attempted to save his eyes, the sharp beak sheered through flesh and bone, and impaled his protecting hand against his forehead. He opened his mouth to scream with the agony, and the river rushed into his lungs, a cold, premonition of death.

The creature swept round in a wide circle—flashed forward again—

This time the beak dug savagely into his right eye; was withdrawn—his left—and then his forehead, smashing through the bone of his skull as if it had been tissue paper.

The men at the trading post at the mouth of the river were puzzled. Puzzled by several things which had happened that afternoon. There was the neat craft which they had salvaged as it drifted by to sea. Now it was lying on the sandbank, hauled to safety.

Merton, the boss, grunted: "Jimmy Taylor bought it. He was going to use it to run to and from the plantation. Got it dirt cheap at a navy equipment sale."

"Then how come it's drifting along here? *Upside down*? Unless there's been an accident."

"An' it'd take some accident to upset a boat like this. The river ain't so bad. I can't figure it out, what's happened."

One of the other men pointed towards the slimy skinned, black creature, which they had also dragged on to the bank.

"Seems plain enough to me. That thing, an' I never seen anything sim'lar in all my life in these parts, attacked the craft—you can see Jimmy had to turn his artillery on it. Well, in the struggle, the boat got capsized. Jimmy had to swim for it. Mark my words, 'fore long he'll be down here to claim his boat."

Merton pointed to the river, excitedly: "There's somethin' else—*what*—drag it in, boys—get them boathooks out!"

They dragged it in; they laid it on the bank.
"Hell!" said Merton, in awe, "the face is sure mussed up, but—I think this is *old Taylor*, boys!"

It was *old Taylor*. And with the realisation that things were far more serious than they had expected, the men ran out a small boat, and started upriver, their eyes searching diligently.

They didn't find Jimmy. Jimmy was waterlogged, was lying at the bottom of the river in the deeper, calmer, water.

What they did see was an immense black shadow hovering over the cliff. When they looked up to see what had cast it, they could not credit their senses.

"It ain't! It can't be! There ain't no such thing!" Merton panted.

"Tell me you can *all* see it!" pleaded one of the others. "Or else I'm never touching that fire water again!"

Merton said: "But by the look of that one we dragged out of the river, they was *fishes*!"

"Now it seems they're *birds*!" grunted another.

They could only stare helplessly after the fast vanishing creature, until it was a mere speck in the late afternoon sky.

The pilot of the airliner yawned, strained his eyes to see if he could locate the shoreline ahead, through the golden haze of the setting sun.

His co-pilot remarked: "Soon be there *now*, Trent."

"Yep. Thank the Lord. There's times when I wish I'd stuck to being a plumber like my old man," said Trent. "Not that I don't *like* flying—what I dislike is flying to schedule."

"What you doin' to-night?"

"Date. Ivy Charters—hostess on the other run."

"You're a lucky guy. She won't give me a tumble."

Trent stiffened, peered harder. He said: "Hey—hey, can you see what I see? What is it?"

The co leaned right forward to glare from the perspex screen, shading his eyes with his hand.

"Looks like a kite, maybe—" he ventured.

"Kite nothing. How would a kite be out over the ocean? Isn't no ship underneath it, is there?"

The co said: "We'll soon see—it gets bigger—it's heading right this way."

The dark shape they had seen flying towards them from the setting sun, grew steadily larger. Trent yelled: "Well, scratch my head! What is that, man?"

The co was too busy scratching his own head to answer. The flying thing grew darker, larger—the co yapped suddenly:

"*T-y-i!* It's heading straight for the ship! Pull up—pull up, Trent—" His voice tailed away as the heavy body of the flying creature smashed violently into the

nose of the plane. Then the air liner responded to the firm hand at its controls and banked steeply.

Trent mopped his brow: "Good Lord: what the devil is it, Tommy?"

"I declare I never saw a thing like it," Tommy said, his Southern drawl coming out strong in moments of crisis.

Trent said: "Take a swivel round—has it *gone*?"

Tommy obeyed; said: "No, it ain't. Man, it's still behind theyah."

"Following?"

"Yep. Looks like it's plenty mad, too—that flipper-like thing at its stern is beatin' like hell. Heck! You all better cram on some speed, or that all chicken'll be causin' delays around here."

Trent nodded, and the plane flashed silver as it cut forward towards the coastline, which was now visible.

Tommy said: "Is that the most the ship'll give?"

"That's the tops."

"It ain't enough, man. Its gainin'—"

Trent gritted his teeth and tried to coax more from the plane. The engines throbbed and roared, props whirled.

Tommy yelled: "*Holy Cow!* Now it's attackin' one of the *props*—I guess it thinks that's alive 'cause it's movin'!"

The flying creature plunged viciously into the port propeller. There was a savage screaming, a slashing of alien flesh, and the body of the flying thing plummeted to the sea. With the port engine stopped, the liner limped onwards—

CHAPTER II

REALLY BIG GAME!

"Whew! It's *hot*!" breathed Alan Clayton, wiping the perspiration from his brow.

"I *told* you not to put your jacket on, darling," smiled Anna, his wife. She herself looked cool and sweet in white drill skirt and open-necked blouse.

Alan struggled from his hunting jacket, said: "Bawala—"

"Yas, sah?" Their number one boy stepped forward obediently.

"You carry coat, savvy."

"Yas sah," said Bawala, with a smile. The way white men muffled themselves up never failed to amuse him. For himself, a loincloth was ample, even too much, in the hot tropical climate about the equatorial belt.

Anna said: "Well, just what do you propose to do now, my sweet? We've followed elephant spoor which you insisted was recent, but which Bawala told you was at least *four* days old, for *three* hours—we're no nearer

elephants than we ever were. So what happens? Do we listen to Bawala in future and do as he advises, or shall we allow you to guide us and buy a few nets and catch some of these *butterflies*? Which, darling, is really all we will catch if you insist on *knowing best*!"

Alan glared at her; but he had to admit she was right. The black boy had been accurate in his diagnosis of the time that spoor had been there. He, Alan, had been wrong.

"I know you're simply dying to be a great white hunter, my precious pet," Anna went on. "I know you want to be called 'Alan of the Seeing Eye,' or the native equivalent, or something similar—but hadn't you better *learn* a little first? Or they may start calling you 'Alan who Trails that which isn't there.'"

Alan grunted: "All right, don't rub it in—*darling*." Anna smiled irritatingly, and Alan grunted: "Believe me, my love, there are times when I could cheerfully strangle you."

She leaned over and kissed him lightly on the cheek. "Sorry darling. Didn't mean to make you cross. Of course, if you *really* WANT to hunt—*butterflies*—"

Alan snorted: "You win. Bawala—"

"Yes Sah?"

"We go all time camp. Make 'nother start tomorrow. You be guide then. Savvy?"

"Savvy, sah. Me guide you fine. Know all trails—"

The three turned round, Bawala carrying the heavy elephant guns, leading them back to the camp. They came to an intersection, where two rough trails ran off in different directions.

Bawala took the right-hand one. Alan halted. He said: "Wait a minute—"

Anna sighed and stopped. Bawala looked back questioningly.

"Bas?"—

"Are you certain that's the *right* trail?" asked Alan.

"My God!" complained Anna. "Here we go again!"

"But I remember distinctly," Alan grunted. "We came up the left-hand trail!"

"No sah. This be um feller trail. Me *know*."

"You know, do you? I understood this was fresh territory to you?"

Bawala admitted that: "Me not be here before—but me *know*."

"You see?" demanded Alan, triumphantly. "What did I tell you?"

Anna sighed: "Darling, you are the most pig-headed, obstinate, pugnacious know-all I ever met. I sometimes wonder what on earth it was that attracted me to you. It couldn't have been the size of your wallet—you had hardly any money—*then*. But you do try me at times, sweetheart—"

"But he *admits* he doesn't know the territory—" said

Alan, in justification. "Whereas I remember this bit *perfectly*—"

"These natives don't *need* to know," she told him. "They have a sixth sense—they're like homing pigeons—"

Alan frowned obstinately. "Oh? And haven't I a sense of direction? How about that time we got lost on the Yorkshire Moors? What did I do *then*?"

"Almost led me into a bog!" snapped Anna, "and if it hadn't been for that rustic happening along just in time we'd *both* have been sucked down!"

"Nonsense. I was going the right way—the yokel only confirmed my judgment."

"If you search your mind really deeply you'll find that's not strictly true, Alan," said Anna.

Alan snorted: "Well, anyhow, I'm taking the trail I *know* is the *right* one. That's the *left* one."

"Eh?" said Anna, puzzled: "Which trail *are* you taking exactly?"

"The *right* trail—"

"Good. Why the argument? That's the trail Bawala says."

"No. I'm taking the *left* trail!"

"But you just said the *right*—"

"The left is, the right," grunted Alan, annoyed. "Don't be deliberately stupid, darling. I'm taking the right trail which is the *left* trail."

Anna stared hard at Bawala. Alan said: "What're you staring at?"

"I was just wondering if black hadn't suddenly turned white. Let me get this straight—you're taking the *right* trail, isn't that it?"

"Yes—the left one."

Anna clutched despairingly at her dark hair. "Please Alan, stop the cross talk act. You're taking the *left* trail? Is that right now?"

"That's left—that's right."

Anna groaned: "No more—just start walking and we're with you. I couldn't stand any more argument."

Bawala said: "If you be taking left trail that be wrong."

"I think I'm in charge of this party, Bawala," stated Alan, loftily, and Anna said: "Yes, he's in charge, Bawala. If he wants to pay for a guide and then guide himself, why stop him? We'll follow *his* trail—who knows, we may find some more elephant!"

Alan gave her a haughty stare, and struck off left without further conversation. Anna, feeling like one half of Abbot and Costello—the sane half—followed him. Bawala, shaking his woolly black head, followed in the rear.

As they progressed the jungle thickened about them, until they were forcing a way through verdant undergrowth, and having to keep a sharp eye open for snakes, wild animals, etc.

Alan came to a halt in a small clearing. It was drawing on towards sunset. The sunset came with startling rapidity when it did come. They all knew that. They all knew they weren't going to be in an enviable position here, in the jungle night.

Alan glanced about. He said: "Well, here we are!"

"Yes," agreed Anna. "Here we are. But *where*?"

Alan tugged at his lower lip, looking like a petulant child. His brow knitted in thought. He said: "Well—"

Bawala grunted: "Bas take wrong trail."

Alan snorted: "How could I concentrate with the pair of you yapping at me like you were? Anyway, I'm not *supposed* to be the guide around here. What do I pay you for, Bawala?"

Anna said: "No doubt he's wondering that himself. Now don't try and shift the blame, darling. You insisted on playing big white guide, heap great explorer. Just exactly where have you landed us?"

Alan was unable to say. He turned to Bawala. When he spoke he sounded considerably chastened. He said: "Bawala, I think we'd better go back to the camp."

Bawala maintained a serious face. He said: "Me rather trust um big white bas. Him know way *best*."

Anna almost exploded with merriment. Alan said: "Er—yes, of course. Hem—but—ah—"

Bawala said: "Bas, me not certain if can get back to camp now. Soon it be dark—if sun set before we find camp, no can search any more. Me *try*."

Alan said: "Try, Bawala. Do your damndest. There's a bonus for you if you can find it before dark."

Bawala showed gleaming teeth in a pleased smile, then led the way towards a side trail.

He knew though, that there was very slight hope of locating the camp. They had been led pretty far astray by the dogmatic Alan. Bawala tried hard. He liked Alan, and Alan's wife. They treated him more like a human being than the majority of white lords who came to hunt big game. And aside from the annoying streak of self-confidence, Alan was a fine specimen of young British manhood, his young wife fully matching him from the female side.

Bawala didn't want them to be stranded in the jungle for the night. Aside from the danger there was the discomfort. That was great. They would not be used to that. Added to which they were here on a holiday—for pleasure.

But even if Bawala had been the best number one boy in the whole of Africa, he could not have made the camp in time to beat the onrushing darkness. And he was by no means the best number one boy in all Africa, although he was extremely fond of claiming that distinction.

The sun went out almost like a light, and thick, heavy greyness descended on the jungle. Bawala said:

"Five minutes it be *dark*—"

Alan said: "We'll have to try and push on—maybe we can *still* find our way through."

"No bas. Be dangerous."

"Be more danger if we stay here, won't there?"

Bawala shook his head: "No. Climb trees, stay quiet, may not attract attention. Only danger from snake—python—not be many of those in this part of jungle."

Alan said: "At least let's press along until it gets really dark."

Bawala shrugged, took up the trail once more. His eyes peered keenly at the ground before him. He said:

"Ai! Be white man here—"

"White man? Recently?" said Anna, eagerly.

"One hour—two hour—may have camp here. Me follow trail?"

Alan nodded, and they pressed on, as fast as Bawala's eyes could guide them. If there had been a white man there it seemed possible there would be a camp. They hoped for the best and followed Bawala. And the results exceeded anything they had hoped for. For as the inky-blackness of the African night descended upon them, they obtained a brief glimpse of a neat white house standing in a wide clearing!

"This is *indeed* a pleasure," said the rotund little man who opened the screened door to them. "Upon my word, it is almost ten years since I had visitors in these quarters. Step in, madam, and you, sir."

He was so charming that they felt instantly at their ease. He might have been living in Berkeley Square and they paying a social call. He was round and small, not fat, stout rather, with white hair, and pleasant features. His face was red, indicated that possibly he suffered from blood pressure somewhat—or possibly varied the monotony of African jungle life with drags at a bottle of forgetfulness. Alan said:

"We have our boy with us—"

"You have? Ah—you are going to stay for a time, are you not? You will not dash away?"

"Well, as a matter of fact, we're hopelessly lost . . ."

"Excellent. Tell your boy my native cook will feed and accommodate him at the back. You step inside."

They stepped. The place was neat, clean, white, all white. It was, strangely, tiled throughout in the fashion of a laboratory. The small man smiled.

"Surprised to find such a place here, eh? But I dote on cleanliness. Cleanliness and efficiency. These walls have about them such an *antiseptic* look, don't you think?"

They did think. They said so. He fluttered on: "My name is Benson—George Benson. I live here."

Alan said, courteously: "I am Alan Clayton—my wife, Anna. We are here on a hunting trip."

"Really? This part of the jungle is not much favoured by professional hunters?"

"We are amateurs at the game," smiled Anna. "Just enjoying ourselves. So far, thanks to my dear husband, we haven't seen anything larger than a centipede."

"Those are large enough here," smiled Benson. "Yes indeed. Ah, well, make yourselves at home, make yourselves at home. By all means. You will not be able to make camp to-night. Luckily I can accommodate you here with ease—I live alone, except for two native boys, you see. It is a pleasure to entertain such charming guests again. I must get you a drink—what will it be? Whisky?"

He got them a whisky each, and poured a liberal one for himself. Then he sat beside them on the long settee.

"So you are big game hunting here, eh?"

"That's about the size of it," agreed Alan. "But so far we haven't had much luck."

Benson smiled; leaned forward. Said: "How would you like to hunt with me? How would you like to hunt—REALLY big game?"

And he added, as an afterthought: "In ANOTHER world!"

CHAPTER III

NOT MAD, AFTER ALL!

For a moment or two they were too flabbergasted to reply. Then Alan said, with a sickly smile: "A—another world?"

"Just so. You'd like that, eh?" said their host, genially. "It isn't everyone who can go big game hunting in another world—is it?"

Anna breathed: "It sounds thrilling . . . do tell us more," and nudged Alan with her elbow.

Benson chuckled: "Later—ah, yes, later. Now I must stir up that lazy boy of mine and have your beds arranged. Kimo—Kimo, you lazy black devil, where are you?"

He bustled from the room, after excusing himself, leaving Alan and Anna sitting, more or less petrified, on the settee.

"Humour him," said Anna, in a stage whisper. "For Heavens sake humour him until we can get out of here!"

"He's mad all right," agreed her devoted husband, "as mad as any bunter I ever saw. Big game hunting in another world? Whew!"

"Let's get out of here," suggested Anna. "I'm frightened, Alan."

"The question is which is the lesser of the two evils? The jungle by night or that character?"

Anna shook her head: "Not the jungle. At least

we do know what we're likely to encounter there—we don't here."

"But apart from that one kink he seemed sane enough," Alan suggested. "He may not be harmful—"

"But they always are," said Anna. "Look at your Uncle Egbert, dear, if you can bear to. He had only one small kink—he wasn't harmful, oh, no! He just thought he was a mousetrap, that's all. He was quite happy sitting in the corner waiting for mice to appear—remember you had to stick a lump of cheese on his tongue before you went to bed every night? And even so he never caught any mice! But he was harmless enough, wasn't he? Until he went completely barmy and sunk his teeth into poor Pekie's tail and wouldn't let go."

"Let's just leave Uncle Egbert out of this," said Alan, stiffly.

"I'm only trying to make a point—"

"And anyway, if ever a dog deserved having teeth snunk into his tail, it was that damned Pekingese of yours. I used to loathe the sight of the animal. In my opinion that was the stoutest day's work Uncle Egbert ever did in his entire life! I congratulated him on it. He probably thought your confounded Pekie was a rat or something. I can't say I blame him!"

Anna snapped: "You beast! How could you talk like that? Why Pekie never picked up again after that—"

Alan said: "There you go! Raking back into the past, bringing up personalities and family affairs. I don't know, whenever I argue with you, why it develops into a vaudeville cross talk act!"

"That's because you bring up such ridiculous arguments," said Anna, heatedly.

"And you don't?"

Her teeth came together with a click. She said: "What do you suggest we do then? Stay here with a—madman?"

"Better than trying to get back to camp."

"Whose fault is it we didn't get back to camp hours ago?"

Alan contented himself with a dignified stare. He smiled, bitterly: "Of course, if you insist on being childish—"

Anna's breath hissed between her teeth. She snapped: "Let's try to make camp—there's a moon out—I can see it from the window here. A full moon."

"You can see it from the window, yes. But once you got in the depths of the jungle it wouldn't be much use to you—"

Anna said: "Well, you can stay, if you wish—I'm going—"

She got up and walked to the door. She opened it, looked back. "Coming?"

"I've made myself clear on that point, I hope."

"You—you mean you'd let me go out there alone?"

"Exactly. Good night."

"You—you pig!" shouted Anna.

She stepped on to the verandah. From the jungle came a wild, untamable roaring. A snorting, a high cackling, a hooting, a snarling.

Lions, tigers, hyenas, night birds, leopards. When she'd wanted to find them during the day she'd been unlucky. She had an idea that now she *didn't* want to find them she'd be unlucky again, but in a different way, if she went out there.

She shut the door, came back, and sat down. She put her head on her arms, and wept quietly.

Alan said: "That routine won't help, either. You've used it too often, darling."

"All right," said Anna calmly, sitting up again, without a trace of tears. "All right, Alan Clayton. But wait until you want *me* to do something for *you*—"

Alan grinned suddenly and held out his cigarette packet to her. He said: "Darling, let's smoke the pipe of peace. And I'll make myself perfectly clear: frankly, if *you* hadn't been with me, I'd have chanced it and tried to make camp even in darkness. But you *are* with me. And I wouldn't expose *you* to the countless dangers out there for sacks of pure gold. That's the truth, so help me."

Anna's eyes softened. She whispered: "Truly?"

"And really!"

He bent and kissed her. Then straightened again as steps sounded from the hall. Anna breathed: "Don't forget—humour him. He's mad—"

Benson came bustling in, his cherubic features wreathed in a pleasant smile. They eyed him cautiously. He said: "It's just struck me that possibly—from what I've said to you—you people think I'm *mad*?"

"Of course not," protested Alan and Anna, simultaneously. "What an *idea*!"

The rotund little man smiled mysteriously: "But possibly I am a little mad," he said. "After all, you know, insanity is next to genius—and, of course, I am a genius."

"Of course," they hastened to agree.

He beamed at them. "Nice of you to see it so readily. But I still feel an explanation would be in order—now, let me see . . ."

They tried to appear as calm as possible. He sat down and faced them. He put his finger tips together like a benevolent village parson. He said:

"I lead a quiet, hermit-like existence out here—far, far different to the one I used to lead. I used to be a Professor at one of the better known English Universities. I was always most particularly interested in metaphysics. The science of being and knowing—mainly theoretical work, which I indulged myself in to the full. More particularly I was fascinated by the possibility of there being *other dimensions*—you have, of course, heard of the *fourth dimension*?"

"Fourth dimension?" said Anna. "Is it a surveying term?"

Alan gave her a lofty look: "I've heard of it. Read a lot of stories in science fictional mags dealing with it."

"Science fiction writers are a bunch of thick-headed idiots laughing up their sleeves at the tripe they write," grunted the professor, irritably. "They never come within a *mile* of the real truths. At first I worked on the theory that length, breadth, depth, were the three dimensions, and the fourth was *time*. But that was a misguess. The fourth dimension is far deeper than that—it is hard to give a name to it, but the fourth dimension is really intangibility, invisibility. Glass is, in water, not only transparent, but invisible, if the conditions are right. Cellophane, from a distance, is invisible, and water itself, given the right conditions is not easily seen. But all these things are *tangible*—can be touched and felt. You know they are there.

"But picture something which is invisible, and has also, as far as this world is concerned, no *substance*. It cannot be felt. It cannot be seen. It is intangible. So that we do not even dream of its *real* existence!"

He paused, smiled at them. "I am confusing you?"

"Not at all, not at all," said Alan. "But isn't that the theory most science fiction writers use?"

"Yes, yes," granted Benson, somewhat testily. "They were right in their theorising up to *there*. It is *later* that they go wrong. In their *conceptions* of this fourth dimensional world. That, to put it in vulgar slang—which is often very *telling*—is where they *slip up*!"

"Since no one has *seen* this world, if exist it does, they may be *right*," ventured Alan. "How can you tell they are not?"

"I can tell," said Benson, pausing to allow the dramatics of the moment to be heightened. "I can tell—because I have *seen* this dimensional world which is intangible to us! I have *walked* there—I have hunted there!"

Anna fanned herself faintly with a newspaper.

Alan laughed uneasily.

The professor, having sprung his big surprise, allowed time for it to infiltrate. Eventually he said:

"Let me elucidate. This world, as is often thought, does *not* occupy the same space as our own! Because its whole atomic structure differs. This is very hard to explain correctly to laymen . . . but let me attempt it. Picture to yourselves, let us say, two ordinary hair combs—I have two here . . ."

He laid them on a small table before him, the two sets of teeth facing each other. Gradually he slid them together until the teeth meshed. He looked at them in triumph. Alan and Anna looked at him in perplexity.

Benson said: "There are two combs—a moment ago each one occupied its *own* space—now they may almost be said to occupy exactly the *same amount* of space, simultaneously! Do you understand? It is so with this world and the fourth dimensional world. They mesh—they fit together; and if you can picture those

combs as being invisible, you will get the rough principles of the thing."

Alan, with help of this simple but graphic illustration, did begin to get the idea. Anna was as lost as ever. Alan breathed:

"You are telling me seriously, sir, that you have walked in, and see, this world?"

"That is what I am telling you. I had these views when I held my post at the University. I expounded them—I was laughed out of countenance by learned men who should have had more sense. I was described as a young puppy. I was ridiculed.

"That was long before the fourth dimension was taken seriously.

"I determined to prove my scoffers wrong. When I inherited my father's estate I sold up, built this villa, and moved here. I experimented, here, where I was left alone and troubled by no one. For by the nature of my experiments I required a large clearing surrounded by trees, a considerable degree of equatorial heat, absolute solitude, and people about me who would not understand the implications of my experiments, and who, if they thought me mad, would give me a wide berth and not interfere. I found all that here—and for the past twenty years I have pursued my ultimate aim.

"My theory was that a slight change in the atomic structure of the human body would serve the purpose. And I have steadily sought this change, and the means of bringing it about, for more than twenty years. With the aid of electricity, supplied by a small hydro-plant at the river, I experimented. Two weeks ago I succeeded."

He was obviously pleased and proud of himself. He sat back and looked important. Alan said: "How?"

He said: "Close to this villa is a wide clearing in the jungle. There I have a large cage—quite an intricate affair, with a metal floor. That cage, which is all of fifty yards square, and is protected by a power charged wire fence from the prying of animals and natives, is my mode of entry into the fourth dimension. It exists simultaneously in the two worlds. I have only to switch on the current which feeds it, and the world we know fades away as the structure of the cage's components is changed, and also the movement of the atoms in the human body. In an instant I am in that *other* world, and so is my cage."

Alan gasped: "Incredible."

Anna said: "I don't know. I once read a book called *Alice in Wonderland* . . ."

The Professor said: "Your wife does not understand at all. I see that you can grasp the rough essentials of my theorising, but you *will* not understand. You refuse to accept the facts. Then—possibly I can prove my remarks for you—

"Ten days ago I ventured into this other world, and snared several animals in my cage. For this purpose I constructed a special compartment, behind which they would be unable to reach me, in my side. I brought

those animals back here with me. I caged them independently—I still have them!"

Alan said: "You can show them to us?"

Benson nodded: "To-morrow . . . it is late now. But in the meantime you may accept the following as ample evidence of my sanity—

Amongst these creatures which I brought back with me were two large, blanket-like bird-fish. By which I mean these creatures possessed the powers of either swimming or flying. Their fins were also wings, although their method of locomotion in the air would be better described as soaring.

"I myself, at *that* time, was unaware of their powers of flight. I assumed they were amphibians, and I therefore had them placed in a large tank of water which I had obtained for the purpose. They had no sooner entered this world than they rose into the air, and were gone before I could recover from my astonishment!"

He smiled: "No, I do not expect you to believe that. But read this, please—"

He threw across a copy of a back dated newspaper. They read:

MYSTERIOUS FLYING MONSTERS ATTACK! TWO DEAD — PLANE CRIPPLED IN AIR

Yesterday there came to hand reports of two mysterious flying monsters, capable of swimming also, which attacked and killed two men in the African Coastal area. One of the creatures was later discovered floating downstream dead, and the other was reported to have flung itself upon the propeller of a flying passenger plane, and killed itself. The plane reached its destination with one crippled engine, but without mishap.

At the moment no further information is available, but radioed pictures of the bird found in the river are published below. A group of eminent zoologists are flying to inspect the bodies, and biologists and naturalists are already on the scene.

The monsters are believed to have come from some lost valley in darkest Africa.

Alan handed the paper to his wife after gazing at the poor, radioed reproduction. Benson said: "Now do you believe me?"

Alan said: "There's little else I can do—now. And you want us to visit this fourth dimension? With you?"

"As I said, with the purpose of hunting REALLY BIG GAME!"

CHAPTER IV

GATEWAY TO THE FOURTH DIMENSION

The room Benson showed them to was a neat little, elegantly decorated bedroom, containing a single bed.

He apologised for this:

"I am unaccustomed to having any visitors at all. I trust you will forgive the inconvenience of having to manage in such a small—and uncomfortable, bed."

Alan said: "It's great. After sleeping on camp beds for three days even a mattress on the floor would seem like the height of luxury to us. Thank you, Professor."

He nodded a pleasant good night to them, halting at the door to say: "And to-morrow—I will introduce you to my gateway to the fourth dimension."

The door closed behind him.

Anna sat on the side of the bed, the mosquito netting pushed to one side. She looked fed up. She said: "Well! *This* is certainly a pretty mess you've found for us!"

Alan eased off his boots with a satisfied grunt, said, absently: "Eh?"

"I said this is a pretty kettle of fish!" snorted Anna, her hands on her hips. "Just *what* do you propose to do to-morrow? Why did you agree to stay and have a look at this blessed menagerie of his, or whatever it is?"

Alan said: "But this is damned interesting. If he really has discovered the fourth dimension—"

"He's insane."

"I'm not sure about that. A lot of his theorising was logical."

"Are you trying to tell me you *understood* all that stuff he talked about magnetic attraction, changing this and that, the structural form of atoms—neutrons and electrons and all the rest of it?"

"I understood *some* of it."

"Well, I didn't."

"I'll try and explain then. Now look—take the matter of the interlocking worlds which he illustrated with combs—our own world, everything in it, this building, me, you—it's all constructed of *atoms*. Two atoms form a *molecule*, and ..."

"What's a *molecule*?"

"The smallest part of a *compound*, and ..."

"What's a *compound*?"

"Two or more *elements* in combination. You see—"

"What's an *element*?"

Alan groaned. He grunted: "Will you let me explain this in my *own* way? I'm not too clever at it myself, and if you will keep butting in I'll get tangled!"

"Go ahead, darling."

"Well, let's take a molecule, first; I'll try and convey some idea of the size of these to you ... suppose we measured a molecule of *water*. We'd find it to be about one fifty millionth of a centimetre in diameter ..."

"How do you know? Have you measured one?"

"No, I haven't. But science tells us."

"Oh! Has science measured one?"

"No—they have ways and means of estimating. Will you for Heavens sake let me get on with it? I thought you weren't going to interrupt?"

"But you want me to understand, don't you?"

"I want you to keep *quiet*!"

He simmered down, while she lit a cigarette. At length he clenched his teeth together and said: "Now I'll try again! Well ... we'll suppose that a drop of water could be magnified to the size of the Earth—8,000 miles diameter. Then the molecules it is formed of would be about the size of *golf balls*. Do you get *that*? Now do you realise how small they are in their *natural* state? Too small to be seen by the most powerful microscope."

"Yes, dear, that's clear ..."

"Thank goodness something is, at last! Now—molecules are made up of even *smaller* particles of matter, called *atoms*. Each molecule consists of a combination of two or more different atoms. As example, two atoms of hydrogen (which is an element) and one atom of oxygen (also an element) combine to form a molecule of the stuff you *drink*—"

"Gin and lime?" queried Anna, interested at last.

"No, dammit—*water*! Don't be so thick, darling. But even now we have not yet reached the *smallest* particles, for the atom is composed of electrons which revolve around a central nucleus. These electrons are minute electric charges, and revolve round the nucleus of the atom rather like miniature solar systems. An atom can consist of as little as one electron, or as many as twenty. The electron is calculated to be about one millionth the size of an atom. So you now see how infinitely small they are, and how many of them must go to make up *your* body. Right. Now if all the atoms in your body were condensed you would get the resultant mass into a small tin can—because atoms are largely *empty space*. But let's go a step further—"

"Let's," yawned Anna.

"And suppose that all the *electrons* in your body were to coalesce! Then they would form a mass no larger than a *pinhead*! Now do you realise that your body is largely space and atoms, and that there is plenty of room for a *different* form of life to exist in the selfsame space?"

Anna, busy darning a tiny rip in her skirt with her portable darning set, jabbed him suddenly in the leg. He yelped:

"Ouch! What's that for?"

"You felt it, darling?"

"Of course I felt it," he grunted indignantly.

She said, smiling sweetly: "I didn't think you would, since you're largely empty space!"

Alan tore his hair in helpless agony: "Mean to say you still can't grasp the basic principle?"

"No. What is the basic principle?"

"That Benson can change the atomic structure of things to fit that of this other world—"

"Do you know what I think, my love?" asked Anna, tiredly.

"No—what?"

"I think," said Anna, slipping off her skirt and inspecting a shapely leg, "that you're just as mad as he is!"

Benson greeted them over a cheerful breakfast of bacon and eggs and toast and marmalade, concluded by a good, strong cup of tea. With the sun shining in through the wide windows and the leafy green of the trees outside, Anna could almost imagine she was back in England. She sincerely wished it wasn't just imagination. She wondered what Alan was going to drag her into this time!

Benson said: "When you're finished and we've smoked, I'll take you along to see my—ha, ha—menagerie. You've never seen anything like it in your wildest dreams."

Alan said: "You have quite a lot of specimens?"

"About ten—there are several I want which I would be unable to capture single-handed. That is where you two come in, if you want adventure . . ."

"How?" asked Anna, dubiously.

"The three of us, and your native bearer, will go to the other world—capture those creatures which have so far eluded me, and bring them back here. I will issue invitations to my learned colleagues—those who scoffed and ridiculed me so long ago, and who remain alive—to come and see these beings. Having satisfied my ambition, we will then sell these creatures to showmen the world over. It will net us millions, millions. We will be unbearably rich. You, my dear Mrs. Clayton, will wear precious gems, your husband will be an influential man without any monetary cares . . ."

Anna sat up and took notice. Alan said: "We're rather comfortably off as it is."

"Comfortably, yes. But this means *more* than luxury—it means *millions*."

"We'll be able to have six cars instead of two, dear," said Anna. "And you won't have to attend those horrid board meetings."

"But I *enjoy* those horrid board meetings as you call them!"

"Now don't be obstreperous, darling. I'm sure we can give the Professor the help he needs—" cooed Anna, with visions of pleasure yachts and trunks of jewellery in front of her eyes.

Benson went on: "Of course. Nobody can afford to turn from honestly earned money. And these creatures will earn that for us."

Alan said, curiously: "What *kind* of creatures are they?"

"They possess an unusual power—one utterly alien to this world—and that is the power of mind over matter! The flying creatures which caused such a stir,

do *not* fly. Nor do they *swim*—they propel themselves by means of their minds! They can control the flesh of their own bodies by will power alone. It is so with *many* of the creatures in that other place. But you shall see, you shall see."

See they did, right after breakfast. The menagerie was some fifty yards from the villa. It was circled by thick trees laced with foliage, and surrounded by a thorn boma, through which was interwoven strands of fine wire. Benson said:

"Don't touch the wires. They're charged. Not enough to kill but certainly enough to deal a nasty shock to anyone trying to be nosey."

He unlocked a gate, and they passed in. They wended their way through closely growing trees, and as they walked strange cries, unlike any cries they had hitherto heard, began to fill the air.

Hootings, squeakings, wailings, groanings, all holding an eerie quality, greeted their ears. Benson said, chuckling: "They are hungry. Oh, yes, they eat just as you or I. I am a little late feeding them to-day. But we will remedy that."

They reached an inner fence, about ten feet high. He opened another gate, and they walked in—

It might have been a miniature zoo. There were about twenty cages of varying sizes, all steel barred, all strong. Ten of them were empty. Those which were occupied made them catch their breath and hold on to reeling sanity.

A nightmare collection of creatures glared at them, snapped at them, from behind their bars! Animals with grotesque red maws set in giant heads attached to ridiculously frail bodies. Creatures with skin like ivory, skin black as jet. Things which seemed more like supernatural beings than living animals. Small, vicious looking twenty-legged beasts with lambent flickering eyes and spade-like tongues. Large things, the size of oxen, balanced delicately upon frail limbs, and with glorious wings sprouting from their sides. Flying beasts!

"But these are nothing," chuckled Benson, delighted with the stir he had created, as he progressed from cage to cage and fed his charges. "These are the *minor* game, the equivalent of our African monkeys and eland. The ones I want to get hold of are, some of them, three times the size of the *largest* elephant. More like the old mammoths and mastodons of prehistoric times. Wait until you *see* them!"

"I hardly can!" gulped Anna, beginning to wish she had never supported him after all. Six cars and lots of jewels, she reflected, wouldn't be much use when all you were in need of was a hearse and shroud, and you couldn't even admire *those*!

Benson prattled on; and to Alan this was the final proof. It was unassailable. These creatures had certainly never come from Earth, no matter what remote corner. He now fully believed every word Benson

spoke. His eyes gleamed as he peered at the various animals behind the bars.

When their tour was completed, they returned to the villa, locking the gates behind them. Arrived back, and seated on the verandah, Alan said: "Are there any human beings in this world of yours, Professor?"

"None that I have so far seen. But then, I have not yet explored a thousandth part of it. There is much yet to discover. Who knows what benefits I may not be able to heap on mankind?"

Alan said: "I'm with you. Not so much for the sake of the money as for—well, the excitement, the adventure."

He turned to Anna: "Anna, I think you'd better go back to camp, or stay and wait for me here. It isn't safe for you to come."

"Oh no you don't," said Anna, with determination. "You're not getting rid of me as easily as that. I married you for better or for worse, and so far I've only had *worse*, so I suppose I can stand it a bit longer. I'm coming."

"There needn't be much danger if we're careful," said the Professor. "Our usual weapons are good enough to kill the beasts inhabiting the fourth dimension. They are not by any means invulnerable. You will bring your boy as bearer—"

Anna grinned: "I hate to think what Bawala's going to look like when he sees some of those animals. I've never seen a green black man before. I'm sure it'll be a scream."

Alan smiled: "He may turn green, but Bawala certainly isn't yellow. And that's what mainly matters."

Benson said: "We may be there a few days. There, the time is similar to ours, although there's an entirely different solar system. We'll have to take along trail rations—"

They talked late into that same night, and by the time they retired it had been decided they would start the expedition some time the following day. . . .

* * * * *

Alan said: "Bawala . . . where've you been?"

"Me run back camp, tell boys we all right. Not send out any search party then. You be staying here, sah?"

"Not exactly here. Bawala, you're a great hunter, aren't you?"

"Damn fine," nodded Bawala, happily unaware of what time this was leading up to.

"Good," nodded Alan. "Now you wouldn't be afraid of any animal that ever walked, swam, or flew, would you?"

Bawala allowed his scorn at this suggestion to show in

his ebony face: "Bawala not afraid of *anythin'*—'cept ghosts," he qualified, quickly.

"That's great. We're going on a hunting expedition in—er—*new* territory. We want a number one boy—we'd like to have you along. But mind, we're expecting to meet beasts the like of which were never seen on earth before! And you certainly won't have seen anything like the territory we're planning to explore. It's up to you, Bawala. For this trip I'm willing to treble your wages—what you say?"

"What me say to trebled wages?" grunted Bawala, eyes gleaming. "Me say okay, sah, by damn *yes!*"

Alan grinned at him: "Stout feller. Hop back to the villa and grab off the equipment we've got ready. Then join us here."

Half an hour later they made a start. The cage which was to precipitate them from the world they knew, was enclosed by a boma similar to the one which hid the menagerie. And when he saw the cage, some of Bawala's first fine flush of optimism began to evaporate rapidly. It towered almost tree high, a web of glittering bars, meshing with electrical wires and contacts.

Benson said, opening the door: "Here we are—in we go. And in a few minutes you'll be seeing the fourth dimension! The only earth men besides myself ever to have *that* honour!"

CHAPTER V

INTO THE OTHER WORLD

Benson indicated a row of strong bars which made a series of divisions in the centre of the cage. He said: "Those cages have been prepared for the animals we are to bring back with us. Let's hope we have them *full* when we return."

Bawala was gulping, in the background. Now he spoke to Alan:

"Bas, what *this*? When we start out for hunt?"

"Now," Alan told him gently. "We start from *here*."

Bawala blinked round with popping eyes. "How you mean, sah?"

Alan grinned: "This *cage* is our starting point, you see. Don't worry, Bawala. Everything will be all right—I hope," he added in an undertone.

Benson smiled at them. He was standing at one side of the cage with his hand on a long, thin lever. He said: "Are we all *ready*?"

Anna said: "Is it—will there be any—I mean—"

"No, Mrs. Clayton, there will be no pain, no unpleasant sensations of any description. A fraction of

a second only is required for the transition. Just stand perfectly still and don't try to fight against the vibrations you will feel all about you, especially on the steel plate under your feet."

Alan murmured: "There's no possibility of something going wrong and electrocuting us, is there?"

"If there were, Mr. Clayton, I wouldn't be here myself. Now—let's waste no more time. Is everyone prepared?"

Everyone, it seemed, was, although Bawala was scared out of his dusky wits and utterly unable to understand what was going on. The Professor said: "Here goes," and threw the switch.

Nothing happened. Anna said: "Well, how long does it take?"

Alan said: "If you'll open your eyes dear, you'll see that we've arrived!"

"Yes, my dear Mrs. Clayton," smiled Benson, jovially. "I can assure you there was no need to close your eyes whatsoever. There was nothing to be afraid of. And here we are..."

Encouraged, she opened her eyes, stared round.

At first she thought they'd been joking with her; for the gleaming bars of the cage were where they had been, Alan was by her side, and Benson beside the lever. Bawala was perspiring in the background, trembling with alarm.

Then she began to notice *other* things—that the light which shone down on them was not the sunlight she knew—it was a pallid green shade, making her companions look most peculiar. Her eyes wandered down to her own clothing, found that, too, was now green. She resisted an idiotic impulse to crack the old music-hall gag, "I've gone all mouldy," and said: "So this is it?"

Benson nodded. Anna's gaze followed his pointing finger. She stared beyond the cage.

The sky, the Heavens, were green-tinted. Far above hung a planet of alarming proportions. It filled practically one quarter of the sky. It was tinted green, too, and the towering mountains, wide lakes, and crater-like valleys were plainly visible.

Benson said: "There is no night or day here. Everything is one. An entirely different arrangement to that existing in our own world."

Alan was looking at the forest.

There were trees, about the size of normal Earth trees. But here similarity ended. These trees were peculiar, were *alive*.

Each branch twisted and writhed, coiling and uncoiling like sinuous snakes. Anna noticed this. She gasped:

"Oh! Look—the branches—"

"Lawd!" breathed Bawala, covering eyes with hands.

Anna said: "There's no breeze..."

"They move of their own volition," explained

Benson. "Almost everything, in fact probably *everything*, in this dimension, has something not gifted to its equivalent form on Earth. These trees *are* alive—in the sense that they can move and feel. I doubt that they have intelligence, though, or sight or hearing. They can certainly feel pain, and may cry out, as I have seen for myself by inflicting a knife cut on one of them. But they are not dangerous, except to small insects which they ensnare."

Alan turned to Bawala: "All right, Bawala. Nothing to harm you here—yet!"

Bawala slowly opened his eyes. Gazed round—gave a yelp, and closed them again.

Alan said: "What is it now?"

"There, bas—" The boy extended a shaking hand in the direction of the ground. About five feet from the side of the cage it was moving and undulating in strange fashion. It was of the texture of fine sand, and green in colour.

Alan stammered: "God, it is moving! Don't tell me the very ground is alive, too, Professor?"

Benson shook his head: "As to that I cannot say. It may be that the ground here is largely composed of living cells, or that a great many microscopic insects abound in it. But the more likely theory, and one towards which I myself lean, is that the movement you see is caused by the passage of some large, subterranean creature tunnelling a passage-way."

"You mean there are large forms of life living underground?"

"I have not seen them, I admit. I have noticed various movements on my explorations here, and have judged these to be made by a form of life similar to our own earthworms, but far larger. We will investigate that aspect of the matter as soon as we can. Now we had better sort out the equipment we will require and make a start."

Bawala being soothed to some extent by the logical explanation given by the Professor, he began to arrange the guns and packs, but not without several wide-eyed glances at the mobile trees. In fifteen minutes they were ready to start, and carrying a pack each, elephant rifle each, with Bawala trailing along behind with nets and steel-jawed traps, they set out.

Alan said: "What I wish to know is precisely *what* we are hunting?"

Benson shrugged: "Anything which—shall we say—takes our fancy. This place abounds with forms of life, and dozens of variations on each form. So we should not be hard put to find something *worthy* of our attentions. There are one or two larger animals which I myself have seen, and these are our actual quarry. But in the meantime we will endeavour to take anything we come-across which is worth the effort. Not nervous, are you?"

Alan shook his head: "Was at first," he admitted. "Rather more interested now, than anything."

Anna walked along close beside him, her gun held tightly in her hands.

Bawala was slinking after them, his eyes glued to the ground in front of him, ready to jump clear at the first sign of movement, and giving a wide berth to the undulating tree branches.

Anna said: "What is the plan?"

Benson pointed ahead: "Beyond the trees is a plain—at the edge of that a river feeds a wide lake, to which animals come to drink. We will set traps round the edges and wait."

Anna shivered. Said: "I—I don't like this place at all."

"You can't be expected to, my dear Mrs. Clayton," stated Benson. "After all, this is far different from anything you have yet known. I myself felt uneasy at first—but that passes, and I think you will soon find yourself deeply interested in all you see, and very anxious to see more."

He halted suddenly, stopped talking. He said: "Here's our chance to find out what makes the ground move as it does—see—"

They stopped, drawing level with him. Some feet ahead the green sand-like substance was rising and falling in considerable agitation. The Professor snapped his fingers to Bawala: "Winchester, boy."

He raised the loaded rifle to his shoulder. Anna said: "Do—do you think we ought to...?"

Benson smiled at her: "I see no reason why not. Our hunting expedition might just as well start here. I find it far more exciting when one doesn't know precisely what one is hunting."

"It's that all right," agreed Alan.

The Winchester shattered the deep silence which hung over the place. A bullet furrowed into the sand ahead, leaving a neat, round hole.

And from beneath the ground came a sudden snarling, muffled by the sand. The ground broke, parted jaggedly, and a head reared up to confront them.

Even Benson went pale, the ruddy glow fading from his round cheeks. They were too paralysed for the moment to do anything but stare at the thing.

It rose higher, weaving and twisting, glaring about with eyes like saucers, covered by a thick layer of skin as protection against the earth through which it moved. It was very much like a worm—but that it was roughly, the portion they could see, about ten feet long, two feet in diameter, and had a well-defined head with a gaping jaw and three serrated rows to teeth. A snarling came from its open jaws.

Anna cried: "What—what is it?"

Benson said: "Calm, now. It's almost blind due to the skin over the eyes; it doesn't see us yet."

He exchanged his Winchester for a heavier bore. Alan cut in:

"Let me have this one, Professor."

"If you wish," nodded Benson, putting up his gun. Alan threw up his own elephant gun, took aim, and discharged the first barrel. The creature's head seemed to soar into the air, fell some distance away, teeth gnashing frantically. The trunk swayed and weaved, pouring out messy black blood.

Then suddenly it withdrew into the ground, the sand sifted into the hole it had left, and all was still again.

Benson breathed deeply: "That's something new to me, even," he murmured. "The first time I've seen one of those things. But I had an idea that subterranean creatures caused those movements of the earth—although I thought they would be more the form of the earth mole."

Alan grunted: "Do you suppose the thing possesses the power of growing whole again, like the earthworm?"

"No, I think not. The earthworm is a simple form of life, and replacements are easily taken care of by Nature. Whereas this creature had a very complicated head, even eyes and mouth—quite possibly the rest of its body, particularly the digestive organs, are similarly complicated. No, I should say that the withdrawal of the body was due to contraction of the muscles in the death spasm. I do not think it can re-grow any missing parts."

Anna said: "Let's get on—away from that head!"

Alan said: "Just a minute—listen—"

They listened. Since their arrival, other than the snarling of the worm-like thing, no sound had broken the unnatural still of the place. Anna said: "What is it, Alan?"

He muttered: "Sounds like—a drumming noise. In the distance somewhere."

Anna smiled: "Probably Bawala's knees knocking," she hazarded. "Or mine!"

Alan said: "No listen—you hear it, Professor?"

Benson raised a hand to enjoin silence, and they remained quiet for some minutes. Then he said: "Yes—I do hear it. It is a drumming! And—although I would not swear to it—it sounds far too consistent and methodical to be made by any form of life or nature which doesn't possess a fairly high degree of—intelligence!"

Alan said: "There is no sign of it now. An entirely different arrangement to our own world. Alan was looking at the ground. There were trees about the lake of normal Earth. But here nothing existed. These trees were different from any.

"Here we are," said Benson, setting down the pack he was carrying, and nodding towards a large, cool lake. They regarded the water with interest, almost expecting to find it green like the rest of this strange world. But it was perfectly cool and clear, although, far below the surface, the sand could be seen lending a greenish tint to the transparent liquid.

"Is it fit to drink?" asked Alan, and Benson shook his head:

"I haven't tested it, but it won't be water as we know it on Earth."

Anna shivered, as she had been doing continually since their arrival. She said: "It isn't very warm here, is it?"

"I'm afraid not. That's why I insisted we bring along thick sleeping bags, heavy coats. The temperature remains constant. So far as I know there is no rain, which means there is no condensation of the atmosphere, which in turn means there is no evaporation of the liquids on the surface of this world, which can mean one of two things: either the place is heated entirely by the heat from its core—and away from the crust up there is absolute zero—or the liquids here simply do not evaporate, are not subject to that chemical change as are our lakes and rivers on Earth."

Alan said: "What do we do now? What's the first step?"

"I think that first we will set a few traps about the edges of the water here. Then we can move back into the shelter of the forest, and whilst we wait for our prey, we can eat and drink."

"That's an idea. In spite of the excellent breakfast we had I feel hungry," admitted Alan.

"How long have we been here now?" Anna wanted to know.

Benson consulted his wrist watch, said: "Six hours, almost."

"Then this spot must be some distance from the cage?"

"It is. We have not noticed the passage of time because we have been so interested in all we have seen. I had expected we would encounter some of the stranger forms of life on our way here, but our luck was out. However, there is still a great deal of time left to us."

He turned to Bawala: "Boy, you be damn quick, make traps ready. Fix net snare to two trees there, overhanging water—"

Bawala made himself busy, whilst the three white people walked along the side of the lake. Benson pointed suddenly:

"You remember the flying things mentioned in the news report I showed to you?"

"Be hard to forget anything like that," Alan observed.

Benson thrust a tubby forefinger towards the centre of the lake. He said: "There's one of them now. Late! I want to get hold of another specimen for the collection—"

Alan said: "I'll take a pot at it, shall I?"

Benson stopped him quickly: "No, don't do that. We don't want trouble, and those things are demons if they're attacked first. If we leave them alone they'll leave us alone. It's the same with most of the other

forms of life I've come across here. It seems to be a law, almost, that they don't attack unless attacked."

"Then how do they live?" queried Anna. "Have to eat, don't they?"

Benson nodded: "They seem to exist mainly on the trees—"

"You mean those moving branches and things?"

"Exactly. Possibly those trees are more animal than vegetable. If so, it would save the animals themselves from hunting. They would grow too lazy to chase food, when there was food before them which was not able to move from the spot."

"Must be horrible for the trees," ventured Anna.

"Yes, they certainly feel pain. But I doubt if they feel very much pain—I doubt if they have any brain—I imagine that the cry they give when injured, inspired by tortured nerve centres, is largely automatic."

They finished setting the traps, and with Bawala, they retreated into the edges of the forest. Here they opened their trail packs and sat down to await events.

Which were not long in coming!

CHAPTER VI

THE DWELLERS IN THE HILLS

They caught nothing that day, although several weird beasts came to drink, and Alan and Anna watched them with startled and unbelieving eyes. They rolled themselves in their sleeping bags when the Professor intimated that they had now been here more than twelve hours, and that normally they would have been turning in on Earth.

They slept for five hours by the Professor's watch. And when they woke the Professor said: "I think the traps will be loaded now. I certainly heard some strange sounds—I didn't sleep any too well."

Alan said: "We're a great distance from the cage—if we've captured anything sizable, how the devil are we going to get it back there?"

Benson shook his head. He said: "I hoped to be able to trap some of the larger animals quite close to the cage. But if I succeed in catching any here, I'll hire native boys and bring them to this world."

"Do you think they'd come?" asked Alan.

The Professor smiled: "I'd have them here before they knew what was happening—and then, if they didn't obey, they'd have no method of returning."

Alan frowned. He wasn't sure that he liked that idea. But it was Benson's party.

They made for the lakeside after breakfast, and stopped short in surprise as they beheld the extent of their "bag." The steel jawed traps had captured five

animals of four different species. They were vicious looking things, snarling and snapping and trying to wrench themselves free. Of the remaining traps four were unsprung, and one contained the paw of some creature, bitten off at the ankle, and a bloody trail into the forest. One of the victims had gnawed itself free.

Benson pointed to the two slender trees which had held the net snare. They had been sprung, too, and in them, fighting and spitting viciously, rocketing about trying to tear a way through the netting, was a creature no larger than a large dog, but with an almost human face, and as fearsome an array of teeth as they had ever seen.

Bawala, seeing it was merely an animal after all, shinned one of the trees, roped the ends of the net, and cut it down. The squirming snapping bundle crashed to the sand, and rolled and heaved in a wild ball of fury.

Benson, venturing a little too close, felt the agony of a sharp, raking claw streaking down his leg, opening his trousers from knee to ankle, and his flesh with them.

He cursed and aimed a violent kick at the struggling wild thing, catching it just behind the ear. It collapsed and lay motionless, suddenly.

Alan went over. Bent—

"What the—Why, it's dead!"

Benson said: "Damn. I particularly wanted that specimen. It would certainly have made them *hop*—"

Anna said: "*Who hop?*"

"Oh!" Benson seemed furtive. "I meant the showmen. The men we plan to sell them to—eventually."

"Well it won't now," observed Alan. "Broken neck. There must have been some *force* behind that kick."

"I'm afraid I lost my temper," apologised Benson.

"No wonder—that's a nasty wound there. Better let Anna fix it for you."

"Thank you."

Bawala said: "How can make *cages* for these animals? No tree branches that stay still! How can make *cages*?"

Benson pointed to the medical kit. "I thought of that. I brought along a syringe, some drug. We'll shoot them an injection and then carry them back. That will be easiest."

Anna dressed his wound, and then Benson drew on heavy leather gauntlets, loaded his hypodermic, and began the rounds of the traps. He was absolutely without fear; he darted in the moment opportunity presented itself and delivered the injection. Alan distracted the beasts' attention whilst Benson performed the dangerous part of the operation. Within an hour the creatures were lying in a stiff, silent circle.

Bawala said: "This one be big. Too big *one man* carry—"

He pointed to a beast the size of a bull, with three pairs of horns sprouting from its flat head, and a further

row of horns spaced along its back almost to its spatular tail.

"We'll *all* have to take a hand with that," agreed Benson. "Fortunately the life here weighs only about half the weight of life on Earth, in proportion to size. I think, if we rope it, we can handle it all right."

They spent the whole of that day, working by Benson's watch, getting the bag safely back and into the cage. And as they were making the final trip, Benson halted suddenly and said:

"Quick—Bawala, pass me the *short* rifle from my kit."

Bawala obeyed, handing him a stubby, metal affair, unlike any rifle Alan had ever seen. Alan said: "What kind of weapon is *that*?"

"Designed especially for shooting the animal *now facing us*," said Benson, and added: "*By myself*. It contains a metal syringe which can be fired, and on striking, injects its contents into the target."

Alan said: "But—there *isn't* any beast facing us!"

"*Isn't there?*"

Alan stared perplexedly. Anna followed suit. Alan said:

"I may be going blind, but if I'm not there's nothing but the green trees."

Benson said: "You haven't seen these creatures before. I have. Look *very* closely. Possibly it's their very size and stillness that has you fooled."

Alan tried again. Shook his head.

Benson said: "Their camouflage is perfect—perfect. But look for something standing about thirty feet high, and about the size and shape of an omnibus . . . *now* do you see it? As green as the trees about it, but you can make out the outlines of the globular head."

They saw it now, a weird, bulky animal, with a large head like a gigantic balloon. Their eyes traced round the dark outline of it. It was about forty yards away from them.

Benson said: "From what I have already seen of these things their sight is poor. Before I fire this charge I want you to take cover—the drug may take some time to react, although it is as strong as I could make it, indeed, strong enough to put twenty elephants to sleep for a few days. But we'd better not take any chances . . . possibility is it may not act at all."

They took cover, trembling with tension. Benson got his home-designed rifle to his shoulder, sighted, fired, and ducked behind a tree, rapidly.

The monster ahead was galvanised into life suddenly. They could see the giant syringe jutting from its flank, and Benson hissed:

"It worked—it *worked*—now—"

With a shrill bellow of rage, the monster charged blindly into the trees about it, crumpling them down with the force of its impact. Benson grunted: "Leave the kit *here*—let's get *after* it, see where it falls!"

They crushed through the trees on the track of the beast. It was not hard to follow. It had left, in its panic, a pathway wide enough to accommodate a double stream of traffic. From far ahead came the eerie screechings of the living trees as they were tramped into the ground, and the shrill bellowing of the mammoth beast.

Forgetting everything in the excitement of the chase, they tore on, out of the trees, on to a long, green plain.

Far ahead were a range of hills, seeming almost to touch the low hanging edge of the other planet which seemed to comprise all there was of this system.

Thundering across the plain, visible now that it had left the natural camouflage of the trees, was the beast they were pursuing. Only now did they appreciate fully its colossal size, and Alan exclaimed: "You'd need an *army* of native boys to drag that thing back, even if we *did* get it, Benson."

Benson panted: "If necessary I'm willing to hire an *army*!"

They raced onwards—

As the monster came into view, they halted in a tired circle, surrounding the recumbent monster. It had led them a hectic chase, and finally they had lost sight entirely of it. But Benson had insisted they push on. He swore by the drug which had been injected, said that sooner or later it was *sure* to have effect.

Benson said: "Here it is!"

They halted in a tired circle, surrounding the recumbent monster. It had led them a hectic chase, and finally they had lost sight entirely of it. But Benson had insisted they push on. He swore by the drug which had been injected, said that sooner or later it was *sure* to have effect.

They had followed it almost to the hills, able to see its great hoofprints in the shifting sand.

Now they had found it, where it had thudded down under the shelter of the hills.

Alan sat down with a groan: "Whew! That was some chase."

"But," said Benson, gleefully, "we've got the prize! And what a prize! This alone should bring as fifty thousand!"

"If we ever get it back to the other side," cautioned Alan.

Anna eased herself down and removed her boots with a groan. She said: "Right now I'd give anyone my share in the fifty thousand for a nice, hot foot-bath!"

Of the four, Bawala was the only one untroubled by fatigue. He stalked round the fallen monster popping, incredulous eyes.

Benson said: "I'm tired myself, but not too tired to take a *look* at this thing."

"You will be by the time you've walked round it," commented Anna, wearily. "As I feel now I couldn't walk round a *squirrel* let alone that mountain of flesh!"

Benson moved to inspect the beast. And almost at once there came a disappointed cry: "Damn! It's *dead*!"

"Dead?" echoed Alan, "but I thought it was just drugged?"

Benson nodded: "That was the idea—but it's dead all right now. Must have had an exceptionally weak heart, despite its size!"

He vanished round the farther side, and the body of the monster concealed him and Bawala from sight. Anna turned to Alan:

"Now look what you've got us into!"

Alan snorted: "Look yourself! When he mentioned the money we could get for these beasts *you* were more anxious than *I* was to go into the thing. Well, now we're *well and truly* into it!"

"Up to our necks," agreed Anna. "And simply because *you* were too pig headed to listen to Bawala when he told you the right way back to camp that night!"

Alan grinned: "Anyway, we'll have some fine hunting stories to tell the folks back home."

"If we ever get back home," grated Anna, rubbing her slim legs, wearily.

"We will," promised Alan. "Why shouldn't we? I'm quite prepared to trust to the Professor's cage after the demonstration we've had already."

"I still think he's mad," Anna said.

"Perhaps he is—a little. But as long as he knows what he's doing we needn't let his madness worry us. He's harmless enough."

"So was your Uncle Egbert until—"

"For the *last* time," snorted Alan, irritably, "will you kindly leave Uncle Egbert *out* of this? Just remember that if it hadn't been for Uncle Egbert leaving us his money, we wouldn't have had enough to take *this* trip to Africa!"

"In which case we wouldn't be here now," retorted Anna. "Yes, I didn't think of it *that* way. Something *else* to chalk up against that old coot of an uncle of yours."

"I'll thank you," said Alan with dignity, "not to speak ill of the dead!"

"I can't help it. Your Uncle Egbert leaves us his money so we can afford a trip to Africa—when we're doing nicely *you* take us back to camp the *wrong* way—and look where we *land*! Between you and your Uncle Egbert I'll be driven raving *mad*."

Alan affected to ignore her, and stared towards the hills. She went on: "Just how long do we stay in this place? I'm getting fed up."

"In that case," said Alan cuttingly, "why don't you walk out on me?"

"Maybe I will when we get back to civilisation again."

Alan turned to face her. He said: "This isn't any place for family squabbles, darling," with a half-hearted effort at conciliation.

"Isn't it? I couldn't think of a better."

Alan's patience snapped: "I told you not to come, didn't I? I didn't want you to come. But like most women you had to stick your nose into business that didn't concern you!"

"Oh, it didn't, didn't it? Do you think a wife's going to let her husband go charging off anywhere he likes without coming along to see what he gets up to? If you think that I—"

"Women!" snarled Alan. "Sometimes I wonder if Nature ever had a hand in anything more pestilential! They want it all ways! They insist on tagging along, and when they find out they don't like the ride, they start crying about it and blaming any man who happens to be at hand. Why the deuce didn't I have the good sense to stay single?"

"You—you utter beast!" exploded Anna. "After all I've gone through to stick by you!"

"And all you've made me go through by sticking by me," scowled Alan, darkly. "No wonder there's so many cases of irate husbands going into business as butchers with a meat carver as a tool and the bodies of their wives as a subject!"

"You—you—" spluttered Anna.

She picked up her discarded boot suddenly and sent it flying towards him. It struck him smartly on the end of the nose, bowled him backwards to the sand, with a howl.

He came up again. He was furious: "That's right! Go on! Go on! That's just a woman's trick exactly! Hit a man when he isn't looking! Go on—throw the other!"

Anna gazed at him; she stopped frowning suddenly, the rage left her face. Her mouth opened, and she chuckled. Then she laughed outright. Alan grated: "Funny, isn't it? My nose was already sun-skinned, you know that. And you have to go and throw a boot at it."

"It isn't that," chuckled Anna, "its your face that's so funny—it just struck me."

"Oh! My face is funny now, is it? I see! That rouses your risibilities, does it? Very amusing I'm sure. Enjoy yourself, my dear. Make the most of it. But someday you may miss that same face, and be sorry you found it so funny!"

She laughed: "I'm sorry Alan. I don't mean you look funny—what I mean is that you look funny, angry as you are, and with your face all green through the light here! You look positively bilious, darling. In fact, exactly like you did that night at Ann Graven's party, when you ate all that lobster salad and had to have me help you out!"

"Anything else you'd like to drag up from the not so very dead past whilst you're at it?" snorted Alan, unmollified by her remarks. Anna leaned back on the sand and laughed again—then her eyes became fixed on the hills above them, and she gasped! "Oh! Alan—Alan—there's—men up there! Coming down from the hills!"

CHAPTER VII

THE CITY

That surprised ejaculation of Anna's was not strictly accurate. The men on the hill were not, in the fullest sense of the word, just men. They were more.

They had all the physical attributes of mankind—but they were, like the rest of the things in the strange world, gifted with additional powers. In this case, wings!

At the moment these were folded along their sides, where, normally, their arms would have been. But as Alan gazed upwards in alarm, one of them soared from the hill, the wings spreading out behind him, and swooped gently down towards the two.

Alan stood up with an exclamation. Anna began to haul her boots on again, pat her hair into position at the nape of the neck with the eternal vanity of the female.

The winged men soared to a stop on the ground, about fifteen feet from them. He looked at the large monster first; his gaze was angry. His finely proportioned features, tinged the usual slight shade of green, were stern and forbidding.

"Why did you do this thing?"

They were able to understand perfectly. And Alan said: "Who are you?"

The superman seemed to understand also. He clearly possessed the power to read thoughts as well as transmit his own. He came a pace nearer, and the shining metal harness with which his joints were girded, scintillated with a weird brilliance of its own.

"It matters not who I am. Why did you kill this creature?"

Alan hesitated, and Anna said: "We were hunting—"

His brows raised. He seemed puzzled, as if this was something he failed to understand. He repeated: "Hunting?"

"Yes—pursuing game—animals—"

He transmitted: "For what purpose?"

Alan was wary—but even so his thoughts betrayed him. The super-being thought, angrily: "To kill?"

Alan nodded, Anna shuddered at the rage which was written on the face of the hill man. She drew closer to her husband.

"Why to kill?" questioned the man.

"For the excitement—the sport."

"Excitement? Sport? Where do you come from?"

Alan said: "From another world. A world very close to this one, and yet a thing apart—" He wondered what reaction to that would be. It was surprising, but not in the way he had anticipated. The being said:

"You mean the *third dimension*?"

"Yes."

The winged man frowned. "How then did you gain access to this world?"

"By means of changing the atomic structure of our bodies—something like that. Our friend could best explain."

At that very moment Benson came round the side of the huge beast and said: "Good heavens! What—what's that?"

"He appears to have some authority here," stated Alan.

Benson's eyes gleamed. He said: "Then I must have him for my *collection*—I—"

Anna hissed: "Careful! He can thought read! He has amazing telepathic powers!"

Benson started. Looked closely at the man. The winged man said, by way of his telepathic prowess:

"Is the fat one your *leader*?"

Benson nodded: "Yes—the expedition is under my control."

The winged man continued: "You fired the missile that killed this beast?"

Benson didn't reply to that. He had a sneaking premonition that there was danger connected with the killing of the beast.

"I see that you did," went on the winged man. "You are also afraid. And well you may be—"

He turned suddenly, looked towards the hill. Following his gaze Anna and Alan saw that the five or six winged men who had been there previously had been joined by about another two dozen, all waiting and watching silently.

The leader didn't speak a word. But suddenly the entire band took flight and swooped down towards the tense little group.

Silently they formed in a circle about the three white people.

The leader said, gravely: "You will come with us."

Benson was extremely uneasy now. He grated:

"Why?"

"That you may be put to death. It is a sin here to kill any living thing."

Benson said: "I'm going nowhere. Stand aside there—come on you two—"

His rifle was raised suddenly, covering the circle with a sweeping movement. He began to stride forward.

The rank parted to allow him passage. After a brief pause, Alan and Anna followed him, watching their rear.

The winged men made no movement. They stood stolidly watching.

Benson was sweating heavily, his knuckles tight and white with the pressure of his hands on the rifle. They got clear of the circle. A thought wave from the leader reached them:

"Stay where you are—"

Benson snapped: "Keep going—they're *afraid* of us. Maybe they saw what we did to that damned creature there. Keep going."

They kept backing steadily, rifles levelled at the circle, ready to fire over their heads to scare them, should they show any signs of attack. But they didn't. They stood silently watching.

Anna murmured: "What's the *matter* with them? I don't like the way they're acting."

She had hardly spoken the words, than something seemed to wrench the rifles from their grasp, hurl them into the air, and send them sailing a good hundred yards away.

"Hell!" said Benson, which was the first curse they had heard from his lips. Anna and Alan were too flabbergasted to even say that much. Then Benson said: "Run—"

They turned to run, feeling it would be wiser not to stay and enquire too closely into the strange activities of the rifles.

And they had scarcely taken more than three strides when they froze, motionless, in mid-step; froze, solid, as if, like Lot's wife, they had been turned into three pillars of salt!

Their minds were not affected; they realised fully what was occurring; they strove to direct their muscles to take up the task of running. But there was no response. Their muscles were bound fast, their bodies no longer responded to their wills.

Even the power of speech was taken from them.

The winged men walked over towards them, the leader halting in front of them. He transmitted:

"It will be of no avail to attempt to escape from us. Any further attempts will meet only with disaster."

Suddenly they found the power of movement restored to them.

They toppled over, taken off balance, as the power which had held them was removed from their bodies.

They scrambled upright again, and Benson said: "How—?" in perplexity.

The leader smiled: "We possess one or two abilities which are not gifted to creatures of the third dimension."

He pointed to the hills. "You must come with us. They way is long and hard. Too hard for men to walk—in fact, you would never be able to negotiate it. However, if you will stand stiff and straight we can transport you there."

There was little sense in refusing to obey. But though Alan and Anna saw reason, and stood to attention, Benson growled: "I'm damned if I will!"

The leader shrugged: "Then it is of little consequence. For we can still transport you, whatever your position. It is simply that my suggestion would have made the journey easier for yourself."

Benson realised he was speaking the truth. He followed the example of the two others, and straightened. And then they felt that strange force robbing their bodies of power again, and they were lifted stiffly into the air, in much the same manner as a magical illusionist would raise his subject, and with the winged men flying low beside them, the journey into the hills was begun.

The city was a thing of grace and power. Sweeping towers and symmetrical spires sheered steeply from the heart of it into the green atmosphere, almost vying with the topmost cliffs for highest point. The bulk of the city was built upon the floor of a valley surrounded by the hills, but much of it sprawled out and halfway up the sides of the hills. Over it and about it flew, or walked, more of the winged men, whose home it was.

Of what substance the buildings were constructed, none of the people from Earth were able to say. They had seen nothing like it hitherto. It was very similar to the stuff of which the winged men's harness was built.

Like flying logs the three captives, unable to speak of their wonder to each other, floated gently downwards towards the central building, tallest of them all.

They alighted upon a flat roof space, and their captors released them from the invisible bonds which had held them.

There was no conversation. Without further demonstration of their telepathic abilities, the winged men let them quickly down a flight of steps leading into the building, and to a long corridor on the top floor.

The doors leading from this corridor possessed neither control buttons or handles. Seemingly they operated at the command of their builders, the winged men, another evidence of their power over inanimate objects.

They slid aside smoothly, and the group passed in. The leader came with them, leaving the others outside. He thought:

"This will be your prison until such time as you are tried in the Court of Golta."

"Court of Golta?"

"This is the City of Golta. Below you is the Court. You will stand trial at the twelfth period from the time of your capture."

"What is that by *our* time?" questioned Benson.

"I do not understand your time."

"But you know of the third dimension?"

The winged man nodded: "I know of it, yes. We here have known of it for some time. We also know what type of beings there are in it. All, from men to beasts, *kill* without scruples. Your hunting—for *pleasure*—is just another sample of that!"

Benson grunted: "We are hunting for gain!"

The winged man transmitted: "That makes it even worse in our estimation!"

He paused, then continued: "That is why we do not welcome any communication with your world. If we wished we could cure the *ills* to which your people are subject—but the ill we would most wish to cure, the lust to kill, which is not known here, we could do nothing about."

"Then you do not kill here—in any circumstances?"

The winged man shook his head. Benson said, triumphantly:

"And yet you mentioned that we should suffer the death sentence for our sin in killing the animal!"

"You do not yet realise the implications of that," said the winged man. "You will not be killed *outright*—"

"How else, then?"

"Our scientists are very clever. You will receive the potion which they concoct. . . ."

"Poison?"

"Not at all. A solution which will speed up the processes of the body, which will assist you to live many years in one minute. After drinking this you will attain old age, and consequently death, within the space of *one* of our periods."

"And how do your periods correspond to our system of time?"

"I do not fully understand your system. I know only that you have seconds, minutes, days and years. But roughly, one of our periods might equal about one hundred minutes of drinking the potion! So that we will not have killed you . . . your life will merely be speeded up, and your end will come entirely naturally. Your aged bodies will no longer support your lives."

"Morally it's *still* murder," grunted Benson.

"Not according to our wise men. Persons who kill in this world—and they are few, only maniacs and atavistic throw backs—are deemed unworthy to enjoy their lives to the full."

He turned towards the door. "Now I will leave you to yourselves—"

Alan said: "Is there no way that you could release us or send us back to our own world?"

The winged man shook his head: "None. For you have the secret of how to gain access to our world. You might bring your fellow men—and there would inevitably be an end to peace in our world."

He left the room, the door sliding to after him.

Benson went over, tried the door at once. It was impossible to move it. Benson said: "Let's concentrate—all three of us. See if we can shift that door. I don't see why we shouldn't. If those chaps have the power of mind over matter developed to such an extent, we may be able to exercise the same powers—in this world!"

They tried; they tried for almost an hour by Benson's watch. It was useless.

Benson said: "No use."

"And even if we did open the door, how could we escape?" Alan asked.

Anna sat down wearily in one corner of the entirely unfurnished room. She gazed towards the opening in the side wall.

"Is there any way *there*?"

Alan went over, looked out. He said, glumly: "No. A sheer drop of two hundred feet, about."

They sat round in a morose circle. Benson muttered: "I'm sorry I got you people into this."

"You didn't. We walked in with our eyes just as wide open as yours. Don't reproach yourself."

Anna said: "The only one who got *me* into this was Alan. If I ever get away—I'll put a good distance between myself and him in future! Believe *me*!"

Alan said, suddenly: "Gosh! Where's—Bawala?"

Benson sat up. "Good Heavens, I completely forgot him! He was round the other side of that animal when I broke in on your little tete-a-tete with these—high-minded supermen! They probably caught him, too!"

Anna breathed: "No they didn't. They *didn't* catch him. He must have heard them and stayed where he was in hiding. Bawala *wasn't* taken. I noticed particularly that the entire bunch of them took off with us when we left for the city!"

Alan said: "Good for Bawala. But what are we getting so excited about? One man can't do us any good. Even if Bawala is free it won't help us."

They relapsed into a gloomy silence...

Twelve periods to their trial. Twenty miserable, dragging, hours!

CHAPTER VIII

THE TRIAL

After a time they got over their first despondency and looked from the large open space which constituted their

window. They gazed over the glittering city of the winged men, watched them moving down below in the green tinted streets, going about their work and play.

Alan said: "These people seem ideally happy."

And Anna nodded: "They really *do* seem to have found the secret of true happiness," she declared. "Calm, leisurely, unexcitable—"

Benson turned nervously and walked back into the room: "That won't do us very much good," he groaned. "If ever I heard determination in a man it was in that chap who as good as passed sentence of death on me."

Anna said: "What time is it *now*?"

"Three."

"Then we've been here about three hours—"

"Just another seventeen to go."

Anna sat down again, said: "Well, I'll take my boots off. If I'm going to be executed at least I'll spend my last few hours in comfort."

Alan nodded: "Not a bad idea. I'll take mine off, too, darling."

They did just that whilst Benson paced irritably about the room. Alan said: "Hello! Take a look at these holes in my heels, dear."

Anna snorted: "Take a look at them yourself."

Alan grinned: "I want to look presentable when St. Peter opens up the pearly gates, don't I?"

"I shouldn't worry about that," sniffed Anna. "You're not going in *that* direction, I'm afraid."

They spoke lightly, but their minds were clouded with the realisation that death—and to their own minds, not a very pleasant form of death—faced them. Benson didn't speak at all. He was the most distressed of the three.

Alan mused, after a short silence: "I wonder how Bawala is getting on?"

"I expect he'll run back to the cage," ventured Anna.

Benson said: "Won't do him any good. He doesn't know how to operate it."

"That's so. Poor Bawala. He'll be out of his dusky wits. It will be almost as bad for him as for us, being stranded in a world like this."

Somewhere in the building a brassy gong note echoed. Anna said: "Ugh! Sounds like a funeral bell."

The echoes had hardly died away when the door was opened and a tall woman stepped in. She was very similar to the men, her hair cropped close, one breast bare, the other covered with a strip of additional harness. Her wings seemed smaller and neater than the male variety.

Her thoughts came to them:

"You are hungry?"

Alan found he was famished, and Anna felt peckish. Benson grunted a negative. The woman went back to the door and made a gesture. Two more young girls

entered bearing large metal platters on which were piled roots and fruit. Alan groaned:

"Now we have to be vegetarians! Couldn't we manage to get a couple of nice porterhouse steaks swimming with gravy?"

The girl read his thoughts. She flashed: "We do not kill animals to eat their flesh here. This is all we can offer."

Anna said: "Oh, well, we'll have to make the best of it. I'm on a vegetable diet *anyhow*."

The fruits, though strange, were pleasant tasting. They made quite a fair meal, and when they had finished, the women, who had been standing beside the door, immobile, carried out the empty platters. The door closed again.

Benson looked at his watch: "H'mm. Been here ten hours now."

He removed his coat and settled on the floor. "I don't know what you people are going to do—I'm going to get some sleep."

Despite his worry, he was asleep almost simultaneously. Alan and Anna huddled together in the far corner of the room, talking in low tones. Alan said: "Darling, I'm damned sorry I got you into this."

There was no sting in Anna's reply. Her voice was low and soft. She pressed his hand to emphasise her words: "You didn't, Alan, dear. I insisted on making a nuisance of myself and coming along. And I'm not worrying about that. Because if you're going to die here I'd rather die *with* you—"

He kissed her. He said, wistfully: "When I think of all the things we could have been doing with ourselves—blast Uncle Egbert for ever leaving us the money to get ourselves into a nasty jam like this. He was an old frump—"

Anna smiled: "Uncle Egbert was an old *dear*—even if he *did* take a bite out of Pekie—I *always* loved him."

Alan gazed at her in surprise. Then he grinned.

They felt very close sitting there in the shady, green-tinted room. Whatever their squabbles, they drew together in an emergency like this. They gained comfort from each others' presence.

They talked on, and Benson started snoring.

Benson rubbed his eyes and looked up. The door had opened. One of the winged men stood there.

"You will follow me."

The three rose, slowly. Benson glanced at his watch. He said: "It seems this is *the* time. I've slept ten hours."

Alan said: "You quite enjoyed it, too."

"I certainly did. I was dog tired. Hope I didn't make any slates fall off with my snoring?"

He seemed less troubled now, more resigned. They went out after the winged man. Down a long sloping passage, through a wide, airy chamber, round a corner, and past a long line of the winged men.

They faced two double doors of impressive dimensions.

The winged man transmitted: "We wait here."

They waited. No one spoke. The city dwellers, if they were telepathising with each other, were guarding their thoughts from the prisoners. Though they strove to read what was passing in the lofty minds behind those impassive features, they could learn nothing.

The brassy gong they had heard once before, sounded again. The winged man said: "Now."

The doors slid aside beneath his mental command. They went through and into the Court Room.

The ceiling was lost to sight in a green haze high above them. The room was plain, save for three perches at one end. These perches, in the form of seats projecting from the blank wall, were occupied by three winged men, whose bodies were covered with white cloaks instead of the customary equipage.

The captives were brought forward to stand in the centre of the room. Their guide turned, retired, vanishing through the door which now closed behind him. The three were left facing the three judges, in the vast, silent hall.

For almost five minutes, which seemed to the hapless prisoners like five eons, they faced the three robed, winged men whom they took to be some kind of judges.

Then the centre one began to transmit his thoughts:

"You will present the sin which is marked against the prisoners, Dala," he transmitted.

The winged man on the right leaned forward slightly.

"The prisoners are men from the third dimension, known to them as the Earth. We have long been aware of what transpires in this Earth, of how cold and cruelly inhuman are the species which inhabit it. The prisoners confronting us are a typical example of the *rest* of their fellows!

"*Their* sin is hunting—by which is meant the chasing and slaughtering of inoffensive animals!"

The centre man transmitted: "Hold a moment. These men are fashioned almost in our *own* shapes. Are they then, so vicious that they would needlessly kill?"

"I have gone into the history of their world, as much as is known, from every angle. Although they pride themselves upon being the zenith of all living things, they are far from this, being, in their degeneracy, almost at the *bottom* of the scale. They do possess a certain amount of crude intelligence: but only a few of the species have even touched on learning the fundamental *truths*."

"They hunt for food, and they hunt for sport . . . they kill for food, and they kill for sport! Some of the animals in their world kill for food—but few for sport!

"Their sin here has been to effect an entry in our world and to slaughter one of the OOnas beasts. This now lies dead at the foot of the hills, whence they were brought for judgment. They seemed to feel there was nothing wrong in this killing, and were surprised when they learned the penalty for the sin."

"Is there, then, no way of teaching them the truths? We can reach their world ourselves. Has not the Controlling Force tried to alter their ways?"

"Many times. Once, many years ago by their standards, there was an evil and brutal conflict which they termed a 'war.' To this they went, with blaring trumpet and banging drum, with fluttering banner, and vast array of martial might.

"And then came the horror! Hundreds of thousands were killed, killed without mercy. Even innocent non-participants suffered, when they unleashed fury from the skies upon the heads of those below. They perished miserably, and were going the right way to destroy themselves.

"Our greatest wise men tried to gain control of their minds across the Veil. But it was useless. Besotted by maddened instincts and lusts, our powers were useless to sway them. They fought on. Once, one of our elders appeared to them, above a battle field where they would have joined combat. They fell back in awe, and knelt before him. But his power to appear faded rapidly, and his efforts were useless . . ."

Alan gasped to Anna: "Could this be—where the legend of the *Angel of Mons* sprung from?"

The winged accuser was proceeding with his testimony:

"Since then, high one, many efforts have been made. Until, some time ago, the Controlling Force decided it was useless to try more. They forbade any of our kind to hold any contact with the three dimensional world. They feared, if Earth learned of our presence, and found a way to enter our world, they would bring to us strife and calamity and disrupt our peaceful way of life. Therefore, these men may not be released. I appeal for the death sentence to be passed upon them, not only because of their sin, but because to set them free would lead to strife in our own domain."

The winged prosecutor leaned back, finished.

The man he had addressed as High One, inclined his head to the left: "Vona, is there aught to be said in extenuation of the actions of the prisoners?"

Vona nodded: "There is a little, High One."

"Then you will speak in their defence."

"I will speak. I too have made a close study of the records of this place called Earth. I find that the men

there are truly convinced this thing called War is an honourable thing. It matters not on which side they fight, they feel that right is always with them. They fight to protect home and family—and many have been the gallant deeds which they have performed."

Anna whispered: "They're not only trying us—they're trying the whole of our civilisation!"

"For," continued Vona. "There is much good amongst the bad. I learned of many kind deeds which stand out like lanterns in a sea of darkness. They hunt for pleasure—yes—but those creatures they hunt would, if not killed, kill their hunters—"

The prosecutor interrupted: "That is not strictly true, High One. There are many creatures which they hunt—the rabbit, the partridge, many other birds, the fox—all of which do them no harm, all of which are of no danger to them. They fish for the denizens of the sea . . ."

"This is true, Vona?"

"It is true, High One. They do hunt thus, many animals which would not harm them. But they do not see any wrong in these actions. They cannot see any wrong . . ."

"Then they must confine their activities to their own world," stated the prosecutor: "For their minds tell us they came here to hunt the beasts in this world, with the idea of imprisoning them and selling them for money."

The High One said: "Is your defence concluded, Vona?"

Vona nodded: "It is, High One."

The centre spokesman, whom they now realised was to be their sole judge, faced them, looked at them. He said:

"Is there anything you wish to say?"

Benson said, tensely: "Yes. A great deal."

"You may speak."

Benson grunted: "First, with your damned high flown ideals, is this the way you treat strangers to your world? Secondly, can we help it if we were brought up to consider killing animals a diverting pastime? Thirdly, can you reconcile those ideals of yours with yourself killing three people, no matter what method you employ?"

"Had you come here peacefully, not to kill, we would have had a different greeting for you," transmitted the High One, calmly.

"How were we to know that it was against your laws to kill a wild beast, here?"

The High One shrugged: "It is against any laws to take a life."

"Then you intend to take ours? Is not that against your own laws?"

"We do not intend to take your lives. Merely to speed them to their ultimate conclusion, that is all."

"Bedamned to that," almost shouted Benson. "You'll be taking life *whichever* way you do it."

Alan said: "Let *me* speak. You're doing more harm than good."

Boiling with fury, Benson stepped back. Alan took his place:

"You have tried us, in your fashion, and judged us guilty. That is plain. You intend to kill us. But we ask for one last chance—we will return to our world in the manner that we came. When we have gone, you may destroy the apparatus which enables us to gain access to this world . . . we will *never* return."

The High One shook his head: "That is impossible. For one of you, or *all* of you, have the secret of entrance. What has once been done may be done again."

Benson was forward again: "I *alone* hold the secret of entrance," he said. "And I promise not to attempt to use it further."

"The word of your kind is unreliable."

Alan said: "Then release the woman of us. She knows nothing. Has killed nothing."

"We must pass sentence upon *all* of you. You all had a hand in this sin which you have committed."

Benson snapped: "Experimentation in the other world is progressing rapidly. The atom has been split—and it will not be long before *others of our kind* are able to enter your world. You would do well to release us—make your peace—allow us to act as emissaries between the two worlds."

But the High One raised his face and quietened Benson with his stern expression. He said, his thought waves flowing into their minds with deadly fatality: "It remains only to *sentence* you—"

CHAPTER IX

ESCAPE

They stiffened, waited, waited for the sentence to fall from his mind.

"On behalf of the Controlling Force, and being in possession of the necessary qualities which entitle me to pass sentence upon sinners, I do hereby condemn you to be taken to the place on the West Hill, and there confined for a period not exceeding fifty periods, and not less than thirty periods, thence to be delivered to the Scientists who will terminate your existences."

The brassy gong clanged again, the door opened behind them and their winged guard entered.

The High One transmitted: "Take them to the Place of Solitude on the West hill. Confine them

there until the Scientists are prepared to deal with them."

The guard turned, escorting the three condemned prisoners, and led them from the Court Room, leaving the three winged beings to sit in judgement upon the next case.

Benson grunted: "Well, there it is. Now we know just how long we have to live—between thirty and fifty periods!"

Anna shuddered, and Alan's arm tightened about her. Benson spoke to the guard: "Where is this place to which we are to be taken?"

"It is on the West Hill, overlooking the town. There you will have an opportunity to meditate upon your sin and renounce your evil ways before the hour of your death."

"Are all condemned prisoners taken there?"

"All are taken there to pass their last hours in solitude and peace."

They were taken to the roof again, which seemed the principal means of ingress and egress for the flying me. Here they were taken over by a waiting posse, and under control of the miraculous powers of the winged beings, they were raised into the air, and floated slowly over the city, like—Alan told himself with a shudder—a funeral cortege.

The West Hill was some distance from the town itself and was not densely populated. The building to which they were transported towered far above all others, rising parallel with the sheer wall of the cliff behind it, and soaring to within twenty feet of the summit. Their guides conducted them up a spiral stairway, to the top-most room in the place, and here they were left to their own devices.

Immediately Benson tried the door again, found that, like the last one, it would not move an inch. There was a balcony running outside and entirely round the tower, and they went out into the dim green air, and walked round this once.

Far below the tiny figures of two flying men stood guard at the entrance to the place. To right and left and in front, the isolated dwellings gradually grew denser as the centre of the city was gained. But where they were they were alone, with a commanding view of the city.

"And here we *stay*," observed Alan, "until they come and drag us away to execute us."

Benson strode round the balcony to the side facing the sheer rock. He looked upwards, said: "From here we're only about twenty feet from the top of the cliff!"

"Might as well be twenty thousand for all the chance we have of getting up there," stated Anna, flatly.

"I suppose so. It's a great pity, though. If there were only a few niches in the cliff, or anything to serve as handholds or footholds, we could swing across the four foot gap to the cliff and get up that way."

"But there aren't any holds," pointed out Alan, "so we may as well stop tormenting ourselves with those thoughts."

They went back into the chamber, sat down on the floor again. Anna said: "They give us a nice view, but they don't bother to give us any comfort. Just a bare room."

Benson snorted, sarcastically: "They're too damned high flown to bother with material comforts. I suppose they live Spartan lives themselves. The real truths—pah!"

Time dragged for them, there. All they had to do was gaze over the city, at the same monotonous view, the same green-tinted sky, the same sheering towers and spires.

They dozed once or twice; and once food, consisting of the roots and fruit, was brought to them. This time Benson ate.

When Benson looked at his watch for the tenth time, they found that twenty of their thirty periods had slipped away—

"What's that?" said Alan, sitting up with a start.

Benson grunted: "I can't hear anything—never is anything to hear up here!"

Alan said: "But there *was* something . . . a clattering noise. Did you hear it, Anna?"

She rubbed drowsy eyes. "I was dozing, Alan."

Alan said: "Listen—there it is *again*! Like—like a stone or something clattering on the balcony—"

Benson got to his feet. He said excitedly: "By God, it is a stone clattering on the balcony!"

The dull, metallic rattle sounded again. Eagerly they crowded out, stared upwards. Benson said: "Here're the stones—three of them—but what—?"

Alan cried: "Look!"

They peered blankly towards the edge of the cliff. A black, wide-eyed face peered down at them, surmounted by a kinky head of hair.

Alan shouted: "It's BAWALA!"

"How did he get here?" gasped the amazed Anna.

"What does it matter *how* he got here?" said Benson, his face lit up with hope. "Now he is here he may be able to help us . . . Bawala?"

"Sah?" said Bawala, cautiously, peering down.

"Can you get us out of here?"

"Me try, damn fine, sah," Bawala commented. "Me bring rope from kit, and gun. Me think may be useful."

"Rope," almost howled Benson. "Good man! If

you get us out of here, Bawala, I'll make you rich for life!"

Bawala grinned, a dusky grin, not untinged with fear. He said:

"If me not get you out of there, maybe me not have much life left, bas. Me try—you catch rope when me swing outwards—see if can climb up."

He started to swing the rope down—it reached the cliff side, directly opposite the balcony, easily. He swung it outwards and Benson grabbed it.

Benson said: "You go first, Clayton—you can help Bawala to haul your wife up—I'll come last. Quick, man, they may be in with food at any moment."

Alan nodded, and gripping the rope grimly, began to sway upwards towards Bawala. The rope was slender, the going hard. But at length he gained the cliff edge, and sank panting on to the ground.

At a word from Bawala, he rose again and took a grip on the rope. Together they heaved, and shortly Anna swung over the edge of the cliff, the rope tied about her waist.

Once more the rope went down; this time returned with Benson attached to it.

They were free!

"But we won't be for very long if we don't hurry," pointed out Alan, and Benson said:

"Do you know way, Bawala?"

Bawala nodded: "Once me come, me not forget."

"Good. Off you go—we'll follow."

Bawala leading, they began the trek across the hills at forced pace. Anna was weary from the strain of all they had been through, and had to be helped along by Alan. But they made good time, and only once had to take cover when a party of the winged men flew above them, heading for the city.

As they lay low, Alan said: "You certainly are a sight for sore eyes, Bawala. What happened to you?"

"Me see you with bird men, bas. Lie quiet, not like look of men. When they fly into air with you, me follow over mountains. Me know me cannot get back to own country unless me got you, so me have to follow whether like or not. Find city, lie low for many hours, watching to see where you be taken. After while bird men come from top of building with you, fly towards 'nother building on edge of city. Me watch them take you in, see you come out soon, walk round little ledge on building at top. Me crawl round cliffs until above you. Take long time, 'cos many bird men flying about city. Wait then until all quiet, throw stones. Now you here."

"You won't be sorry you followed us if we get back, I promise you," said Alan. "You'll be well paid for this, Bawala."

"Thank you, sah. What bird men do with you?"

"They meant to kill us!"

"Good job me come, then. Me glad not too late." Benson hissed: "They're out of sight now. Let's push on."

They passed the dead OOnas beast lying where it had fallen at the foot of the hills. Benson eyed it reluctantly, seemed loth to leave it. But their steps became lighter as they realised they were nearing the end of their journey.

Soon they were traversing the forest, heading swiftly towards the cage which they left so long ago. The weird trees undulated still, everything looked exactly as they had left it. They collected their fallen equipment on the way, and pushed on.

They broke through a knot of trees, and Benson cried: "It's there! Just as we left it! Thank God they didn't find it!"

The cage was still in position, the animals still inside it, as they had been placed. Now they had recovered from the effects of the drug, and Benson breathed: "Thank the Lord they didn't all snuff it like the OOnas beast. That would have been the limit."

Alan grunted: "Personally I couldn't care much less. All I want to do is get away from this crazy country before I'm in no state to get away. We should hurry—they may find out we've gone, must have found out by now, I should say."

His words were proved to be true the next minute, as they were entering the cage. Benson flung a hand high, pointing to a number of fast approaching specks in the sky.

"The winged men!"

Anna said: "Let's get in and pull that lever—if they get close enough to see us and put that will of theirs to stopping our movements, we're trapped!"

They fell into the cage, and Benson tumbled frantically over to the lever. The specks swooped suddenly in steep dives, and bore down upon the cage. They had seen the fugitives!

Alan shouted: "Benson—the lever, man! Quick!"

They could feel the gradual numbness creeping over their bodies as the winged men exercised their powers over matter. Benson gasped, hoarsely: "I—can't—"

It was *Bawala* who did the trick. Perhaps because he had not hitherto been in their power, perhaps because

his intelligence was not so developed as that of his employers; whatever it was he forced his black body across the cage, and though he dreaded to touch the lever, he gripped and pulled it—

Allan said: "Whew!"

Anna said: "I think that's about all the big game hunting I'm doing. Enough to last a life-time."

Benson grunted: "Anyhow, we have got some fine specimens here. Magnificent! Look at them!"

Alan snorted: "I couldn't bear to. The less I'm reminded of that world the better I'll be pleased."

Benson smiled, his old, jovial self again. "Now that it's all over, I hope you'll agree to be my guests for a time? Until we dispose of the beasts. What do you say?"

Alan said: "We'd be delighted. All right, Anna?"

And Anna nodded. Benson said: "Good. Then we'll get out of this cage and back to the villa. And the first move is to have a good, square meal!"

CHAPTER X

BUT BENSON NEVER DID

The following two weeks passed pleasantly enough, with Benson proving a charming host. He mentioned to them, some twelve days after they had returned from the strange Dimension, that he had already despatched invitations to the scientists and learned men who had once belittled his fanciful theorising, to make the trip to see his unbelievable collection of animals. As an added inducement he had included their return tickets to Africa.

The scorching days passed quickly, with Alan and Anna content to spend the balance of their trip basking in the Professor's charming hospitality.

Benson spent much of his time with his enlarged collection of beasts; and often, when passing the compound, Alan and his wife heard savage snarls and roars.

So fierce did the racket become, that once Alan muttered: "Sounds almost as if one of them was loose—"

For a wonder the entrance to the boma was open. They went carefully inside. Came to the rows of cages; Benson was standing outside the cage of the winged creature resembling a horse, was doing something with

a long stick, prodding through the bars with it. The creature was slaving and snapping, rearing upwards and unfurling and furling its wings in terrible fury.

Alan called: "Anything wrong, Professor?"

Benson started, turned quickly, and then threw aside the stick with a furtive movement. He said: "Er—no, no. Just pushing the animal's *meat* in, that's all."

"Meat? But I thought they were vegetarians?"

Benson muttered: "Yes, of course. But I feed them meat—I—er—feel it keeps them in choicer *condition*."

And there he obviously desired to let the matter drop, and led them from the boma, diverting the conversation to other topics.

But Alan was very thoughtful, the second he had left them. Anna noticed the frown, and said: "What's wrong *now*, darling? Aren't you happy? Want to go stalking elephant again?"

"I was thinking about Benson . . ."

"What the devil was he *doing* to that creature in there?"

Anna said, in surprise: "He said he was pushing the meat in."

"I know. And that's something *else*—"

Anna eyed him blankly: "What on earth are you *driving* at?"

Alan grunted: "The *stick*, for instance. Did you notice that it was *pointed* at one end? That that end was *stained*—with something red?"

"Of course I did. The point was obviously to stick into the food. The red was the blood from the raw meat."

"But did you notice that all along that winged thing's flanks there were tiny red stains—as if it had bled from superficial punctures *inflicted* upon it?"

Anna felt uneasy, but said: "You're mistaken—are you trying to say he was *tormenting* the animal?"

"From the noises we've heard lately I'd say he was tormenting them all, devilishly, and systematically!"

"Oh, Alan, you must be imagining things. He's such a jovial little man!"

"He's *deep*, though. I think his joviality's an act."

"But he'd have to be *mad* to want to do a thing like that, Alan. What good would it do him?"

Alan shook his head: "I don't know. He may be sadistically inclined. But haven't you sworn all along that he *was* mad?"

"Not in *that* way."

Alan said: "He's feeding those beasts *raw* meat. Why?"

"I wouldn't know unless it's as he said, and it will make them fitter."

"Hmm. Raw meat would make them fiercer, more bloodthirsty, even savage carnivorous *man-eaters*! Everything he does seems to be directed towards *one* end—to make them as ferocious as he can. I don't like it. Why should he do that?"

Anna suggested: "Maybe he thinks the more blood-thirsty they are, the more likely the showmen, he plans to sell to, will be to buy them at stiff prices. You know the stuff—wild beasts from another world. 'Savage man-eaters from Fourth Dimension. It wouldn't draw the crowds if all they had to show was a bunch of docile-looking sheep, of *whatever* shape or form."

Alan nodded, said: "That's an angle . . . but I think Benson will bear *watching*!"

The eminent men for whom Benson had sent, arrived a few days later in a bunch, due, probably, to the fact that Benson had forwarded tickets for the *same* boat to all of them.

There were four of them, and all the four had availed themselves of the opportunity to pay a visit.

It was likely that the few photographs Benson had forwarded of his strange menagerie, had helped to lure them away from their daily routine. Whatever it was, all were anxious to see the collection; all congratulated Benson on proving his point. And Benson said:

"Yes, gentlemen, I don't expect you feel like laughing *now*, do you? As you *once* did!"

"Oh, come, man, that was *long* ago. We admit we were wrong. Your photographs prove that—if you are not trying to pull our legs."

Benson's eyes glittered a little, and Alan caught the look.

"To-morrow you shall see if I am trying to—pull your legs, as you put it, Jennings."

Later, when they were momentarily alone, Alan said: "I'd rather like to come along with you to-morrow, Benson, and see the collection again."

Benson looked uneasy: "Well—can't you leave it until later? You see, I wish to enjoy my triumph over

these gentlemen to the full. I wish to be alone to witness their utter humiliation. They might not be so anxious to retract the remarks they made about me so long ago, in front of another party. You don't mind?"

It was a lame excuse, and Alan knew it. But he said, easily:

"Certainly not. Any time you suggest, Professor."

Benson seemed relieved, and the matter dropped there . . .

As far as he was concerned. But Alan was by no means satisfied. He saw absolutely no reason for the Professor's refusal to allow his to visit the boma at the same time as the learned men. The reason Benson had given seemed to him the feeblest story he had ever heard.

He said to Anna later that night: "I'm keeping my eyes on Benson, darling."

"So you told me before," yawned Anna. "I hope it keeps fine for you, dear."

"Don't fool. I think Benson's up to something—has some deep reason for bringing those men here and goading those beasts into their present state of savagery. I think there's a tie-up!"

"I think you're still imagining things, my sweet; for Heavens sake don't lead us into any more nasty situations. You know what you are when you get going."

Alan grunted: "Nevertheless I'm going to keep a very close eye on Professor Benson."

"Well, darling," yawned Anna, sliding the mosquito netting into position, "it's your eye, so do what you want with it. But don't ask me to join in with any more of your crazy ideas!"

It was likely that the few photographs Benson had forwarded of his strange menagerie, had helped to lure them away from their daily routine. Whatever it was, all were anxious to see the collection. All concentrated Benson on proving his point. And Benson said:

"Yes, gentlemen, I don't expect you feel like laughing now, do you? A year ago, when we were wrong. Your photographs prove that it was not trying to pull our legs."

Benson ever pictured a joke, and Alan caught the look.

The party of five came from the villa, paused, then struck off in the direction of the thorn boma, led by Benson.

Alan, watching from the verandah, hissed: "Quick, Anna. You'll find your rifle ready loaded just inside the villa door—I left it there for you."

Anna drawled: "Don't be silly, dear. I am not going to hunt any more elephants with you as guide!"

"This isn't a question of hunting elephants—I have a feeling it's far more serious than that. I may be wrong—but if I'm not the welfare of four men depends on us! So follow me and do as I say."

Anna sighed, rose: "I don't even pretend to understand," she told him. "The things you get me into!"

Meanwhile, the party of five had gained the boma, had passed inside, and were making for the cages. There were exclamations of great excitement as they beheld the weird collection imprisoned there. The beasts gathered at the front of the bars, roaring and snarling.

And in their excitement, they failed to notice the absence of their host!

But they were soon to be reminded of him, and not pleasantly. For from a microphone hanging to a high tree, came his voice:

"Having fun, gentlemen? Inspecting the specimens? Yes, indeed! For your information I myself am now outside the boma—you are inside, with the animals—LOCKED INSIDE! In one more moment I will throw a switch which will automatically open the cages before you! Those maddened beasts will pour out—and you will have the extreme embarrassment of being torn to pieces by creatures from a world in whose existence you had, at one time, no belief!"

"Yes, I planned all this—ever since I found the dimension! I thought it all out—I never forgot your gibes, your sneers, which did much to ruin by reputation among men of note! Now you may gibe all you wish—for you have not long to gibe—"

Realisation came to them; they were dealing with a lunatic! They turned, began to race back towards the gates. Benson, as if he knew their moves, warned: "To touch the gate now, or any part of the boma, means instant electrocution! The current is controlled from outside—and now, if you are ready—"

Their cries were lost, as they heard the heavy clang of metal bars snapping back. The creatures, enraged by Benson's previous tormenting, sprang out—

And on the outside of the boma Alan raced towards Benson, standing at the switch which had closed the gate. His fist streaked to the fat Professor's jaw, and Benson spun, fell . . . a second, and the gate was swinging wide. The four frightened men streamed out.

They were followed closely by one of the creatures from the cage, a pony-sized, sharp-toothed thing, with slavering red maw. Alan yelled:

"Shoot, Anna!" and as the shot rang out he reclosed the gate in the very teeth of the pursuing mob!

Benson was coming to his feet, white with rage. The four men were panting outside the gate. Anna's steady marksmanship had told, and the only beast to escape lay dead, shot through the brain.

And then there was a revolver in Benson's hand, and it was levelled at Alan, and his finger was squeezing the trigger—

There was a commotion behind the boma—soaring downwards over the high thorns, the electric wires, came the winged, horse-beast!

It directed itself at Benson, and in panic he raised the gun to fire at this new menace. His shots missed in his haste—the thing was almost on top of the man, who had tormented it for so long, now; he dropped the gun with a scream of terror, turned, and tore through the trees . . .

Alan reached the clearing where stood the cage into the fourth dimension, just as Benson, with the winged monster on his heels, threw himself inside, and turned to slam the gate . . . He was too late. The creature

was inside, *with him*, and was lunging forward. Benson felt giant teeth meet in his arm, crunching the bone—he shrieked, threw himself backwards. His elbow slapped against the control lever . . .

In another second there was nothing to be seen but a deserted clearing!

Benson was gone, with his attacker, back to the other world!

And although a watch was kept for four days for the return of the cage, it was never seen again.

As Alan said to Anna, that same night:

"If the winged men were watching that clearing in case of any return by Earth men, Benson would not escape *again*—they would take him—unless, of course, the winged beast had killed him *first*! And if they then destroyed the cage—the secret is destroyed with Benson. If you ask me, I don't think Benson will *ever* come back!"

And Benson never did come back!

THE END

CHAD SAYS

WOT NO LUCK!



SILLY

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