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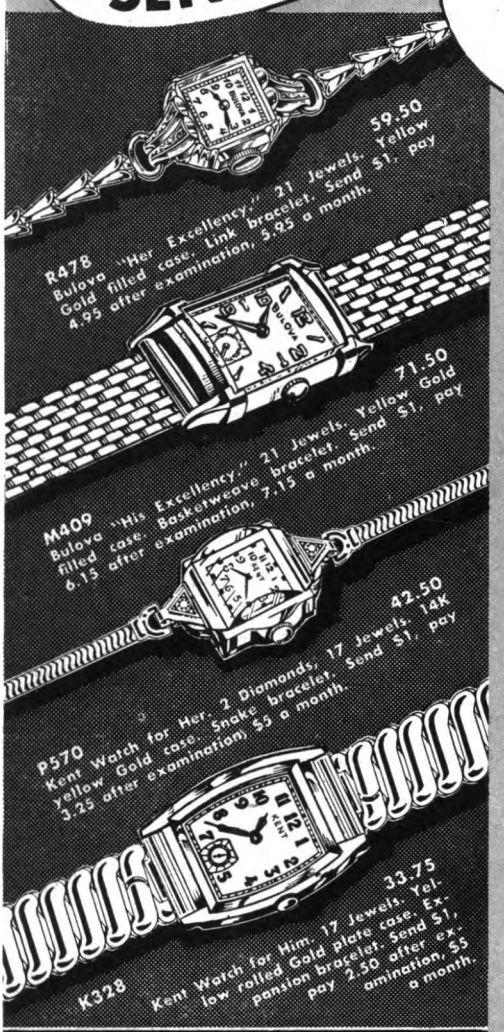

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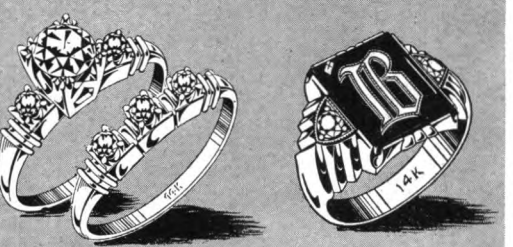

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Famous FANTASTIC Mysteries

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VOL. 9 APRIL, 1948 No. 4

Book-Length Novel

Novelette

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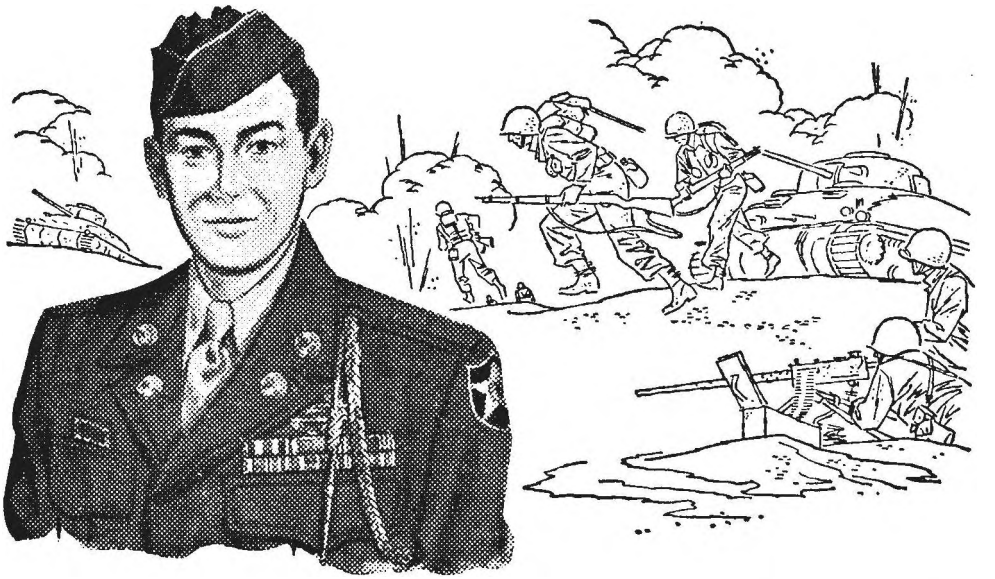

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The Readers' Viewpoint

Address comments to the Letter Editor, Famous Fantastic Mysteries, All-Fiction Field, Inc., 205 East 42nd St., New York 17, New York

F.N. A SURE SUCCESS!

Dear Editor:

Your news, announcing the reappearance of F.F.M.'s sister magazine, *Fantastic Novels*—with Munsey tales—was, to me, the most sensational event in Fantasy, in years. It's positive to be a successful venture, for readers have longed for these long unavailable stories.

You know better than I do how great has been the demand for Merritt's "The Ship of Ishtar"—and, oh!—how many others lie ahead! I imagine that some of these tales are almost legendary, to younger fans.

Famous Fantastic Mysteries is, as it stands, the aristocrat and majority favorite, I think, in the present field, and with this return of its sister magazine, Popular Publication's place in the hearts of Fantasy lovers is forever assured.

When I think of what is a literal host of great tales, from Munsey's, my cup of anticipation darned near runs over—such "lost" stories (lost until now) as "The Treasures of Tantalus," "After a Million Years," "Lords of Creation," "Caves of Ocean," "The Copper Princess," "Draft of Eternity," "The Eye of Balamok," "Sea Demons"—and so many other novels by great Fantasy writers, plus a veritable legion of short tales for fillers by distinguished writers.

Everyone is going to be breathless wondering what story will be picked for each succeeding F.N. . . . It's grand news! I, for one, am extremely happy about it. Also, "The Ship of Ishtar," featuring the March issue of F.N., has always been my favorite Merritt tale.

THYRIL L. LADD.

33 Cuyler Ave.,
Albany 2, N. Y.

Editor's Note: The March issue of Fantastic Novels is on the newsstands now.

ARTIST-READER

Have been enjoying F.F.M. for a very long time. But this time I thought I'd instill a little fun amid all the letters you have to read, and send you a cartoon.

"The Man Who Went Back" by Warwick Deeping is one of the too few good stories that come our way. More if you please!

CHARLES E. KROMA.

317 Manmee St.
Toledo 9, Ohio.

GIESY STORY IN NEXT F.N.

I have just heard that you intend to resume publication of *Fantastic Novels* with the famous Munsey classics. This is the best news I have heard for a long time in the Fantasy field.

Will you schedule for early publication "Jason, Son of Jason" by J. U. Giesy, the last of the complete stories in the Palos trilogy? As you may know, this story is almost impossible to obtain anywhere, and I know many of your readers would like to get this one.

Suitable for F.F.M., I would suggest "Green Fire" by John Taine, "When the World Shook" by Haggard, "Maker of Moons" by Chambers and "Jewel of the Seven Stars" by Stoker.

L. W. ROWE.

19 Essex Ave.,
Metuchen, N. J.

Editor's Note: "Jason, Son of Jason" will appear in the next (May) issue of Fantastic Novels.

By Charles E. Kroma

FANTASTIC NOVELS IS BACK!

Thanks for the swell news that *Fantastic Novels* is back on the stands. This is the first real news that has come out of the science fiction field since the war. The choice of "The Ship of Ishtar" was an excellent one.

GERRY DE LA REE.

9 Bogert Pl.,
Westwood, N. J.

CONGRATULATIONS!

Congratulations—best news in years—*Fantastic Novels* back again!

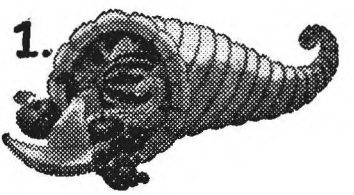
WALTER DUNKELBERGER,
EDITOR, FANEWS.

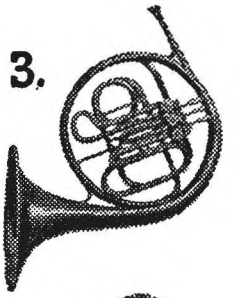
1443 Fourth Ave., South,
Fargo, North Dakota.

DEEPING'S STORY FINE

Thanks for a swell story in F.F.M. I never read much of Deeping's, but if "The Man Who

(Continued on page 122)





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(It may mean money to you!)

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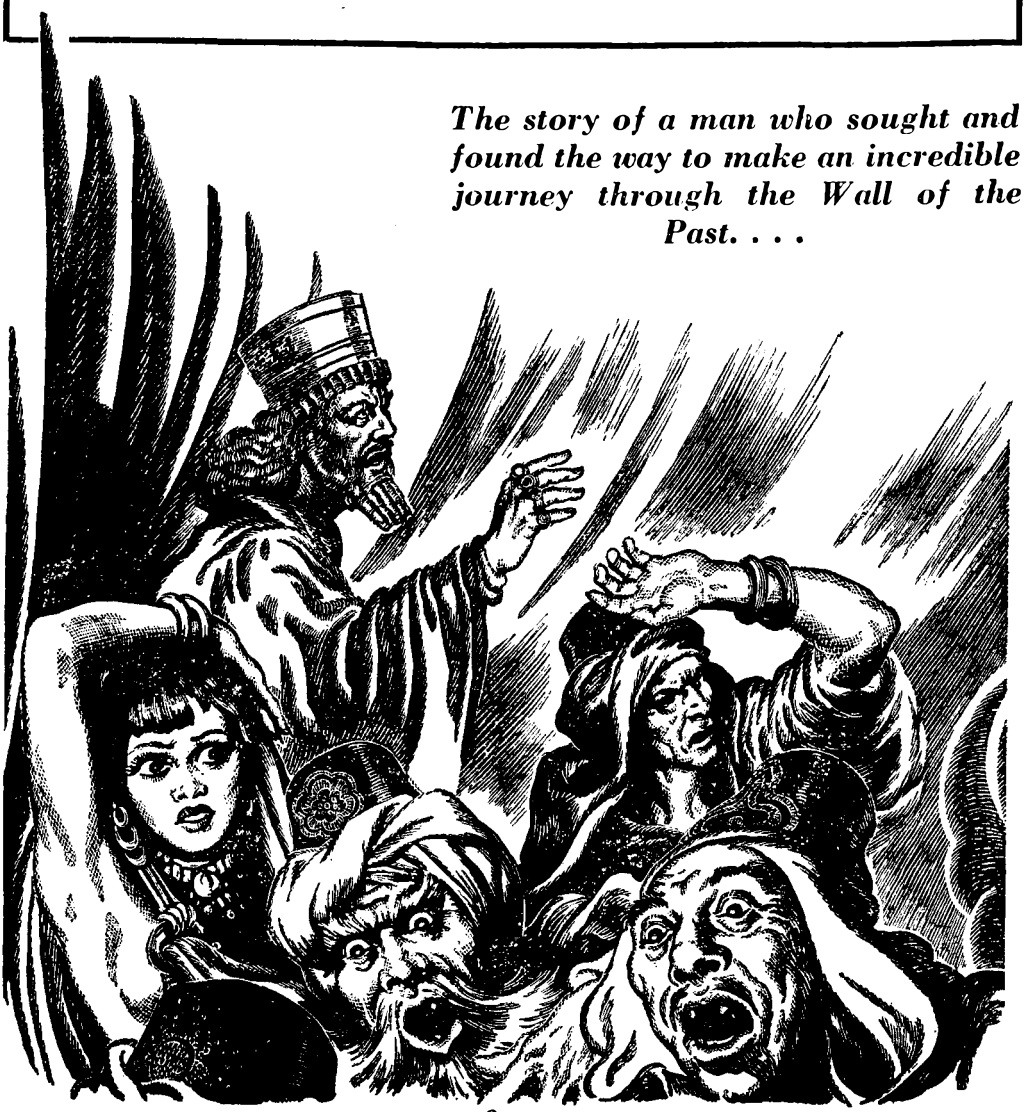
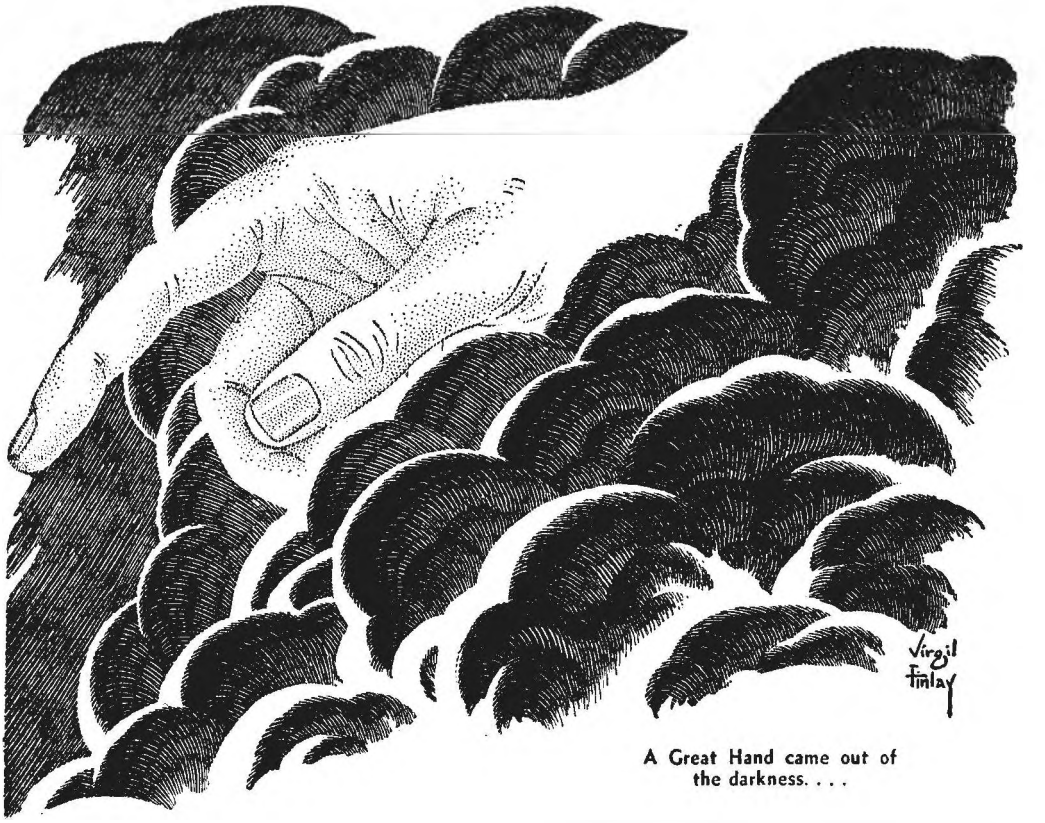
The story of a man who sought and found the way to make an incredible journey through the Wall of the Past. . . .





A Great Hand came out of the darkness. . . .

CHAPTER I

THE WIZARD OF SCIENCE

"THIS is exceedingly interesting!" exclaimed Joseph Muller, drawing his chair nearer to the window, to obtain a better light upon the newspaper in his hand.

The well-known detective was enjoying an hour of unwonted leisure in his own rooms in Vienna. His modest lodgings were located in a quiet residential quarter of the town. Through the open window came a flood of warm sunshine, bringing a hint of spring, although the trees were still bare. The chirping quarrels of the birds added to the sense of country quiet.

"Most interesting," murmured Muller again.

The item of news which had so caught his attention was a despatch from Stockholm.

Professor Clusius, the Wizard of Science, threw out hints of a remarkable new discovery in his lecture at the University yesterday. Without going into technical details, the noted scientist stated that he believed it possible to find some process by which faded writing or colours could be restored to a surface on which they had been impressed. and also, any shadows or light impressions thrown on the surface by forms passing over or near it at any time. Professor Clusius would not make any more definite statement concerning the process by which such astonishing results could be obtained. But he told his hearers that he was about to start on a journey to the Orient, in the course of which he hoped to perfect his experiments sufficiently to give out decisive information on his return. Professor Clusius' standing in the world of science makes such promises from him of vital importance. Even outside scientific circles, the world will eagerly await his return from his voyage of research.

"To bring back lost writing—to restore even the shadows of the forms which have passed before any surface—marvelous—hardly credible!" Muller spoke half

By Augusta Groner

aloud in his excitement. "Why, it would be one of the greatest discoveries of all time! Think what I could do with such a process to help me in my work—" Then he laughed aloud and his grey eyes twinkled. "Still, I don't know—if it should prove possible, where would I be? Anybody could do detective work then with the shadow-story of the crime unrolling itself before him. But the idea is fascinating—it would be a revealing of hidden mysteries such as has never been heard of before."

The detective leaned back in his chair, looking up at the clear blue sky over which occasional fleecy white clouds floated. "I wonder—if I had a chance in life—if I had been able to study, to delve into the mysteries of science—I wonder if then I could have done some little even of what this man does. I have imagination and the power to command its services—I can see what others do not see. But I feel so often the lack of early study. The thought of what the genius of a man like Clusius can do for the world is wonderful—wonderful."

The jingle of a bell outside penetrated Muller's reverie. He sat up and waited, and a moment or two later there was a tap at his door.

"Someone for you, sir," said his landlady, opening the door sufficiently to admit the substantial form of an attendant from the police station.

"Letter from Commissioner von Riedau, Mr. Muller," said the man. "I'm to take back a reply."

Muller glanced hastily at the few lines of writing.

"Tell Commissioner von Riedau I will come over at once."

WHEN the messenger had bowed himself out, Muller took up the newspaper that had fallen to the floor. "Sorry! I should have enjoyed a few days of rest, and I think I should have spent them in studying up a little on what Professor Clusius has already done. The hall-mark of genius like that is his intuition, his winged imagination that can bring light into darkness. And how enviable in that he dOesn't have to delve into the depths of human misery to do it, either, or to destroy human life to prove his own ability. Well—I mustn't keep the commissioner waiting."

"Sorry to have to send for you, Muller, for you've earned a rest after your work on this last case," said Commissioner von Riedau, when the detective stood before him. "But it's nothing very difficult this time. In fact you can look on it as a vacation with expenses paid. Sit down and I'll explain."

Muller took a seat with his usual expression of quiet deference.

"This isn't a case at all," continued the commissioner. "It's the sort of thing on which we don't usually waste people like you. But there's no one else at leisure who can be trusted, and I thought you might like a little jaunt. I have a private request here from London, from Scotland Yard, asking that a Secret Service man of trusted ability be sent to accompany the celebrated scientist, Professor Clusius, while the latter is passing through Austrian territory."

"Professor Clusius of Stockholm?" asked Muller quickly.

"Yes, do you know him?"

"Only by reputation, as does all the world. I never saw him."

"I wish you had seen him, for according to our information the professor and his companions are likely to travel incognito to avoid publicity. The professor is on his way to the Orient on a special mission of research."

"Relating to his new discovery—the details of which have not yet been published," said Muller.

"Muller, you always manage to surprise me! Now how did you know that?"

"Merest chance this time," replied the detective with a cheery smile. "I was reading about it in the papers just as you sent for me."

"Professor Clusius is so famous that his incognito is likely to be discovered. There's always some crank ready to make such a well-known man a mark for his envy, or his crazy revenge. Even curiosity can sometimes prove harmful. Protection is asked for the professor, but he must not know that he is being guarded, nor must anyone else know it. I leave the choosing of your disguise to you, as usual."

"You said the request came from Scotland Yard, sir. Professor Clusius is a Swede. How come the English police to ask protection for him?"

"It does sound queer, but the explanation is easy. The protection is asked not only for Professor Clusius, but for Lord Richard Tannemore, a well known English nobleman, who is traveling with the professor."

"Tannemore? Where have I heard that name?" said Muller. "It was in connection with some recent police news."

"Good Heavens, Muller, don't let anyone hear you say such a thing!" exclaimed the commissioner. "Lord Tannemore is a brother of the Earl of Wrexham, and is a scholar of note himself, an archaeologist, I understand—with special knowledge of Assyrian antiquity."

"All the same—yes—Assyria, that's it. It was in connection with the breakdown of Burton, one of the best detectives Scotland Yard ever had. I remember it now. Lord Tannemore—that is the man—proclaimed his belief that some collection of antiquities recently purchased by the British Museum was not genuine. It made talk and Burton was put on the case by Lord Tannemore. He could not bring any proof of the forgery and broke down completely over it, lost his mind. It wasn't so very long ago—about a year, I think. I wonder if Professor Clusius' journey has anything to do with this matter?"

"I couldn't say. There was nothing in the despatch from London to that effect."

"A little imagination can help even in reading despatches," thought Muller. But he said nothing and listened as respectfully as before while his chief continued:

"The despatch states that information will be sent us by the Swedish police as soon as the actual route taken by the professor and his party is known, and the names that they have chosen to travel under. They will be obliged to obtain their passports and thus make their intentions known to the Swedish authorities. Be ready to start at any moment. Thus far we know only that they intend to enter Syria by way of Beyrout. You need not go any further than that point with them."

"Please give me indefinite leave of absence, Commissioner. I may want to go further than Beyrout; something may turn up."

"It isn't likely, but if you want the time, take it. You have earned a vacation. Our department has had secret orders for some time to pay particular attention to any request for assistance that might come from England. We are told to be particularly polite to English wishes. That's another reason why I am sending you on this job. You don't mind going, do you?" asked the commissioner, somewhat anxiously.

"Not in the least. In fact it will be most interesting to make the personal acquaintance, unofficially, of such a noted scholar. Have you read anything about the professor's newest discovery?"

"No; what is it?"

"Some process he has invented by which he hopes to restore lost writings—to make it possible even to call up on any surface the shadows of the figures which have passed between it and the light at any time, no matter how long before. You can imagine what that would mean for our department, Commissioner. If this thing is feasible we can see the whole process of a murder, for instance, worked out in shadows on the wall of the room where it occurred."

"Impossible," declared the commissioner. "The thing can't be done. These scientists have their visions, but precious few of them are ever translated into a form that will make them of use for us ordinary mortals. We of the police have to deal with facts, not visions."

"And yet even we need the Vision. What would the world be without the Vision?" murmured Muller.

CHAPTER II

THE MIDNIGHT VISIT

PROFESSOR CLUSIUS put down his pen and looked at his watch.

"Midnight!" he murmured. "I had no idea it was so late. I must not work any more to-night."

With a half-regretful sigh the noted Swedish scientist pushed back his desk chair, rose and walked slowly to the window.

The great park-like garden surrounding Professor Clusius' home on one of the islands of Stockholm was famed throughout his own city and far beyond its liimts. Trees and flowers from every zone grew there, braving the northern climate as if sustained by some miraculous power. And indeed popular opinion ascribed miraculous power to the man who lived there, the great explorer in the realm of science, whose world-fame was his country's proudest boast.

As he stood now at the broad window of his study looking out into the garden the far-off hum of city traffic came faintly, even in the stillness of an early spring night. It was as if the busy bustling town were loath to disturb the labours or the repose of her greatest citizen.

Clusius pressed a button by the window. "Put out the lights in the large drawing-

room, Klaus," he said to the servant who appeared. "I am tired and can see no one this evening."

"There are three reporters waiting outside, sir," replied Klaus. "The gentlemen from the New York *Herald* want to cable some particulars about your latest discovery. What shall I tell them?"

"Ask Mr. Lund to receive the gentlemen. He may be able to give them the information they want. Do not let anyone disturb me to-night—no one, you understand? And now good-night, Klaus."

His subconscious mind still struggling with the problem that engrossed him, Clusius fell into an uneasy slumber. Scarce an hour later he became aware of a timid but persistent knocking at the door. He turned over, annoyed, and called out, "What is it?"

Klaus entered apologetically.

"There's a gentleman come, sir. I told him you didn't want to see anyone else to-night—but he says it's very important."

"Who is it?" asked Clusius angrily.

"Lord Tannemore, sir; he says that he must see you."

Clusius sat up in bed.

"That's a different matter," he exclaimed. "I wouldn't see His Majesty himself to-night, but I am always ready to see Lord Tannemore. Hand me those clothes, Klaus—then light up the study—quickly now."

Ten minutes later, Professor Clusius entered his study, holding out both hands in eager welcome to the man who stood there. The visitor was a tall, fine looking Englishman, with the features and bearing of an aristocrat, but with the eyes and brow of a scholar. He was suffering from a depression of spirit which even his well-bred repose could not quite control. But his weary eyes lit with a smile of true pleasure as he stepped forward and clasped his host's hands firmly in both his own.

"Richard—I'm so glad, so glad you have come," exclaimed Clusius heartily.

Tannemore's fine face grew grave again as he gazed long and earnestly into the eyes of the great scientist.

"Then your friendship for me is as warm as ever?" he said. "But why should I ask? —a man like you cannot change. I have come now to make a demand on your friendship—I am in sore trouble—"

"My dear Richard!" replied Clusius eagerly. "Our friendship did not spring from any need we might have for each other—but it would not be friendship if we did not know that we could depend upon one another in time of need. All that I am and have are at your service. Tell me your trouble."

Clusius pulled an armchair close to the sofa, pushed his friend down into it and settled himself in the sofa corner. Now as the light fell clear on the handsome face opposite him, the scientist noted its lines of deep weariness, and noted also that Tannemore's ease of manner was assumed. Beneath it the soul of the man was bearing some heavy burden.

Clusius laid his hand gently on the other's arm. "Tell me everything," he murmured.

After a moment's pause Tannemore began to speak, calmly and dispassionately.

"I should not have come to you at this unseemly hour, without announcing my coming, had it not been important. I am helpless to save myself—I need your aid—it is a matter of life and death—even more than that. To-day is the fourth of March, is it not? Very well, then; on the sixth of August of this year, I shall find myself compelled, wherever I may be at that time, to send a message to my wife, telling her she may never see me alive again, telling her whether I can return to England—with the honour of my name free from stain." He paused again and sat staring into blankness, his eyes heavy with despair.

"The honour of your name?" murmured Clusius surprised. "What could ever touch that?"

"Yes, the honour of my name is in danger," whispered Tannemore in a low tone.

Clusius shook his head and leaned back again in his sofa corner. "You must exaggerate—no one who knows you could believe that you would ever do anything to cloud the honour of your proud name. But whatever the trouble is you may depend upon me for help. What is it that you want me to do?"

"I want you to save my honour—my life, too, possibly, but that is the lesser matter. I am almost afraid to ask it of you, and yet if anyone can do it, you can—you who can work miracles. Let me tell you the story from the beginning that you may understand it clearly. In the British Muesum, second story—"

"Mesopotamian antiquities," cut in the professor.

"Yes. In room 7, second division—"

"District of the Lower Euphrates." Clusius smiled in interested animation.

TANNEMORE smiled also. "I see you are entirely at home there. Well, then, in the first row of glass cases, case 3, there are—"

"Clay tablets from Birs i Nimrud—"

"The tablets to the left—"

"Cuneiform inscriptions," supplemented the professor eagerly.

Tannemore nodded. "Exactly. When were you there last?"

"Seven years ago."

"Oh, that's too bad."

"Why?"

"If you were there now you would see something—something monstrous."

"What?"

"Babylonian tablets that—but let me go back again in my story. You know those modest-looking, fascinating bricks in case 3, the tablets which bear on their surface the mystery of three milleniums? None of the great scholars, not even Rawlinson the peerless, can decipher them completely. You know how we all, we archaeologists, have been working over these stones, striving to wring from them the secret which they hide, the secret of a lost language. As you know, we have succeeded in part only. One thing we do know—"

"That the script is hieratic," Clusius completed.

"Yes, that is the point," said Tannemore solemnly. "We know that it is a style of cuneiform writing considered sacred in Mesopotamia, writing used only by priests and scholars. Now over a year ago, while I was in the Highlands, news came to me that the government had purchased, for an enormous sum, a collection of Babylonian antiquities, gold, gems and stones. The seller was William Bridgeport, an archaeologist of some repute. The price he asked was far beyond the cost of all other material ever found in the neighbourhood of Birs i Nimrud. He based his exorbitant demands on the contention that his tablets showed a new style of writing, the *demotic* cuneiform, something never before discovered in that region. The government had refused at first to pay so much and the hesitation cost dear. For when the decision to acquire the collection was finally made, Bridgeport's business representative, a man by the name of Redfowles, demanded double the original sum asked.

"I hurried to London at once on receipt of the news and went directly from the station to the museum. The new stones filled my thoughts so completely that I found myself, as I ascended the stairs, looking into my own sister's face without recognizing her. Then at last I stood before the new wonder, and—at the very first glance—I felt—I knew beyond a doubt —that they were falsifications—that they were a blatant forgery."

Tannemore paused, breathless, waiting for his friend to speak. But Clusius sat silent, his head resting on his hand, and the Englishman took up his story again.

"For a whole week I tried to persuade myself that I had been mistaken. Then I called on our friend Kingsby, the new director of the museum, and asked his permission to make an examination of the tablets. 'It has been done most thoroughly already,' he told me. I revealed my doubts and he assured me that our leading Assyriologists had studied the bricks carefully before the purchase was made. But he had no objection to another examination and let me take the stones. Rumours of my doubts got about in scientific circles, and Redfowles, who had arranged the sale, called on me one day. He declared that I had insulted him and his friend Bridgeport by my expressed opinion, and challenged me to a duel."

"And you want me to be your second?" cried Clusius, looking up. "Gladly—gladly —depend on me."

"No, that isn't it," replied Tannemore. "I thank you deeply for your offer, my friend, but it is a greater service than that which I ask of you. What possible good could a duel serve? Should I fall, how could I prove the truth of my assertion? By a chance quiver of my hand Bridgeport and Redfowles would be vindicated, and could laugh all honest archaeologists to shame. No, I will not fight them in that absurd way—I will expose them! That is, I have hoped to expose them." A bitter smile wreathed his lips. "And in this hope I drew up a formal contract with Redfowles on August sixth of the year before last. By the terms of the contract I was to have two years to prove the truth of my assertion that the inscription on the tablets was a forgery. Could I prove it, Redfowles was to make open acknowledgement of the fraud, and of course, the money should be restored to the Museum. If I could not prove it, I must acknowledge openly that—that I made a false accusation."

Lord Tannemore's voice was quite even and steady when he reached this point in his story. With scarcely a perceptible

pause he continued, "And now, after many months of work, I find myself compelled to acknowledge that I cannot prove the fraud, although I am as convinced as ever that it is a fraud. I know those stones are forged. And yet—on the sixth of next August I shall be compelled to confess myself guilty of public libel, an irrevocable stain on my name—a stain that—that I can scarcely outlive unless—" Tannemore breathed deeply. "Unless you—"

"Unless I can help you expose the fraud," Clusius said calmly.

"That is what I came to ask of you—came at this hour. I should not have disturbed you for a lesser cause. For the first time in this year and a half of research I am worried and anxious—I will confess it to you. I left London on an impulse—in the press of an uncontrollable desire to see you. I took the quickest route and come now directly from the station to you—to your house—"

"That was right—you did right to come to me." Clusius caught his friend's hand. "It was good of you to think of me in your trouble, Richard; it shows me that you do indeed look on me as your friend. I will try to deserve your trust. Then I am to prove that you are right? Surely, that's my work—to discover what is hidden from others. I *will* prove that you are right—that is," his voice grew grave, "if it can be proven."

"Yes—if it *can* be proven." Tannemore's smile was forced.

"I know it can be proven," declared Clusius brightly.

Tannemore pressed his friend's hand warmly, and his intelligent eyes softened. "If it had been a personal matter only, I should never have troubled you. Even though my honour is at stake—the unspotted honour of my family name—and my own personal reputation as an archaeologist. But the tablets, the false tablets! Is it not unendurable to think that they should lie there beside the true ones, equally honoured and admired?—that unless the fraud can be exposed they will rest there for future generations to see?"

"It must be exposed," said the professor calmly. "No such falsehood must endure to confuse science throughout the years."

"Exactly," exclaimed Tannemore eagerly. "Imagine our best men giving years to the effort to unriddle this writing; or—the thing has been done so cleverly—imagine letting this untruth be written into history."

"It must not be! It must not be!" cried Clusius, the fire of the true scholar shining in his eyes.

The Englishman laid his arm affectionately about his famous friend's shoulders, as he asked with grave tenderness, "Then you trust me fully? You believe what I say even when I tell you that I cannot find a single fact to prove my assertion?"

Clusius answered in the calm, balanced tone of a teacher laying down an axiomatic rule.

"There are some statements, the truth of which must be judged partly by the mental and moral worth of him who makes them. There is something in intuition even in the field of exact science. I know you as a scholar of high repute. I should consider any opinion of yours worth a careful investigation."

"Then you will help me—you will?" Tannemore's voice was hoarse with emotion.

"I will help you," declared Clusius definitely.

Tannemore rose, pressed his friend's hand. His lips trembled and he did not trust himself to speak.

Into the tense silence of the room a clock struck sharply, once. Another answered from the room beyond, and still another. The succession of sudden sounds roused Tannemore into self-control. He laughed and stepped back a pace.

"Your clocks insist on being heard," he said.

"The hint is not intended for my friends," said the professor. "It is designed for an excuse to rid myself of tiresome, formal visitors. We will send Klaus to the hotel for your man and your luggage, Richard. You must stop here while you are in Stockholm. I understand the gravity of this matter, my friend, but I trust you, and I will help you if it is in my power to do so."

"It looks now as if only a miracle could save me," replied Tannemore gravely; "but you can work miracles."

THE FOLLOWING morning Professor Clusius and Lord Tannemore sat together over a late breakfast in the scientist's favourite morning room. It was a light, airy apartment with walls and roof of glass. The tree-tops in the park outside arched over their heads, and through the bare branches the pale sunlight flashed a gleam from the near waters of Lake Malar.

There was a third man present, Hjalmar Lund, the professor's chief assistant. In

spite of the very considerable attainments which had won him so favoured a position, Lund was not yet thirty years of age, and was furthermore very good to look upon. Whenever his presence was required at the professor's public lectures and demonstrations, the younger women of Stockholm society developed a noticeable and commendable desire for scientific knowledge. Lund's personal triumphs were farthest from his thoughts this morning, however, as he sat with his clear honest blue eyes fixed on the face of the great scholar whose devoted disciple he was.

Clusius pushed back his chair a little from the table. "Now we can begin," he remarked.

His two companions sat up eagerly and waited in an attitude of respectful attention. Outside, the faint sunshine grew paler still as a white sea-fog rolled slowly in over the lake. Clusius had fallen into deep meditation, and the others scarcely dared to breathe in fear of disturbing the train of his thoughts.

Finally he spoke. "Now we can begin," he repeated. "Lund, I want you to take part in our conference. Lord Tannemore has told you of the matter in hand, I suppose."

Lund nodded, and the professor continued, turning to his guest, "and now, Richard, will you be so good as to tell us in detail just what you have already done to prove the forgery of the inscription? Your first impulse, I suppose, was to enlist police assistance?"

"Exactly," replied Tannemore. "I engaged Burton, the cleverest Secret Service man in England, and sent to America for the famous Josiah Kingfleth to help him. They were liberally supplied with money and a big reward was the further price of success. For eight months these two men devoted themselves entirely to the case. At the end of that time Burton was committed to an asylum, hopelessly insane. Kingfleth gave up the case in despair and went home to resign his official position, in shame at his defeat."

"And then your part of the work began."

"Yes. Then I began my scientific investigation."

"I am taking for granted that you went over the ground thoroughly? In Mesopotamia, I mean."

"Surely. I realized that I must first of all know positively whether or not real tablets bearing such script could be found in that neighbourhood. Had I found any, it would of course have been one proof less in my favour. But it would have diminished the value of Bridgeport's collection, a value based on the assumption that there were no more such stones in existence. This, of course, was his best security against exposure. For who could prove that the demotic writing did *not* exist at the period in question? I found no proof anywhere that it *did* exist—but that is no proof of its non-existence. My investigations did not give me a single proof that I needed—but they strengthened my own belief that these stones are forgeries."

"I agree with you there," said the professor.

"I left literally no stone unturned in that region," continued Tannemore. "With thirty good men to help me I spent nearly a year of constant labour in Assyria, Media and Babylonia."

"You examined the rock walls of Birutun?" asked Clusius.

Tannemore nodded. "We studied every mark on them up to the very top."

"And the mud of the Euphrates bottoms. There have been isolated stones found there."

"I had it dredged for miles."

"Then we must go back to the collection itself. You tried out the gold of the ornaments?"

"It is gold of Ophir, used to-day in some places, but used in ancient Assyria also."

"And the tablets? Their composition?"

"They are perfect in weight, thickness and composition. They might be made either of clay from Birs i Nimrud, or of Eckbatana earth." Tannemore sighed, then set his teeth hard.

Lund looked at Clusius, who shook his head and relapsed into silence, but not for long this time.

"The cuneiform writing," he explained, "is cut into the surface of the stone. Any metal instrument used for such purpose will become blunted and leave some of its substance in the stone. Did you look for filings in the corners of the letters? Anything that would show that the stones had been cut by chisels of bessemer steel?"

"I thought of that also," replied the Englishman. "I found some minute particles and assayed them. They were iron filings, soft pig iron of a kind that Cambyses or Darius might have used. No, my dear Professor, I have done all that and I can do no more. All my labour has resulted only in apparent proof of the genuineness of the tablets—and yet—and yet—" Tan-

nemore's eyes flashed, his lips curved over his set teeth—"and yet I know positively that they are forged."

There was deep silence in the room again, stirred only by the slight movement made by Clusius as he buttoned his coat. The ticking of the watch in his pocket had disturbed him. Lund's blue eyes darkened with doubt, but he would not let himself believe that there was any problem his revered master could not solve.

Still Clusius sat silent and the others waited. Then he began slowly, "You say you have found no proofs of the fraud either among the ruins of Mesopotamia or in the tablets themselves? What shall we do next, then? I hope you will both agree with me when I suggest that we take the straightest, simplest road to prove the forgery. We will look on at the writing of the demotic script in Assyria—over five thousand years ago. Pardon the apparent anachronism. We will see how the demotic script was written then, and we will compare it with the inscription on Bridgeport's stones."

Tannemore turned pale. He remembered that Detective Burton's keen mind had become unhinged over this problem, and his own brain turned dizzy for a moment. But Hjalmar Lund gazed at his master with frank and complete confidence.

Before either of the men could speak, Klaus entered the room to announce that the professor's carriage was waiting. He had brought his master's hat and coat with him.

Tannemore stifled a feeling of disappointment as Clusius calmly arose, remarked that he could not very well give up this last lecture, nodded to his friends and left the room.

The others sat as he had left them for some minutes. Finally the Englishman spoke, more uncertainly than was his wont. "Mr. Lund, you heard the professor's last words, did you not?"

"Certainly, Lord Tannemore."

"And did you—understand them?"

"Why, yes."

"Understand them entirely, I mean?"

"Why yes—at least I think so."

"Then—then perhaps you will be kind enough to repeat them to me. I fancy I did not hear them quite correctly."

"Surely," answered Lund brightly. "I shall be very glad to repeat the Master's words to you. He said, 'We will look on at the writing of the demotic script in Assyria, over five thousand years ago.' "

"Then he truly said it?"

"Those were his exact words."

"Well—what—what do you make of them?" Lund smiled a cheery and most becoming smile. "Why—'we will look on' —future tense."

"Yes, first person plural."

"And 'at the writing of the demotic script'—"

"Present tense," finished Tannemore.

"Well, then—your lordship heard quite correctly."

"Yes, yes—the grammatic sense, of course—but I didn't understand their meaning, did you?"

Lund laughed openly. "No more than you did. But I'm not troubling my head as to the why and wherefore of it. If Professor Clusius says he will do a thing, he does it, no matter how impossible it may sound to others. He sees more than others—and his dreams come true. We may not understand his words, Lord Tannemore, but they were carefully chosen. He made a promise to us and he has never yet failed to fulfill a promise."

ABOUT an hour later Lund and Lord Tannemore entered the hall of the University where Professor Clusius was lecturing to crowded benches. Beside the student hearers, his audience, as always, comprised diplomats, senators, white-haired scholars and high dignitaries of the Court and the city. His friends came just in time to hear the professor say, "Our talk of to-day closes the present subject. My next lecture will be held four months later, for I have just been granted leave of absence for that length of time to undertake an important experiment. If there is any further point concerning our subject of to-day that any of you would like explained more in detail, I beg that you will come to me before next Wednesday. I shall be leaving town, my friends, on Thursday."

The Minister of Public Education rose from his seat on one of the foremost benches.

"Would it be possible, revered professor," he asked, "to give us some little hint as the nature of your planned experiments? I ask this not in my ministerial capacity, but merely as one of your pupils. We all wish to follow you in thought, however humbly.

"Surely," answered Clusius; "I will gladly say a few words which may give you an idea of the lines along which I am

intending to work. Suppose some historian, some writer of family chronicles, some learned monk, let us say, several centuries ago, had recorded his own knowledge and experience in words painted in colour on parchment. A single drop of water would obliterate a word forever—a spilt glass of wine would throw an entire family into oblivion. From sunlight alone, throughout the changing years, many a monument of monkish industry has faded into illegibility. And yet how interesting it would be, could we read the story on many a faded page in these old tomes.

"Now, listen carefully, gentlemen. The pigments and the ink used for these old writings have not thrown their impression of light and shade only on the retina of the eyes bent to read them. They have left also an impress of light and shadow on the paper upon which they were formed. For the portions of the pages covered by the writing could not take in the same quantity of light as did the vacant spaces. If we may call the picture thrown on our eyes by a written letter its *positive* impression—then we may say, by contrast, that the impress left on the covered or darkened portion of the paper is its negative picture or impression. Now even in a case in which all the writing had faded out of sight, do we not know that this negative impression must still be there? The problem, therefore, is to force the paper to give up the secret of light and shaded spaces. If we could do this then we could read lost writing, then we could cause the invisible to become visible again—then we could see shapes and shadows of men a thousand years dead—

"I am trying to make this possible," continued the professor after a slight pause in which he replaced a bottle he had upset by a gesture. "With what result I will tell you in my next lecture. If I succeed—then we may be able to read the verse scribbled in charcoal on the base of the Memnom column four thousand years ago by some lovelorn Egyptian. If I do not succeed, then another will—other men will work and plan until the one shall come who will show us the shadow of Praxiteles on the Venus of Milo, the shadow thrown by the artist as he worked. And this silhouette of a genius of a past age will mean more for science even than his immortal work has meant for art. I shall think of you while in Asia, gentlemen. And our next courses will begin a month later than usual. I wish you a very good day."

THE EARLY dusk was gathering under growing clouds as Klaus Groth, Professor Clusius' faithful servant, moved about the dining-room laying the table for dinner. Although Klaus was engaged nominally for the personal service of the professor, he invariably refused to leave the preparations for a formal meal to anyone else. Klaus was so appreciative of the honour of his position of confidential valet to a famous scholar that he spent much of his scanty leisure in the attempt to make himself worthy of it. He puzzled over Greek and Latin verbs, and sat up nights struggling to master the elements of the physical sciences.

As he laid the table now, using the handsome silver and fine porcelain service presented to the professor by an Eastern potentate, Klaus murmured snatches of Latin vocabulary, pausing to fit the verb-endings correctly. When all was done he looked at his handiwork critically and remarked, "*Finis coronat opus*, or else '*opus fine coronatur*,' either will do." Then he went into the dining-room to announce that dinner was ready. Tannemore and Lund took their places at table and waited some time for Clusius. Finally Lund rang for Klaus and asked if the professor were not coming for dinner.

"I couldn't say, sir. Professor Clusius went directly to his study when he came home from the University. I heard him walking about and talking to himself. Then he took his hat and cane and went out into the garden. I saw him drawing figures and letters on the garden path."

"That's his way," Lund explained to Tannemore. "When his study grows too small for the pressure of his thoughts he goes out into the garden and writes his calculations and figures all over the paths. Let's come and see what he's done now. Maybe we can find him there."

They did not find the professor, but they found yards and yards of figuring drawn clearly in the smooth sands of the garden paths. They could find no key to decipher it, so stepping carefully, they returned to the house just as the man they sought emerged from his study door. The professor was in excellent spirits.

"The problem grows more and more interesting," he called out to his friends as he saw them approaching. "I believe the solution is a possible thing—but it means hard work. My dear Lund, I have made

some—some notes outside there—notes that hold the key to success. It was sort of intuition. Might I ask you to copy the figures tomorrow?"

Tannemore was dazed. He knew his friend's genius, but even then he was astonished. It was only last night that he had arrived with his request for aid. In the morning he had heard hint of a scientific problem, the importance of which appeared more clearly in the lecture-hall. Now he stood bewildered as he heard Clusius declare that the key to the success of an apparently impossible undertaking was already found.

All three men were so absorbed in the thought of what lay before them, that they talked little during dinner. When the meal was ended and they had settled down to coffee and cigars in a cozy smoking den, Clusius began.

"This will be the proper time, I think, to formulate our plans for action, to decide finally what we are to do. For whatever I do, wherever I go, I shall depend upon both of you to accompany me, to aid me. Now let us survey the field. The facts are—"

"That we know three sorts of cuneiform writing, one of which is considered doubtful," said Tannemore.

"And furthermore—"

"And furthermore—that this newly discovered fourth sort is not genuine."

"Exactly. It is our task to show whether this new writing was ever used anywhere at any time. If we can prove that it was not, then Bridgeport and Redfowles are swindlers and forgers—or at least Bridgeport is—for Redfowles is no archaeologist and may have been deceived himself."

"Bridgeport asserts that his collection comes from Birs i Nimrud."

"Then we may confine our investigation to the ruins of Asia's ancient civilization," said Clusius. "And if we find any traces of the new script there—"

"Then I have been guilty of gross libel," remarked Tannemore, deadly calm.

Clusius held out his hand to his friend. "Forgive me, Richard, I had to give expression to that possibility simply to make our argument complete. But to continue. I suggest that we visit the Valley of the Euphrates, equipped as no expedition was ever equipped before. Our aim is to discover, by means of pictures seen by no living eye for thousands of years, how elder Babylonians and Assyrians lived, how they ate and drank, how they moved about, and—how they wrote. We shall be living in a world of silent shadows; we shall force long-vanished sunlight to mirror again for us the forms and visions on which it shone in grey antiquity. Do you follow me?"

The others hung on his words entranced. Outside, heavy clouds gathered and scattered a fine rain drumming against the window panes.

"Science and research lead us back through history to the days of the Saga, before history was, but still telling us of human beings of highly developed mentality. Back through the various forms of written language, through its first letterings, through its crude picture-forms, back to the time when spoken language only took the thought from mouth to mouth—where can we find the light to guide us further than this, back into the Unknown? Only within ourselves. We must find it in our own power to understand even where we do not see clearly; we must find it in our trained intuition which can form combinations, and which from facts known and understood can grasp the Unknown. This is how I want you to follow my thoughts to-night.

"We know the first picture-writing, but we do not know, in actuality, what went before that. The rock walls of Busutum stand silent, guarding their secret. We do not know what mental processes brought forth the hieroglyphs as part of a people's development. But we know that a people's development moves slowly and logically. And yet how few seem to realize that there must be a long history of development at the back of the first known cuneiform writings.

"We know of the despotism of Semiramis and Cyrus, but we do not know what peoples and what sort of civilization their conquering tyranny may have destroyed. We do not know—and the walls of Pasargadä stand silent. Who was in Assyria before Assur? Before the first mighty ones of whom we have records? Questions! Idle questions—and the walls of Babylon stand silent. But they will stand silent no longer when we come to reveal their secrets."

Clusius paused, his eyes alight. The bare branches of the trees beat madly on the window pane and added to the turmoil of rain and hail outside. But none of the men heard it. Tannemore and Lund bent forward, their eyes on Clusius. He looked out and beyond them into a myste-

rious world they could not see. Finally he spoke again:

"And there is a greater despot even than these early conquerors—it is Time, the tyrant of us all. In Mesopotamia many a valuable record is blurred or faded altogether under the ravages of time—in Mesopotamia, the cradle of ancient culture. Back in the dimness of Days the people there were intelligent and prosperous. They carved their hieroglyphs in stones, and more than that—here our intuition may sagely lead us—they painted them in colours."

Lund sprang from his chair, his handsome face flushed, his eyes sparkling. "In colours—colours which have faded under the sunlight of years."

"That is my meaning," said the professor.

"And then we can imagine how the Persians and the Syrians copied out this colour-writing on stone," exclaimed Tannemore quickly.

"And furthermore," continued Clusius, "we can answer the question of the genuineness or the falsity of Bridgeport's tablets when we see the development of hieroglyphic writing with our own eyes—when we watch men writing in Mesopotamia of five thousand years ago."

Tannemore and Lund looked at each other in helpless bewilderment. Again they had come to the point where they could not follow.

"When we watch—" repeated Lund mechanically.

—"men writing in Mesopotamia of five thousand years ago," Tannemore finished the sentence in the same groping uncertainty.

"And we shall watch it," continued Clusius, unheeding their bewilderment, "for I feel that I shall succeed in the task of which I spoke in my lecture this morning. The problem has been engrossing me for some time. When you came to me last night, Richard, it flashed over me that to do this thing would be the only means of helping you—your need of me has given the impetus to carry me on to the actual experiment—the impetus needed to awaken my mind to its best activities. It would be a great thing to do—it might easily be the culmination of my career—but it would mean still more to me if it should prove the means of helping you."

Klaus had been standing near the door for some time, waiting for a chance to speak. In the pause that followed the professor's words, he came forward and asked if he might close the window, as the rain was coming in heavily and the floor was covered with water.

The three men looked down and laughed. They were sitting with their feet in nearly half an inch of water and not one of them had noticed it.

"It's a bad habit of mine always to have a window open wherever I am," said Clusius apologetically.

Lund sprang up a second time and ran to the window. The carefully tended garden was strewn with broken branches and the sanded paths were roaring torrents of mud. "The figurings—the calculations!" he exclaimed in horror. "They're all gone—they're lost—totally lost!"

Clusius started and groaned. "My notes—my valuable notes—they're lost—irretrievably lost!"

He repeated the words half aloud. Then, as he saw the ghastly pallour of Tannemore's face he hastened to add, "And yet—perhaps not—perhaps not altogether lost."

Lund vented his anger on Klaus. "Why didn't you warn us of the coming storm?"

"I'm so sorry, sir," replied Klaus humbly, "but I thought you saw it coming—it threatened for so long."

"Oh, you thought we saw it, did you? We had something more important to think of."

Klaus looked from one to the other, at a loss to understand their excitement.

"This is a most unfortunate happening," said Clusius.

"It is a catastrophe—for me at least," replied Tannemore, his eyes fixed on the wet floor.

Klaus, still bewildered, ventured a timid hope that his lordship's shoes were not greatly damaged. No one heard him except Lund, who smiled in the midst of his emotion.

"Those notes," began the professor again, "were of the greatest possible value for our undertaking. They were the result of a train of reasoning which I may never be able to reach again with the same definiteness. As you know, Richard, there are moments of intuition even in science. The mind flies over unessentials and welds together the links of the chain. Something is accomplished in a few moments which ordinarily might take months to achieve."

Lund sighed deeply and Clusius nodded to him. "I know what you are thinking now, Hjalmar," he said, with the ghost of

a smile. "You have often begged me to let someone come with me in my walks, someone who could copy my calculations at once. I regret now that I did not follow your advice. For I do not see any possible chance of reclaiming a single figure or letter under those torrents in the garden paths."

"Please, sir," began Klaus timidly. The three turned to him in surprise. "Please, sir, were you talking about the figures you made in the paths before dinner? Because I copied them all in my book. I hope you don't mind my doing it, sir. I wanted to study them this evening. I had just finished the last letter when the rain came. Maybe my book will be of use to you."

Lund seized one of the valet's hands, and Tannemore the other, shaking them violently, a proceeding which added greatly to the worthy fellow's amazement.

"Klaus, you are a jewel," exclaimed the professor, "and if you are really so fond of study I will reserve a good place for you for all my lectures."

"Oh, sir," stammered Klaus joyfully, red to his ears. He fumbled in his pockets and finally produced a small blue notebook which he handed to his master.

Lund turned on the full blaze of the electric light and the wet floor gave back the glow with double radiance. The men crowded to the table while Clusius turned the pages of the little book.

"It's all here—every single line. Klaus, I don't know how to thank you—not a figure missing—it's all here." And now he himself shook his embarrassed valet's hand as he continued, "We are all greatly in your debt. As partial payment for what you have done I will open a credit account for you in a good bookshop. You shall have all the books you need for your studies. And now, friends—victory is ours! All Mesopotamia will lie before us like a mirror, a mirror in which we can awaken the shadows of the Past. The ages that have gone will pass in review before us—leading us back from to-day into the Unknown and Unrecorded. We will—but the rest is only a hope as yet, I dare not think of it as already achieved." His eyes looked out through the window, lingering thoughtfully on the clustering branches of a tall linden tree which stood there. The others looked at him as men might gaze at one more than human.

When they had gone into drier quarters in the study, the more practical details of the expedition were discussed.

"We start Tuesday," said Clusius, "I can be ready by then. How about you, Richard? We must lose no time, for we have much to do before the sixth of August."

"Yes, we must find the needed proofs by the sixth of August, if—" murmured Lund.

"If I am to live after that day." Tannemore's voice was deep but calm. Turning to his friend he continued, "I am ready to start any moment. I will wire to London for the guns and other equipment which we need. They will be sent on at once and we can pick them up in Damascus. You must let me take charge of the prosaic details of the expedition. I can do nothing else this time. Your genius is leading you to heights where I cannot follow."

"Oh, no, indeed," interrupted Clusius.

But Tannemore shook his head. "I am only your humble courier. Weapon in hand I will be ready to guard your life amid the dangers of the desert. It is little I can do—for you—you who are working to save *my* life."

"What is the final goal of our journey?" asked Lund.

"I cannot say definitely yet," replied Clusius. "We will cross the continent from Stralsund to Trieste; there we take the steamer for Beyrout. From there we go due east, out into the Syrian desert to find the oldest ruins. Chance—or Fate—must guide us then."

"And will you take anyone else with you from here?" asked Lord Tannemore.

"No one but you two. This journey will have its dangers. I could ask no one to accompany us without first telling them something of our plans. And the less that is known of them the better."

"Not even Klaus? He is discretion itself," ventured Lund.

"Yes, I know that," replied Clusius. "And he alone, at home here, shall know where we are that he may forward our mail to us from time to time."

"But why can't he go with us? We may need his tried fidelity," insisted Tannemore.

"He is the most faithful fellow in the world," smiled Clusius, "but he hasn't a scrap of physical courage. He would be very unhappy and uncomfortable, and he might be decidedly in the way. What are you laughing at now, Hjalmar?"

"I was thinking of what would happen if the details of our plan got to the newspapers. Can't you see the Mayor of Bey-

Lund started with amazement as he glimpsed a girl who looked like Erna, in a window.

rout and the schoolteachers coming out to the ship to meet us? In Bagdad it would be the constabulary or the militia, and in Nineveh I know we should have to run the gauntlet of a delegation of white-clad maidens."

"All of which would be a great nuisance," said the professor with a laugh. "Yes, we must be alone and free to come and go as we like. Any strangers joining us might interfere seriously with the success of our experiments."

"Hadn't we better travel incognito?" suggested Tannemore.

"Under other names? How jolly!" cried Lund joyfully.

"A good idea," said Clusius. "I will see to our passports under any names we may assume."

"And I'll make up the names," said Lund. "While I was still in school I made up the names of a long cast of characters for a play I intended to write. It took me many happy hours to do it."

"What happened to the play?" asked Tannemore.

"Oh, the play? I forgot to write it."

Clusius leaned forward suddenly and touched a bell on his desk. Klaus hastened in.

"You asked me something about shutting the window in the smoking-room a little while back, did you not?" said Clusius. "I don't remember having answered you. Yes, you'd better close the window."

Klaus bowed. "I closed it some time ago, sir," he said solemnly. Then he murmured to himself, "*Feci*—or, *factum est*—or else *iam clausum est*. Any one will do."

CHAPTER III

WHAT THE FAN REVEALED

THE steamer *Pandora* of the Austrian Lloyd left Trieste on the morning of March 10 on her regular run to Beyrout. On the morning of the second day out, Lord Tannemore and Hjalmar Lund met in a sunny corner of the deck shortly after seven o'clock.

"Where's the professor?" asked Lund in surprise, for he knew the famous man's love for early hours.

"He is still in his cabin," answered Tannemore. "At his table, where he has been working all night. I don't think he went to bed at all. I looked in early this morning, but he asked to be left alone until ten o'clock. Then he wants us to join him to make the first practical trials of his new discovery."

"Then—then he has been successful?" Lund's cheeks flushed and his eyes lit up.

"I hope so," replied Tannemore gravely. "But you know him better than I. What do you think?"

"I am sure he has succeeded, and I'm impatient to hear the news. He didn't need us for the preparations?" Lund continued almost with a sigh.

"No; it's all his work. We have done nothing. When I think what it means to me—I feel so useless— so ignorant beside his genius. Has he given you any hint of the nature of his experiment?"

"Not the slightest," replied Lund as they made their way down the companionway to the saloon. "But he promised to explain it all before we land."

The three men had taken passage on the *Pandora* under assumed names, the professor calling himself Mr. Digby, Tannemore and Lund booked respectively as Lord Lomond and Mr. Swendborg. The professor had kept to his cabin almost exclusively since the vessel started, but the other two had mingled with the passengers with more or less reserve, at least on Tannemore's part, though there seemed to be no danger of their incognito being discovered.

After breakfast the two younger men went up on deck again, Tannemore pacing vigorously up and down, while Lund lingered near the companionway, apparently aimless but with an eye on the door to the cabins below. When half an hour later an extremely pretty girl in a light summer gown appeared in the doorway, Lund gave himself the air of having casually strolled past, and advanced to meet the lady with pleased surprise.

Before the *Pandora* had been many hours out of port, Hjalmar Lund, in common with other male passengers, had discovered that Miss Erna Lengdale, from Copenhagen, was by far the prettiest girl on board. The young scientist had acted on the discovery at once and already had apparently distanced his competitors in the young lady's favour.

Now they met with the easy air of good friends. And it was with very human satisfaction that Lund observed the envious glances of several other men as he strolled down the deck beside Miss Lengdale. Professor Clusius' assistant enjoyed a fair measure of fame in learned circles for his very respectable acquirements. But at this

moment Professor Clusius' assistant was nothing more than a young man conscious of the soft curve of the fair cheek beside him and the lights and shadows of the golden hair above it, hair of that shimmering pale gold that ripens only under Northern skies.

When Erna turned her clear amber eyes to his—golden eyes he termed them—it took all Hjalmar Lund's control to appear sufficiently interested in the past history of the coast and the historic waters through which they were passing.

Erna Lengdale was not averse to the attentions of so attractive a young man, but she was freshly come from her studies and this was her first journey so far from home. She was eager for more and more knowledge and her discovery of the fact that Lund knew a great deal of the history of this part of the world was, as yet, his chief claim to favour in her eyes.

"Isn't it too bad that we passed the Albanian coast by night?" she exclaimed as they leaned against the rail and looked out over the sunlit waters. "Each bit we pass is so full of interest, I hate to miss any of it."

"I noticed your love for history and the lore of past days, in our talks yesterday," Lund replied, conscious of a feeling of jealousy towards all ancient days. "And I must confess my surprise and admiration at your really remarkable knowledge."

Erna blushed prettily. But Lund realised that the same praise from the mouth of an aged professor would have had exactly the same effect in sending the becoming colour to her cheeks.

"I had such splendid teachers," she replied with charming bashfulness. "And I have been keeping up my studies since I left school. I never can understand why girls lose all interest in those things the moment they get home. I love history, but archaeology and even the physical sciences are fascinating to me. Of course I know so little about them. But some day I'm going to study more. I envy the men who can devote their lives to science and do such great things. And it makes me proud to be a Scandinavian when I read of the wonderful achievements of our greatest man of the North, Professor Clusius."

Lund started and smiled happily. "Professor Clusius," he repeated. "Then you also are an admirer of his?"

"Who isn't, that has ever heard of him?"

"Oh—then you've only *heard* of him?"

"Yes—I never had the good fortune to see him, even—much less make his acquaintance. I made two lengthy visits to an aunt who is living in Stockholm in the hope of seeing the great man somewhere—but I had no luck."

"You were in Stockholm? Oh, when?"

"In July and August of the last two years."

"Too bad—that's the season we—"

"We?" asked the girl in quick surprise.

"The people who live in Stockholm," Lund answered hastily, "are generally away in the summer. As far as I know, Professor Clusius usually spends the summer months in his country home near Drontheim."

"Oh, if I'd known that I should have gone up there too."

"Then you're so anxious to make his acquaintance?"

"He's the most interesting man in the world to me."

LUND sighed deeply and looked out over the water. Miss Lengdale spoke again. "Do you know him, Mr. Swendborg?"

"Yes," he replied. "I see him occasionally."

"Do tell me about him!" The amber eyes gazed into his with eager interest. "What is he like? One hears only about his work and so little about his personality, he's almost like some figure in a saga. I don't even know what he looks like."

Lund laughed. "What do you expect? The famous scientist is no longer young. Miss Lengdale, and never was particularly handsome."

"I wasn't thinking of that," said Erna, smiling. "But he must look dignified and noble, and of course—keenly intelligent. He must have a wonderful face."

"Yes, he has," answered Lund. "He *is* noble and dignified and so kind and sympathetic too, and when he speaks one cannot help listening. For one knows that what he has to say is important, even—even if you don't always understand it. Oh, he is wonderful—wonderful!"

"There, you see, you admire him just as much as I do. Oh, I'm so glad!" She held out her hand impulsively. Lund gazed at it a moment enraptured, then raised it to his lips. Erna drew it back in blushing embarrassment and asked, "Where are we now?"

"We ought to be just over the deepest measured spot of the Adriatic; nearly a mile down to the bottom it is, here," answered Lund promptly.

"How interesting! But to return to Professor Clusius. You must talk to me more about him. My aunt never saw him, either. But a friend of hers met the professor's assistant once, Mr. Hjalmar Lund. He's getting to be a celebrity too in scientific circles, and yet my aunt's friend says he is quite a young man. Did you ever see him?"

Lund stooped to pick up his handkerchief, which had fallen to the deck. "Oh, yes, I see him more often than I do the professor," he answered, trying to control his amusement. "Now that bit of land over there, shining through the morning mist, is Durazzo, the Dyrrhachium of antiquity."

But Erna refused to be diverted from the subject that was interesting her most at the moment. "You see Professor Clusius has been famous for so long." she persisted, "that it is hard to realise he is still living and just like other people. But a younger man, just beginning to make a name for himself, would seem more human, not quite so far away, as it were."

"I hope so," said Lund, involuntarily moving nearer.

"I should so love to know a scientist like that. I should be so proud to be his friend," Erna went on, gazing dreamily out over the water.

"Do you really mean it?—Look at that shore now. Durazzo is quite hidden in the mist."

"What does Mr. Lund look like?" asked Erna.

The young scholar began to enjoy the situation. "Oh—I'm awkward at description," he replied in a casual tone. "But I should say he was about my size and general appearance."

Erna turned her eyes back to him now. "Yes, I remember, my aunt's friend said he was very good-looking," she said, then caught herself up and blushed violently. Her embarrassment was exceedingly becoming, but evidently so painful to her that Lund turned his head away considerately, feeling glad of the chance to hide the answering flush on his own cheek and the sparkle in his eyes.

"Dyrrhachium is a place which would surely interest you," he began, in a matter-of-fact tone. "It has a great past and little hope of the future."

"Oh, do tell me something about it," said Erna quickly. "Where did you say it was?"

"There. See now—where the wind parts the veil of mist you can catch a glimpse of the ruined city."

"Yes, yes, I can see houses—"

Lund launched into a description of the past glories of the ancient town. Erna listened with great attention, finding it convenient to keep her eyes fixed on the distant coast-line.

"How interesting!" she breathed when he had finished. "But, oh, just look, what *has* happened to my fan?"

She held the delicately tinted satin fan up for inspection. A great dark blotch marred its surface. "It's spoiled, quite spoiled!" she complained, "And I was so fond of it. It's very old, a family heirloom, belonging to my grandmother and then to my aunt, who gave it to me. Of course it isn't the sort of thing to use every day, but I found I'd forgotten to bring any other, so I have to use this until we land. The sunlight is so sharp down here. I had the fan out yesterday for the first time in ever so long. This must have happened yesterday. I could just cry about it."

"Please don't," cut in Lund eagerly. "I think we can make it right."

"Oh, really? How? It ought to be cleaned right away and how can it be cleaned on board here?"

"My specialty is chemistry, as I think I told you," replied Lund. "If you will let me have the fan for a few hours, I'll try my hand at cleaning it."

"Oh, that will be awfully good of you," exclaimed Erna, half consoled already. "I know I must have got that spot in the engine room. Father took me down there yesterday."

"If it's machine oil it's all the easier to get out. Will you let me try?"

"Indeed I will, Mr. Swendborg; it's awfully nice of you to take so much trouble."

"It's a very little thing to do for you," replied Lund. Then fearing he had said too much, he bowed a formal farewell and promised to return the fan in an hour or two.

AT THE entrance to the companionway he met Lord Tannemore in conversation with a middle-aged man, whom he introduced as Mr. Smithson. They had been talking about phosphorus in the water and electrical phenomena at sea. That is, Mr. Smithson had been talking and Tannemore had been listening without great interest. Just as Lund came up Mr. Smithson was saying:

"I don't know very much about these things myself, not more than any other amateur with a merely platonic interest in

science. But I remember a wonderful lecture I heard in Upsala once, delivered by the famous Professor Clusius. I have relatives up in that part of the country, my mother came from there. And it was on a visit to her family that I went to hear the famous man. You are a Norwegian, I believe, Mr. Swendlborg? Then, of course, you must know this great scholar."

"Why—why—we Norwegians are not particularly enthusiastic over anything that comes out of Sweden, Mr. Smithson. But I must ask you to excuse me now, I have something to attend to." Lund bowed and turned down the stairs.

"And you, Lord Lomond? You are an experienced traveler, I perceive. So you chance to know Professor Clusius?" asked Smithson.

Tannemore shrugged his shoulders. "I travel mainly because I'm fond of hunting," he answered. "I'm on my way to the East now in the hope of bagging a tiger or two. Your interest in science is greater than mine. Good morning." Tannemore raised his hand with a gesture of unmistakable dismissal and walked on down the deck.

The other man looked after him. "Arrogant aristocrat," he thought. "Seems to be merely a globetrotting sportsman. And as for the other, the young Norwegian, he has eyes for nothing but the pretty Danish girl. They're not likely to have ever seen the professor. They're not dangerous. Now I'll have a look at some of the others before I make my next report."

Lund, locked in his cabin, put in a half hour's careful work over the fan. Satisfied that his efforts were successful, he still held the dainty fabric in his hand, conscious of a feeling of pleasure in its proximity. Suddenly there was a tap on the door and he started up, blushing like a schoolboy.

"Good gracious, is it past ten o'clock?" he exclaimed, opening the door hastily. "Am I late?"

"No, it lacks ten minutes to ten yet," answered Tannemore, who stood outside.

"Then I've time to run up on deck? I have something here belonging to Miss Lengdale. I ought to return it to her."

"Better wait till later. You might be delayed coming back. We must be prompt."

They walked slowly down the corridor to Professor Clusius' door, a few yards away. They waited there until the door opened and Clusius stood on the threshold, looking pale and fatigued but smiling brightly.

"I'm glad you're here already," he said. "Won't you come in?"

They passed into the outer cabin, which Clusius used as a study. Beyond it was the open door to his sleeping quarters. The bed had not been occupied. Clusius made room for his friends on the sofa and began:

"I think I have everything ready for the first experiment. You will need only a few words of explanation to prepare you for what you are to see. This trial will be merely the first part of our problem, the simplest part of it. As I have told you already, I shall force blank surfaces to show again the lights and shadows they have received and retained through so many years. In this first experiment the light will have no colour, merely varying degrees of shadow.

"But as every surface is exposed to a constantly changing impression of light and darkness (if only in the natural change from night to day) and as these lights and shadows will move before us with incredible quickness, giving in less

than an hour the impressions of a year or even a decade—if we look at the surface itself we shall see nothing but a glimmering of grey, with uncertain outlines. To obviate this difficulty I shall take photographs of the impression, photographs made by an invention of my own.

"In the experiments I hope to make there among the ruins, my arrangements will be so perfected that the photographs will be necessary only to preserve the record of what we shall see. Just now we need them to see anything at all. I have invented a camera by means of which what happens on the surface under treatment will be caught on a specially prepared paper, moving on a roll, and developed instantaneously by simply passing through an acid bath. The paper runs on big spools and can be rolled or unrolled at will."

"Wonderful!" exclaimed Lund.

"And now let us commence at once." The professor rose from his chair, pulled over his photographic apparatus and showed Lund how to work it.

Tannemore looked on in silence. His firm-set lips and the rise and fall of his chest alone told of his suppressed excitement. Whatever the success or failure of this experiment meant to others in the interests of science, to him it was more, much more. It was life or death, honour or disgrace.

Finally Clusius looked up from the apparatus. "And now, friends, remember!" he whispered. "These cabin walls are only wooden partitions, and no one must know what we are doing here." The others nodded and the scientist continued, "I thought that all was ready—but—we haven't anything to experiment on. Funny, but that slipped my mind entirely. What shall we take for our first object? Why, what's this on the table?—a woman's fan? What's it doing here?"

"One of the ladies left it in the saloon," explained Lund in embarrassment. "I was about to take it up on deck to give it to her when Lord Tannemore came to fetch me."

"And so you brought it in with you? Well, that will do very nicely for our purpose."

CLUSIUS fastened the outstretched fan in a steel rack on the table. Under it he placed a metal jar with a screw top, turned the lens of the camera on the silken surface, and asked Lund to stand ready. Then he closed the window tightly, drew the dark curtains over it and shut the door to the inner cabin.

Deep silence reigned in the darkened room, broken only by the gentle lapping of the waves against the ship's wall outside, and by the monotonous stamp of the engine.

"When you hear the click of my watch-cover, Hjalmar, you may start your camera."

There was a pause, then Lund caught the little signal. He took the cap from the lens and loosened the catch that held the roll of paper. The latter began to move with a gentle humming noise.

Slowly a gleam arose from the open fan, a faint gleam that now shone out more brightly, now faded into blackness. One moment it would be quite dark, and again a brighter ray would lighten the cabin like fleeting sunshine through opening clouds.

"The pictures are passing with incredible swiftness. In sixty seconds we have taken up the impressions of an entire year," whispered Clusius.

"It's marvellous," gasped Lund, his hand on the bars of the apparatus.

Tannemore stood gazing with wide eyes at the mysterious glimmering light.

"Six hundred seconds," Clusius counted. "Ten years, the fan is old. There, that will do," he said a little later; "stop the paper. This is sufficient."

Lund checked the machinery and Tannemore started for the window.

"Wait a moment," said Clusius; "we must pass the paper through the bath. Now you may open the window," he added a few moments later.

Tannemore's hand shook as he drew the curtain and raised the shutter. "Is it successful?" he asked hoarsely.

"We'll see," returned Clusius. He drew up a little table in front of the window, placed the spools holding the paper upon it, and sat down. Tannemore and Lund stood behind him, bending over his shoulder.

"It begins here," said Clusius, unrolling the paper. "Here's the bright spot made by the sunlight when I opened the fan."

"And here's a big dark blotch," said Tannemore. "What does that mean?"

"Queer—that's no shadow!" exclaimed Clusius. "It has no shape at all; what can it be?"

"Could it be a spot on the fan?" suggested Tannemore.

"Yes, that must be it," said Lund hastily.

"And these lines of light through it, up-and-down streaks!" exclaimed Tannemore. "Oh, I know; it's a grease spot that was taken out by some cleansing process."

"Very likely," said Clusius; "that sounds feasible."

"How wonderful that we should be looking on at processes that happened possibly many years ago!" exclaimed the Englishman eagerly.

Lund moved uneasily and was about to answer, when the professor spoke. "No, this spot is of very recent date. Ah, here's a real shadow."

"At last," breathed Tannemore.

"And the object that threw the shadow came very close to the fan—the outlines are more distinct—it's a head."

"A man's head in profile. Now the features are becoming more distinct," Tannemore bent over the moving paper as he spoke. "Why—it looks like, it *is* Lund."

"Undoubtedly," said the professor, smiling. "And here he is still and more of him. What were you doing with this fan, Hjalmar? You must have been bending over it for nearly half an hour in bright sunlight."

Lund was too embarrassed to answer and Tannemore relieved him of the task. "I begin to understand," he said merrily; "it was someone we know who cleaned the spot out of this fan, in sharp sunlight to make it disappear more quickly."

"Dear me—dear me," sighed Lund. "This new scientific discovery is extremely interesting, but it's very indiscreet."

The paper was now all dark. "This is the natural darkness of the night!" exclaimed Clusius; "now we can measure the time exactly." He rolled the paper off quickly. "Here is the spot again; it was on the fan yesterday, then. And here's a series of indefinite shadows—now it's quite dark again for a long time."

"What does that mean?" asked Tannemore.

"The fan must have lain in a tightly closed box for a long time," replied Clusius, rolling off paper rapidly. "Ah, here comes the light again—a brilliant light. It is spring or early summer—see the leaves on the trees, the young leaves—see how they move; there was a slight wind but it was a brilliantly clear sunny day. Look, look, friends; whoever used this fan was sitting in a trellised arbour—see the shape of the bars and the leaves of the vine. The leaves change their outline—they are moving in the wind. But whoever carried the fan was sitting still. Ah, here is the shadow of a head, a woman's head—what a delicate, pretty profile—this is a young woman and I've seen her somewhere."

"Unless I'm greatly mistaken—it's the pretty Danish girl, the belle of the ship," said Tannemore. "Then the fan belongs to her!" He glanced mockingly at Lund, who did not speak. "Yes, see—see, it is she," he said. "Isn't it wonderful; how long ago was this, do you think? She looks a little different."

"It must be about a year ago," replied the professor.

THE PAPER rolled on from one spool to the other and for a few minutes there was nothing said, while Lund's eyes grew wide with an expression of amazed surprise. A bright smile lightened the tensity of the professor's face and Tannemore chuckled outright. "Really, this is an amazing invention!" On the paper before them they had seen the shadow of another head approach that of the girl, a man's head, they could see the corner of a little moustache, then Lund exclaimed involuntarily, "That was a *kiss*."

"A kiss with a military cap on," laughed Clusius; "the outlines are quite distinct."

"It's incredible!" gasped the assistant.

"Which shows how careless it is to kiss in such bright sunlight," remarked Clusius. And Tannemore added, "For one never can tell when that kiss may be seen a year later by inquisitive scientists." Lund said nothing further, but looked down at the paper with an air of deep sadness.

"Now the fan is dark again. It was shut up—shut up for a long time," murmured Clusius as he rolled the paper off again. "Look—see these flashes and streaks of unequal light—that is artificial light coming from various directions at once. The young lady was at a ball with her fan. Now she has held it folded in her hands—now she has opened it again. Now darkness for a long, long time. The fan was seldom used."

"Here's the silhouette of a head again!" exclaimed Lund. "It's another face this time, an older woman."

"And here's another—a very old face—with an old-fashioned arrangement of the hair. This woman must have been aged even some years ago." It was Tannemore who spoke now.

"It's her grandmother," said Lund, in a tone of conviction.

"You must know," laughed Tannemore, "and here are letters, old letters that have

been rubbed out! Oh! then we shall really see how men wrote in Assyria thousands of years back!"

"Where are the letters?" asked Lund. "Yes, yes, I see them." The outlines of the edge of the fan were quite distinct and on it stood the words, scribbled in a girlish hand: *Yes, if grandmother isn't at home. At five o'clock as usual, Your loving Erna.*

Clusius read the sentences aloud, and both he and Tannemore could not resist a laugh. Lund smiled also, but he did not look happy.

"These written words are of great importance to us in our experiments," said Clusius. "We can measure the time at which they were written, so that it will be quite possible for us to reckon the time of impressions made in ancient Nineveh. But now I am tired, Hjalmar, will you roll off the paper?"

They sat in silence now, watching the play of light and shadow on the paper before them. The various experiences in which the fan had been concerned were of personal interest to one of them only, but to the others it meant the confirming of practical details in the working of the great discovery. So they sat over it for a long time and the rays of the sun were already well aslant when the professor stopped the roll and pushed back his chair.

"That will do," he said. "We have watched eleven years of the fan's history. It means success. What we have done here we will do among the ruins of ancient Assyria—in a larger measure—in greater scope."

He stretched out his arms like a man resting after heavy labour.

"Success!" whispered Tannemore, swaying gently. He caught at a chair and fell heavily into it. Visions danced before his eyes, visions of possibilities unprecedented in scientific research. Then a great weariness came upon him, and he realised how severe had been the strain of the last days, with all that they had meant to him.

Lund also was tired, tired and hungry, and just a little oppressed by this latest evidence of the greatness of the man to whose service he had dedicated himself.

Clusius busied himself quietly about his apparatus. He loosened the fan from the frame.

"Take this to its fair owner, Hjalmar," he said. "I am afraid she'll be angry with you for keeping it so long on such a sunny day. Hurry up on deck. We'll follow you in time for supper."

CHAPTER IV

THE OVATION ON SHIPBOARD

NEXT morning a sudden crash aroused Hjalmar Lund from a sound sleep.

He sat up, only half awake. Before his eyes still danced dreams in which Assyrian hieroglyphs played hide-and-seek in the soft curls of a certain golden head.

Did anybody knock?" he murmured. And then he did hear a knock unmistakably.

He sprang out of his bunk and unlocked the door. "Good morning, Tannemore," he said, jumping back into bed and drawing up the covers over him.

"Good morning," was the answer in a strange voice. Lund, who had supposed his visitor to be Tannemore, flung himself around, and gazed astonished into the smiling face of a stockily built, square-shouldered man who walked into his cabin and sat down on the edge of the bed, though quite a stranger.

"Pardon me," remarked Lund, "but I haven't the honour—"

"Of my acquaintance," cut in the stranger. "I know, but that doesn't matter. I know you. You are Mr. Holger Swendborg from Bergen, Norway."

Lund sat up and looked at his visitor. He remembered now having seen the man on deck and at table. Before he could find words to express his opinion of the intrusion, the stranger continued. "I know also that you are a young man of considerable learning and of high intelligence."

Lund bowed. "Thank you. But perhaps you will tell me who you are and why you are here at this hour?"

"Certainly, certainly. My name is Elias Sleiding. I live in Melbourne and am the proprietor of a Thought and Idea Agency."

"A what?" exclaimed Lund.

"A Thought and Idea Agency. I buy and sell original ideas and thoughts."

"How very interesting," remarked Lund gently. He was now quite sure his visitor was crazy.

"I was listening to you last evening; I overheard your conversation with that rude Englishman who sits next to you at table."

"Sir!" cried Lund angrily. "Please be more careful of your language."

"Well, he is rude just the same," rejoined Sleiding, shaking out a large yellow silk handkerchief. "Only five minutes ago he threw me out of his room, with such force

that I nearly broke the cabin wall opposite. I call that a rude way of expressing one's feelings."

Lund began to be really interested in his strange visitor.

"What is it you want of me, then?" he asked more gently.

"I will tell you. But if you wish to dress, don't mind me. Your boots are in front of the door."

"Much obliged," said Lund. "But I shall dress alone, and very soon too."

"Very well," answered Sleiding. "I like plain speaking in business matters. As I told you, I buy and sell original ideas. I buy them from people who have them; I buy ideas that can be used by painters, writers and scholars. I heard you talking to your friend last evening, and I propose to you to become one of my contributors."

Lund sat looking at the man for a few minutes in silent surprise. Then he remarked, "My dear Mr.—Sleiding, your enterprise is something so entirely new to me that I must ask for a little explanation. Tell me something about it. I will get up later."

Sleiding took out a big cigar and lit it with elaborate care, asking permission to smoke. Then he began:

"Very well, Mr. Swendborg, I will give you some of the details. The raw material of the mental worker is the Thought, the Idea, is it not? Now there are a great many people who are very lacking in ideas, although nowadays, with the general spread of education, there are so many more than ever before who are trained to express ideas. But, of course, they do not meet with any great measure of success if they haven't the ideas to express. So they are anxious to find the *Idea* wherever they can. Do you begin to understand? It is for people like this that I have established my agency. But I serve all humanity as well. What would the world be without new and good ideas?"

LUND rearranged his pillow and sat up straight. "I understand the reason for your agency now," he said. "But I don't quite understand how you can gather and sell the ideas—I mean, I can't imagine the business workings of the enterprise."

"That's easy," said Sleiding; "listen now. The thoughts and ideas that I buy are divided into two classes; first class, general ideas; second class, detail ideas. The general ideas, of course, are such as allow of development in various lines. They are the highest paid, while the detail ideas bring in about two-thirds of the price of the others. There are several highly educated men working in my office, sorting the ideas into these two general classes."

"And then?" asked Lund.

"Then," continued Sleiding, "we send them further to regularly engaged judges, who have bound themselves by oath not to use any of the ideas shown them. For instance, the ideas for use in painting are sent to a painter who had made quite a name for himself before he lost both arms in a railway accident. He divides them into the various styles of ideas and fixes the price."

"Most interesting!" said Lund. "And how about the literary ideas?"

"Our judge for them is Mr. Henry Sliper. He was a poet at one time. But he has been married for four years now, is the father of triplets, and his mother-in-law and two unmarried sisters-in-law live with him. He does not write any more poetry."

Lund laughed and Sleiding joined in. Then he continued, "There's another group

to which I should like to call your attention. Epigrams, *bons mots* and the like. During your conversation which I overheard last evening, you uttered at least two pounds five shillings' worth."

Lund laughed again. "Very well," he said, holding out his open hand.

"Oh, no," said Sleiding; "you don't get anything for them, because I didn't put them down. I'm an honest man; I forget what I don't buy, and I didn't know whether you'd care to be my contributor or not. Do you?"

"I'm afraid not, Mr. Sleiding," answered Lund. "I need all my ideas myself. But now tell me, is there any danger of an idea being used several times?"

"Not the slightest," said Sleiding. "A copy of those sold is put in the archives and carefully preserved for ten years at least. There was a robbery in my office once and a large number of dramatic ideas were stolen. But we never heard anything of them later; the thieves were doubtless unable to make any use of them. The repetition of an idea after ten years does not matter."

"Tell me," said Lund, "how has the world in general regarded your enterprise?"

Sleiding smiled. "Laughed at me, of course; and I have found it necessary to have my office in a quiet street and to remove my sign from the door. So much fun was made of it in the newspapers that my clients were afraid to come. But now to business—have you any thoughts to sell me?"

Lund shook his head. "No, as I told you, I have only just enough for what I need myself."

"Then you might look over this price list," said Sleiding. "There might be something here you would care to buy. And now, good morning."

Left alone, Lund held the price list in his hand and looked at it with a feeling that just at that moment he hadn't a shilling's worth of saleable ideas in his head. Then one did come to him, the idea that it would be wise to dress and go to breakfast.

When he left his cabin and turned down towards Tannemore's room a few paces distant, he found his friend in consultation with the ship's carpenter concerning the broken panel in the door opposite.

"That was a good one you gave him, sir," the workman was saying, his eyes upraised in admiration to the tall Englishman. "There's two panels just about ready to fall out. He must have been tough or else he's broken a rib sure."

"I'm glad that cabin is vacant," remarked Tannemore calmly.

"But it isn't, sir; there's a gentleman in it."

"Dear me, how very unfortunate." Tannemore was greatly concerned. "I must make my apologies for disturbing him."

He knocked gently at the door, which was opened in a moment. A small man, slightly inclined to plumpness, stood smiling up at them merrily.

"You are certainly a humorist, sir," he said in German. "First you throw a man through the wall into my room, then you knock on the door as gently as a sucking dove—afraid of awakening me, I suppose."

"My dear Mr. Schmidgruber, I do hope I didn't frighten you."

"Oh, no; I suppose it was some slight difference of opinion. I don't like that man Sleiding myself."

Schmidgruber, who had already made Tannemore's acquaintance and had had several talks with him, took the Englishman's hand and shook it warmly. Tannemore had taken a fancy to the genial little man, an Austrian who described himself as a country squire on a pleasure trip. With less than his usual reserve the English nobleman proposed that Schmidgruber join him and Lund at breakfast. And the Austrian assented gladly.

"Why, what's up!" he exclaimed, as they entered the saloon.

THE whole place shone as if newly polished, woodwork and glass glittered alike in mirrored smoothness. Even during the breakfast hour the stewards were carrying on a general renovation process. There was an air of preparation as for some important event about the big room.

"What's going on?" Schmidgruber asked a steward.

"Don't know, sir; captain's orders," replied the man.

"Looks as if they were going to have a party, doesn't it?" The Austrian turned to his companions and found they were not listening. He followed the direction of their eyes and saw a tall man in oriental garb, with a heavy black beard, just coming into the door of the saloon. The man advanced a few paces majestically, caught sight of himself in a mirror, stopped, took another look, than turned and left the saloon more quickly than he had entered it.

"What was the matter with him?" asked Tannemore.

"I fancy his beard wasn't curled to suit him," answered Lund, with a laugh.

"Do you know who that was?" asked Schmidgruber casually.

"No. He's an interesting type, but I don't like him," replied Tannemore. "I can't make him out. He dresses like a Turk and speaks English like an Englishman. I've heard him talking French and Italian, fairly well, too!"

"He speaks German well," said Schmidgruber.

"He has the air of being somebody of importance," put in Lund. "But I don't like him, although I couldn't say why."

"I don't like him either," persisted Schmidgruber. "But *I* know why I don't."

"That's interesting," remarked Tannemore, looking down into the little man's now serious grey eyes. "Do you mind telling me? I should really like to know."

Schmidgruber looked at both men in a slight embarrassment, then he answered, "It's his thumbs. Don't laugh at me, I am not talking idly. A mans hands may often tell us very much more than his face, the expression of which can be controlled.

"Really beautifull thumbs are very rare. But also a noticeably repellant thumb is rare, and wherever you see it, it is safe to conclude that its owner needs watching. Most great criminals have had abnormal thumbs. Look at this man's thumb some time. I don't know anything about him. He may be the most peaceful person in the world, but I would not trust him."

There was a pause after this sudden personal ending to Schmidgruber's psychological dissertation. Finally Lund asked the Austrian if he had ever had occasion to put into practice his theories of judging a man's character by his hands.

"Oh, yes," said the little man, smiling; "my theory has been very useful to me in a number of cases."

"How extremely interesting," said a voice behind Schmidgruber.

The latter turned with a suddenness in striking contrast to his usual easy manner. "Oh, Mr. Smithson! Have you come in for breakfast? We were so absorbed that we didn't hear you. Possibly you can tell us the reason for all this cleaning up on board?"

"There's ever so much more going on above," said the newcomer, seating himself beside them. "I understand there's to be a celebration to-day in honour of some great man whom we have here on board!"

"Indeed!" exclaimed Schmidgruber; "who is it?"

Tannemore and Lund exchanged glances of consternation, then bent over their plates as if not at all interested.

"Why, I'm not sure that I know. I have an idea, but I doubt if it's the right one."

"You'll excuse us, gentleman," said Tannemore, rising and motioning to Lund. "I want to get up on deck and take a look around to see where we are." He bowed stiffly to Smithson, more amiably to Schmidgruber, and the two left the saloon.

"Friends of yours?" asked Smithson, left alone with the little Austrian.

"No," replied Schmidgruber indifferently.

"There's another man with them, I believe; an elderly man—seems to be an invalid. They call him Digby. Do you know him?"

"No, don't think I've seen him yet. You seem interested."

"Not more than in any of the passengers. It's always interesting to me to study a group of people thrown together like this. By the way, have you ever seen the famous Professor Clusius, the great scientist?"

The Austrian shot a quick glance out of his keen eyes at the other, then bent over his plate. "No, why?"

"Why—I have an idea that he's on board."

"Do you think so?" said Schmidgruber.

"And that that's the reason for all this preparation; they're planning to give him an ovation. Have you seen that tall man with the black beard in oriental costume?"

"One can't help seeing him. He's so very noticeable."

"He looks something like the pictures of Clusius—except for his heavy beard."

Schmidgruber turned to his companion with great interest. "You think he's Clusius?"

"I don't know—only I don't know that *he isn't.*"

"That's true; no more do I."

ON DECK Tannemore and Lund looked about them.

"It does seem as if something special was going on," said Lund.

"That man Smithson's a deuced bore." commented Tannemore. "Impudent, too—talks to everybody without an introduction. Yes, you're right; look at the fellow washing out the flags there. Do you really suppose that—"

"That anyone has found out?" asked Lund. "It would be dreadful."

"It would. Every idle curiosity-seeker on board would besiege him, and we should be met by reporters on landing—"

"And we shouldn't be alone an hour, not even in the heart of the desert."

"No; by Jove, this is serious, if it's true," said Tannemore, gnawing the ends of his moustache nervously. "He couldn't work if he were disturbed and—it means a deuced lot to me, you know."

They stood by the rail in silence for a few moments. Finally Lund said, "Mightn't it be somebody else? Some other celebrity? Why should it be Clusius?"

"Who else do you think it is?"

"That mysterious Oriental, possibly. Maybe he's an Indian rajah—an Asiatic despot. What a triumph for Schmidgruber that would be."

"He's not a Hindoo—but he might be a Persian," said Tannemore. "This thing worries me; I don't like it. Let us see what we can find out ourselves. I'm going to the captain."

"That's a good plan," said Lund. "And I'll begin with the cook. Cooks know a good deal sometimes. You go on down through the list of officers and I'll work my way up. We may meet at the purser's."

"Or at luncheon," laughed Tannemore. "Goodbye until then."

A little after one, the gong sounded for the mid-day meal. The guests, noticing the extra preparations about the ship, had given more than usual care to their toilets. There was an air of expectancy the whole company.

Erna Lengdale came in slowly and took her place between her father and the Oriental. She looked depressed, in spite of the beautiful day and the general atmosphere of excitement. Ever since yesterday evening, when he had returned her fan to her with a few words of formal politeness, Mr. Swendborg had not appeared to take the slightest interest in her. She had seen him moving about the deck all the morning, talking to various people, particularly among the sailors and stewards, but, beyond a bow as he passed her, he had not noticed her existence.

She could not understand it, and she did not like it.

When she sat down at the table she saw a little bunch of flowers at her place. With a sudden start her eyes sought the other side of the table. The place she looked for was vacant. Then she saw that a similar bouquet was in front of every lady at the table. The light died out in her soft eyes and she turned to her father with a question. "Why have we these flowers today? It it some special occasion?"

"I've heard something of the kind," answered Mr. Lengdale, a quiet-looking man of middle age.

"And the captain's with us, too," said Erna, looking around. "He looks much cheerier than usual. What can be going on?"

Then her eyes brightened again as she saw Mr. Swendborg coming down the stairs. He was glancing anxiously around the saloon, but not for her apparently, as his expression did not change until he caught sight of his friend Lord Lomond, who was sitting on the sofa at the other end of the room. The Englishman arose, went forward to meet Swendborg, and said a few words to him in a low tone, upon which they came down to their places at the table together.

"They are certainly the most distinguished-looking men on board," thought Erna. Then she met a full glance from the blue eyes opposite her, and raised the flowers to her face to cover her confusion.

Schmidgruber, who sat at the other side of Erna's father, looked over at Tannemore and Lund. They shook their heads at the question in his eyes. Then he turned his in the direction of the Oriental, and raised one thumb so that the others could see.

"I'm glad our little friend can't see the professor's hands at table," whispered Tannemore to Lund, leaning across Clusius' still empty chair, "or he would recognise that they belong to a man of importance."

The professor, who now came in quietly and slipped into his chair almost unnoticed, sat very nearly opposite the Austrian. But between them was an arrangement of fruits which almost hid their view of each other.

WHEN the main part of the meal was over, the captain motioned to the head steward. Fresh glasses were brought and bottles of champagne opened. The glasses were filled and the captain rose in his place, rapping on the table for attention.

"Ladies and gentlemen," he began solemnly, "I have a most interesting piece of news for you, a delightful surprise. There is among us, at this very table, a man whom I have long wished to see. A man whose name and fame are known

wherever science is known and revered, a man whom the great minds of today consider one of their greatest."

Here the captain made a pause, and the eyes of the entire company turned towards him expectantly.

"This man is with us to-day. He, the brightest star of science—one of the great geniuses of the century—has honoured the *Pandora* by becoming our fellow passenger for this trip. I ask you all to join me in a respectful greeting to the great Professor Clusius. We drink this glass in his honour."

As the captain paused again, a sudden uproar arose outside. The steam whistle filled the air with clamour and the ship's cannon thundered a salute. The crew assembled on the deck added a many-voiced hurrah to the general tumult.

Below in the cabin, there was a moment of intense excitement. Everyone looked at his neighbour with the question. "Who is it? Which is he?" everyone, except four of the passengers.

Erna Lengdale gasped in astonishment, while the quick colour flowed up over her delicately tinted face. It was such a surprise to her, it was a shock of pleasure that was almost painful, to think that the great man she so much admired should turn out to be her fellow passenger.

Lund looked down at his plate, biting his lips in the endeavour to control his face. Tannemore leaned back in his chair, staring over the heads of the rest with an absolute lack of expression. Clusius seemed quite calm and sat motionless.

Suddenly Erna started again and turned in her chair. The man beside her in oriental garb had risen and was now bowing to the captain, then to the rest of the company.

"Why?" she almost gasped. "How can it be? This oriental-looking man?"

One could see by the astonished glances of a number of the others that the same thought was occupying their minds. Professor Clusius, the celebrated scientist, was known to be a Scandinavian, a Swede. This man might be anything else but that. Erna was dazed. And looking to her father, as if to ask help from him, she caught an equally surprised glance from a pair of grey eyes beyond him. Schmidgruber was bending forward, looking at the Oriental. The astonishment in his eyes changed to a question as his brows drew down sharply and his lids drooped until only a narrow slit could be seen.

At this new surprise Tannemore and Lund sat as if turned to stone. Lund passed his hand across his eyes once and Tannemore gnawed the end of his moustache. Otherwise their gaze hung, with an astonishment far exceeding that of the others, on the man who stood upright at the table, bowing his thanks for the ovation.

The real Clusius sat quiet. A slight flash of surprise which had gleamed up in his face gave way to an expression of gentle amusement. His lips curved, but he said nothing. As he caught the indignant start given by his friends, he stretched out his hands and held their arms. "Don't move," he whispered; "don't say a word! It's the best thing that could have happened."

The little by-play was not noticed in the general tumult.

When the first excitement passed, silence fell upon the cabin again. And the Oriental began to speak.

"Friends, fellow travelers," he said. "Through some unexplained chance our kind captain here has learned that I am on board. It was my intention to remain unknown, as I am setting out on a journey of scientific research. To preserve my incognito I had adopted the oriental costume. It is one that changes a man's appearance greatly, and will also leave me undisturbed in my wanderings through oriental countries. Yet, anxious as I was to remain unknown, it would be hypocrisy to deny that I am deeply touched by such an ovation as this. I thank you, Captain, and you, my fellow travelers, for your great kindness. I ask you to join me in drinking a glass to our captain and the officers of the *Pandora*."

The Oriental left his place and walked forward to the captain's seat, touching glasses with him.

Then the passengers thronged about and there was a general shaking of hands and clinking of glasses as they passed in review before the great man. The first who came to offer congratulations was the real Clusius. With a friendly smile he raised his eyes to those of the taller man, held out his glass and remarked amiably:

"I drink with you to the honour of Science."

Lund sat still in his place, the veins in his hands swelling as he clasped his glass tightly.

Tannemore, scarcely less excited, whispered to him, "I should like to throw my glass in his face, too, but we'd better not. He may be a fool—or he may be a rascal.

There's something behind all this and we must find out what it is."

A LITTLE while after the passengers had left the dining saloon, Erna Lengdale and Hjalmar Lund met on the deck. The girl's manner was noticeably cool. Lund was surprised, and wondered if she was hurt because he had not spoken to her that morning. His reasons for avoiding her had been partly a little personal irritation, a natural jealousy after the revelations of the fan, and his enquiries among the crew had taken more time than he realized.

Now that this astonishing thing had happened and he and his friends had not yet dared to meet in consultation over the occurrence, his first thought was to utilize his leisure as pleasantly as possible. This meant, in Erna's company.

He greeted her with eager pleasure, but she bowed coolly and turned as if to leave him.

"Miss Lengdale, won't you stay with me a few moments?" he asked.

"Sorry," she replied; "I'm not in the mood to listen to fairy tales today."

"Fairy tales? I don't understand," he ventured, uncertain.

"Wasn't it a fairy tale? Your telling me you knew Professor Clusius?"

Lund realised the situation suddenly. He flushed deeply and looked utterly helpless for a moment. He could not tell her the truth, and he realised in a flash that she must think him a braggart and a liar. How could it be otherwise? She had seen him at table and must have noticed that the object of the ovation was a total stranger to him. She must think, of course, he had been lying to her, and quite naturally she must despise him. Lund set his teeth and clenched his fists, but could say nothing.

"You were right in saying he looked dignified," Erna went on, "but I can't say that I think him kind or sympathetic. I was greatly surprised when I discovered who he was, and I confess I was disappointed. I disliked him from the first, and was sorry that he sat beside me at table. Still, that has nothing to do with you. It was plain that you had never seen the professor before."

"You are quite right, Miss Lengdale."

"Then you acknowledge?"

"I acknowledge that I have never seen *this* Professor Clusius before."

"And yet you told me so much about him; told me about him with as much assurance, as much conviction as—as if it were really true!"

"Miss Lengdale—"

"Oh, no! Don't try to make it any better—you must see what I—what I am obliged to think of you. I suppose all the rest of your talk was just as untrue. You said you knew his assistant, too, but I suppose you don't—and I suppose he doesn't look anything like you—and I suppose that he doesn't know so very much after all—in fact, the professor said so."

"What did the professor say?" asked Lund with a start.

"Does it interest you?" said Erna coldly.

"Decidedly," answered Lund, trying to keep back a smile. "Any opinion the professor might give you as to his assistant would be of great interest to me."

"Oh, then, it is I who have to inform you, and not you who have the information to give me." Erna's voice was icy with contempt. "Well, then, I will tell you, since you don't seem really to know anything about this Mr. Lund, that the professor told my father just now that his assistant—who is to meet him in Asia—is only good for the mechanical side of the work, and has very little real capacity for science."

"Indeed," said Lund; "this is most interesting. Did he say anything more?"

"You acknowledge, then, you don't know anything about them yourself?"

"I'll acknowledge anything if you will stay here a few moments longer and tell me what else the professor said." Lund's eyes looked hard and his voice was determined.

Erna was surprised, and wondered whether she had made him very angry.

"Why—he told papa he was travelling to Assyria on a matter of research concerning some old writings—hieroglyphics. Another gentleman came up who seemed to know something about some bricks in the British Museum. The professor explained that a friend of his, an Englishman scholar by the name of Lord Tannemore, considered these bricks false. But the professor does not agree with him, and his journey to Assyria is to prove that Lord Tannemore is mistaken. I don't know whether I've got it right, but I remember what he said."

Erna considered herself very amiable in giving all this explanation, when she had vowed she would never speak to the young man again. She couldn't help thinking that the look of determination on his face

and the square set of his shoulders was very becoming. He did not say anything when she had finished, but stood looking out over the water, his lips tight set.

"But perhaps some day," she began again, "you will explain to me why you thought it necessary to tell me all those—those fairy stories."

Lund turned back to her with a start and his eyes softened. "If I could only tell you," he began, then stopped suddenly.

ERNA waited a moment, then, as if disappointed, remarked, "You need tell me nothing more. Unless possibly—if you could tell me where Professor Clusius is at the moment? I want to ask him to write something on my fan."

"I thought you said you were disappointed in him? That you didn't like him?"

"I may grow to like him," replied the girl thoughtfully. "It oftens happens that one grows to dislike someone—someone one has liked once. Why shouldn't the opposite be possible?"

Lund's face lit up, but he smiled quietly.

"I think you will find—the professor on the other side of the deck. Good afternoon."

Erna bowed and walked off down the deck. Lund looked after her, frowned, and then smiled. "Someone one has liked once! —but I mustn't tell her the truth! —I mustn't—there is too much at stake for the others."

He stood for a long time looking over the rail, out across the water, until he became conscious of someone standing at his elbow. He turned quickly and saw Schmidgruber.

"Are you disappointed, too?" asked Lund. "But I must tell you that your theory as to hands is a remarkable one. I envy you your knowledge."

Schmidgruber looked up keenly, then smiled as if embarrassed. "Are you laughing at me?" he asked. "You think I should have recognised the celebrated man by his hands? Or that I made a mistake when I said that he had the hands of a criminal? You may think it, if you will; I don't mind. And I will tell you now that I am not disappointed in the working of my theory; only that I *am* disappointed in the personal character of this celebrated professor. I do not change my opinion of his hands."

Lund put both his own hands on the little man's shoulders and bent down to him, as he whispered angrily, "You are right—absolutely right. This fêted celebrity is a rascal—or a fool, and I think the first." Then he turned and walked swiftly down the deck, disappearing in the door of the companionway.

Schmidgruber looked after him.

"H'm," he murmured, "I thought so. It begins to grow interesting."

Lund hurried to Tannemore's cabin, and finding it empty went to the professor's room. Here he found his friends together.

"Well, Hjalmar, what do you think of my second self?" Clusius looked up smiling.

"I think he's a rascal; and that there's some plot at the back of it—some scheme to injure you," answered the assistant.

"And do you know what our friend here has just been saying?" continued the professor, with a wave of his hand towards Tannemore.

Lund looked up in interest as Tannemore spoke. "I think that I know who this man is. I believe him to be William Bridgeport, the forger of the tablets. We none of us know him—it just so happens that I have never met him anywhere, although I knew of him by reputation as an Assyriologist. Who else could have such an interest in giving out the opinions this man has been uttering since luncheon?"

"Then you have heard him?" asked Lund quickly.

"He is heaping scorn upon Tannemore and yourself?" the professor answered with another question.

"Yes, and he says he is going to Assyria to prove that I am a liar," said Tannemore. "He seems to know all about the matter. His anxiety to inform everybody is proof positive that he is not merely a fool, trying to pose as a celebrity for a day, as I thought at first. To me it is proof positive that he is none other than Bridgeport."

"But what does he mean by it all?" asked the professor thoughtfully. "I can't quite make it out."

"Nor can I," said Tannemore. "But one thing is sure, this man has not come out on such a journey, has not put himself in danger of being exposed as an impostor, without some reason for it. He cannot know that we are on board, or he would not have dared to call himself Clusius. The question is, does he know where we are going, and why is he going to the East? There is some plot here, and I don't like the looks of it."

"And the worst of it is," said Lund angrily, "that the passengers will believe every word he says; the reporters will get

hold of it the moment any of them land, and it will go through the papers everywhere."

"And we must be silent, friends," said Clusius gravely. "If there is any danger for us here, that is all the more reason we should say nothing now. We must find out what his plan is, and do it by not letting him know that we are here. Besides, we cannot prove anything against him once we land. It will get in the papers that Professor Clusius was on board and was fêted by the passengers. But who can prove that it was not the real Clusius that was fêted?"

"Exactly," said Tannemore. "All we could say wouldn't help matters. We could prove that Bridgeport was on board, but Bridgeport might have been on board like any other passenger and simply chosen to have changed his name on the passenger list, as we did ourselves. No, there is nothing for us to do but keep quiet and be on our guard."

CHAPTER V

THE MYSTERIOUS PHOTOGRAPHS

THE *Pandora* unloaded a number of her passengers at Alexandria, skirted the delta of the Nile, had stopped at Port Said and was now on her way to Joppa.

Erna Lengdale sat alone in a sheltered corner of the upper deck, looking out over the flat Egyptian coast; looking at it but not seeing it, for just as the Port Said light vanished on the horizon two big round tears rolled down her cheeks.

She was very unhappy. The voyage was nearly at an end. She had been sadly disappointed in the character of the young man who had pleased her so at first, and worse than all he had not been near her since their last conversation, had scarcely even looked at her. She had given him plenty of opportunity, in the hope that he might come to excuse himself for the apparent falsehoods he had told, and to confess that it was the desire to look well in her eyes which had led him to pretend to be personally acquainted with the famous professor she had so much admired.

But he had taken no advantage of the many times he had seen her sitting alone on the deck. Erna was conscious of a decided feeling of oppression. In fact, his manner towards her had been different from the moment that he had returned her fan; not only that, but she had now and then caught a glimpse from the eyes of his two friends, resting on her as if with particular interest. She could not believe that Mr. Swendborg had been discussing her with the other two gentlemen, but she did not understand it and she did not like it.

A step beside her startled her out of her meditations. It was Mrs. Henning, nominally her father's housekeeper and her own maid, but in reality Erna's faithful friend and guardian throughout her short life, watching over her like the mother she had early lost.

"Why, what are you doing, child?" she exclaimed now in sympathetic astonishment. "I believe you're crying! Is this what we came on such a long journey for? You could have done that at home."

Erna said nothing and blushed violently.

"I rather fancy that I know," said Mrs. Henning.

"What do you know?" asked Erna.

"I have eyes in my head, dear child, and I am not deaf and dumb either. Besides which, I rather like him myself."

"You, too?" said Erna naïvely.

"Well, that wasn't what I came to talk about," Mrs. Henning said, laughing. "I'm packing your trunks and I want to know what dress I shall leave out for you to wear on landing."

"Any one you like; I don't care."

"Very well, I'll see that you look pretty. And now that you are no longer alone I'll go back to my work."

Erna heard someone approaching as Mrs. Henning left.

"What is it that interests you so much over there, Miss Lengdale?" asked Lund's voice behind Erna.

She turned slowly and with great dignity, trying to push back the rebellious curls that the wind tossed over her forehead. "I was looking at the sailors hanging over the edge of the ship," she answered in a cool tone.

"Cleaning ship? It is interesting to watch."

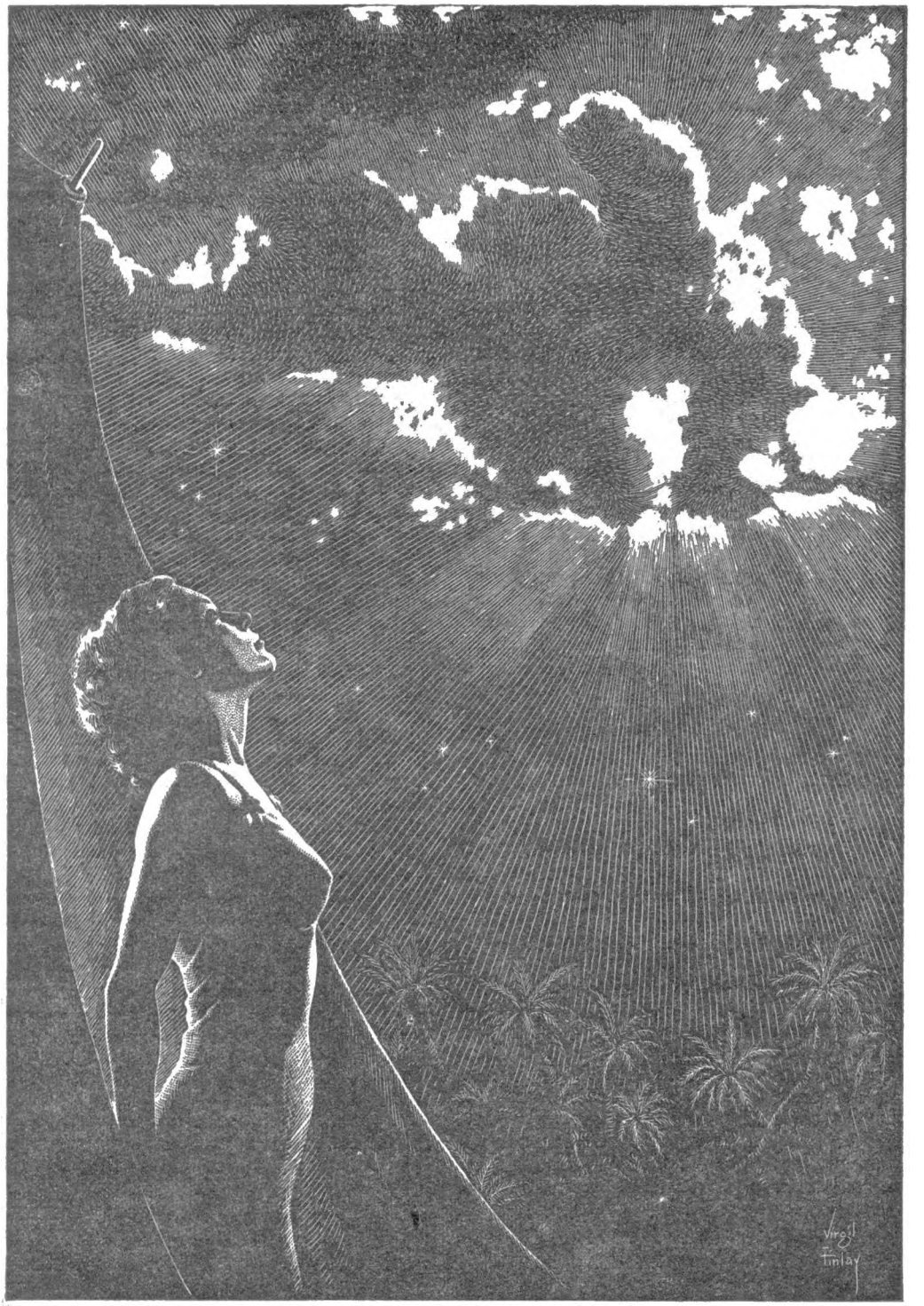
"Yes, isn't it? I'd like to join them."

"It would make your hands dirty."

"Possibly. But it's nice to see them cleaning up the ship—"

"Because it means that we have nearly come to the end of our journey?"

Erna did not answer at first and the colour faded from her cheeks. Finally she said, "Why, yes, I'm glad we are nearly there."



Erma looked out into the splendor
of the Eastern night. . . .

Lund sighed lightly. "We haven't had a talk for some little time," he began.

"It's a few days now, I believe." Erna was quite indifferent.

"And yet we have a good deal to say to each other."

"Indeed? And what?" she asked, surprised.

"Or rather," he continued, "it is I who have something to say to you."

"Do you think so?"

"I do. No, please do not turn away. I'm afraid that you have no very high opinion of me just now."

"I love truth above all things," said Erna, quite low, looking out over the water again.

"And so do I."

"Indeed?"

"Yes, I mean it. Can you not conceive of situations which one cannot explain?"

"Such situations are sometimes one's own fault," remarked Erna.

"There are situations in which one's—hands are bound."

Lund had intended to say "one's tongue," but he remembered in time that he had already talked a little too much. It had not been easy for him to remain silent till now and to let the girl leave the boat thinking that he had told her an untruth, from vanity or whatever other cause. But the mission on which he and his friends were engaged was too important to be endangered by personal considerations.

HE REALISED, of course, that it was only a matter of a momentary disappointment and misunderstanding. Whatever she might think now, when he returned home in late summer he would go to Copenhagen at once, and there, in her own home, he could tell her the truth and ascertain whether her feeling for him was what he hoped it might be. Interested as he was, his well-trained mind could easily overlook the situation.

But Erna could not. And her depression made her bitter. "Do you want me to understand that there is some complication here—some sort of theatrical farce situation? Wouldn't a single honest word clear it all up? Of course I know that in the farces they never speak this word till the last act. But you don't seem inclined to speak this word at all."

Erna was still young enough to have little control over her feelings. Her soft eyes grew dim and her sweet lips quivered. She looked so exceedingly desirable in her appealing helplessness that Lund resolutely put both his hands behind him, clasping them tight. It was one way of keeping control over himself.

But he looked straight into her eyes as he answered seriously, "My dear Miss Lengdale, I'm afraid I shall have to follow the example of the farce writers. I will speak the word of explanation several months later—in your home, I hope. Will you receive me there?"

"Do you know our address?"

He smiled. "I've just been asking Knute. I knew I should need the information—unless—you forbid me to come."

"I—I do not forbid you, but it would be better, much better, if you would speak now. You need only be honest with me and tell me that you made a mistake—"

"You mean I am to confess that I have lied to you, that I have boasted to you? No, I will make no such confession. I still insist that I have told you the truth and nothing but the truth."

Erna set her lips tight. "You insist that you know the professor?"

"I do."

"And that you know Mr. Lund, too?"

"Very decidedly."

"And you know them so well—that you could not possibly be mistaken when you saw them?"

"There is no mistake possible."

"But you were on this boat for several days with Professor Clusius and you did not recognise him."

"No, I never saw *this* gentleman before."

"Could it have been his Turkish costume that changed him so that you didn't recognise him?"

"You are very kind, but I shall not take advantage of it. I repeat that I have never seen *this* Professor Clusius before."

"*This* Professor Clusius?" said Erna with a start. "Do you mean to insinuate that there is a doubt as to his identity?"

"Spare me the answer to that."

"Oh, indeed—and is that what you are going to tell me in Copenhagen?" asked Erna scornfully. Her delicate nostrils dilated and her eyes flashed fire. "In that case I will say at once that you had better spare yourself the journey. I do not care to listen to calumnies and false accusations. I shall not be at home to you."

Lund stepped back a pace. He was quite pale and his eyes widened and flashed. Then a soft smile parted his lips. "She is more wonderful even than I dreamed," he thought, "for she is strong enough to remain true to herself."

Erna had risen and stood up very straight. In spite of her youthful slenderness she was tall and well built. And as she stood now with her head thrown back and her fair face pale with indignation, she looked more attractive than ever.

Suddenly her courage failed her. "Please go now—please leave me," she murmured.

Lund raised his arms, then crossed them tightly over his breast. The deck around them was empty of all life. The sea lay quiet and the noises of the ship came dimly through the distance of sunlit space. Erna looked out over the waters again with eyes that saw nothing. She listened and waited, either for his retreating steps or for some words. Finally he began to speak in a voice that was deep with emotion.

"You despise me now and I must endure it for a time. But one can always endure a pain, however great, if one knows that in a short time it will vanish. For this reason I can endure your contempt now, Erna—no, don't—don't be angry. I know that you think well of me and I admire you all the more for the stand you are taking now. I cannot explain, and you would not be the woman I think you are, if you were not angry with me. Oh, don't tear your handkerchief—the lace is broken on one end already; Mrs. Henning will be sad about it. And don't say anything at all; just let me talk. There is one thing I want to say to-day—just to say to you, and I don't want you to answer—not now, at least Erna, I know now that I love you. I might say that I love you out of all reason, if there were not so many reasons for loving you. I want to let you know this before we part.

"I want you to know that my thoughts will follow you while you are wandering about this Eastern land among the shades of the past. My thoughts and my heart will always be with you, Erna. That is all that I have to say now. No, one thing more. We shall be in Joppa in a few hours. Will you let me be your guide there?

"I regretted greatly that you kept away from me in Alexandria. But let me have this one last day with you. For in Beyrout our ways part, for a while at least. I fear that while I am in Nineveh I shall not be thinking of that old city as much as I should; I shall be thinking of you instead. Goodbye now," his voice changed. "Here comes your friend, Professor—Clusius. I will leave you now, and I shall not come to your home unless—" He bowed and turned away as he heard steps immediately behind him.

AN HOUR later Erna came upon her father by the door of the smoking-room. She was greatly excited, her cheeks aglow and her eyes bright.

"Papa, won't you put down that paper and come over here on this bench? There's something I want to say to you."

"Why, yes, my pet," said Mr. Lengdale in his usual quiet manner. "What can I do for you?"

"Do you want so very much to go to Jerusalem?"

"Do I want to? Why should I want to?"

"Then you wouldn't care if we go somewhere else? To Palmyra, for instance, or Babylon?"

"Go anywhere you want to, my dear child. This is your journey. You're to do anything that pleases you."

"Oh, Papa, you're so kind," said Erna, nestling up to him and patting his cheek with her soft hand. He drew her gently to him, pleased at her pleasure; he did not understand her particular interest in the change, but was willing to do anything to make her happy.

"And now, Papa, don't let's say anything to anybody about it," whispered Erna. "I shouldn't like Professor Clusius to know we're going to Nineveh and Babylon for his sake."

"Oh, that's why you want to change our plans," asked Lengdale. "Well, now, if he were twenty years younger I might understand."

"Don't be a silly old dear," said Erna quickly. She pressed a hasty kiss on his lips, handed him his newspaper again and disappeared. She ran down into her own cabin, threw herself on a sofa and dreamed there with wide-open eyes until she heard the bustle and excitement of the ship stopping. Then she ran up on deck again and looked out.

Before them lay the town, framed in gardens, climbing over the straggling hills. A fleet of boats surrounded the *Pandora*, their owners gesticulating to attract the attention of her passengers. Erna stood looking down over the railing with keen enjoyment of the characteristic oriental tumult.

"There are the mountains of Judea," said a voice behind her. "You need not be afraid of the landing to-day in such calm weather. Ordinarily it is difficult and dangerous on account of the shoals and rocks."

Erna looked up at the speaker with a smile. "I afraid? On the water? I don't know what it means."

"It's a notoriously bad spot," explained Lund. "Sometimes they can't land here at all, and have to take the passengers and the freight on to the next harbour."

"Well, we're going to land to-day," said Erna decidedly, but without looking at him.

A small number of passengers only went on shore to visit the city. Among them were Lord Tannemore and Mr. Schmidgruber, Erna and Lund. They did not return until nearly evening.

Lord Tannemore had various purchases to make, and the little Austrian, with whom he had struck up quite a friendship, accompanied him. Erna and Lund went through the city, studying all the points of interest. Lund made an excellent courier, telling her much of the interesting history of the ancient town, of the old Hellenic myths connected with it and of the Biblical events in which it had played so important a part.

Side by side they climbed up through the steep narrow streets, visited the old cemeteries, took lunch at the hotel, then went across to the native inn and fed the camels waiting there. When they were tired of walking they went into the famous orange grove of the German Consulate and rested there from their exertions.

Lund spoke no single word of love throughout the long day. He remained only the careful guide and polite friend. They chattered easily with no embarrassment, and yet there lay between them and about them an indefinable atmosphere of unspoken happiness.

When they came back to the *Pandora* their manner towards one another was so calm and indifferent that Mrs. Henning, waiting at the gangway, thought to herself, "I wonder what's the matter now? If it was me, I should be quite in love with that young man."

THERE were still some miles of sea to travel before the harbour of Beyrout was reached. But most of the passengers of the *Pandora* were busy at their preparations for leaving their floating home.

Schmidgruber strolled up and down the deck, looking around him with interest at the busy stewards and the general bustle of the last hours on board. Now and then he would fall into thought as if pondering some problem. During such moments the genial smile faded from his face and his grey eyes grew keen under their heavy brows. In one of his fits of abstraction he turned suddenly and found himself face to face with Sleiding.

"Nearly there," remarked the Australian in German, a language which he spoke with more fluency than accuracy. "Too bad he's going to leave us."

"Who?" asked the little man absently.

"Why, the famous professor," replied Sleiding. "Aren't you sorry?"

"Of course. I should like to see more of him."

"Are you, too, trying to profit by his genius?"

Schmidgruber shook his head. "His genius? No, not exactly; there's something else of his that interests me more."

"What is it then?"

"It isn't easy to talk about—with everyone. If you really want to know, the man's a mystery to me—a riddle that I am very anxious to decipher."

"A riddle? Why?"

"Because if I can read this riddle aright, it will help me in the working out of a new theory."

"A new theory?" asked Sleiding eagerly. "Man alive! Why didn't you say so before? The idea of keeping such a thing from me till this last minute. Don't you know how interested I am in new ideas? Don't you know that I buy them and pay well for them?"

"No, you've never said anything to me about it."

"I don't believe I have," admitted Sleiding. He remembered that he had not thought this simple-looking little man capable of any new ideas, but now that he took another look he noted a highly intelligent face and the eyes of a man who can see visions. "Just shows," he thought to himself, "how little you can tell by a man's superficial appearance."

"Is your idea a useful one?" he asked aloud.

"It's very useful to me."

"I mean in general."

"If my theory is correct it will be exceedingly useful to the whole world," replied Schmidgruber, in a tone of deep conviction.

"And what's it about?" said Sleiding, drawing out his note-book.

"It is about hands—about the expression of the hands, their shape—" Sleiding put his right hand behind his back— "and their movements. I believe it's possible to

tell a man's whole character from the look of his hand."

Sleiding sunk his left hand into his pocket. The movement may have been involuntary, or he may have been not altogether willing to have this little man learn anything, as he thought he could, of his true character. His face changed for the moment, and he shot a quick glance at the harmless-looking figure before him.

"To understand a man's whole character," he repeated thoughtfully. Then he looked up with a sudden decision. "Have you plenty of time?" he asked.

Schmidgruber smiled genially. "Certainly," he answered; "if you want me to talk about hands I've any amount of time."

"Six weeks."

"Six weeks!" queried Schmidgruber astonished. "Do you want me to talk about hands to you for six weeks?"

"Not altogether, but we can talk about that, too. I have a proposition to make to you."

"And what is it?"

"Are you master of your own time for the next six weeks or longer?"

"I am."

"Then you're travelling for pleasure, as I am?"

"Yes. And you mean that it will be double pleasure if we join forces?"

"That was my idea."

"And then?"

"You said just now that you were interested in Clusius, this celebrated and highly gifted man. You're interested in his present enterprise?"

"I am. You mean that—"

"I mean that we follow him, or join him if necessary. That will be better still. We should both gain by it. You would have plenty of opportunity to study his hands—to elaborate your theory further or else correct it."

"Quite right—quite right. It would be a good plan." Schmidgruber was evidently pleased with the suggestion.

"I'm usually right," said Sleiding. "This trip would mean a good deal for you, then, and it would help me a lot, too. Professor Clusius has any number of new ideas. He has told me something of his plans, and they seem adventurous, to say the least. He claims to have invented something never heard of before, a way to discover things hidden from the sight of everyone else. Now, between ourselves, there is a self-complacency—to put it mildly—about his manner. I should like to be there when he makes his discovery—or doesn't; and I imagine that it would interest you, too."

"It would—it would," assented Schmidgruber eagerly.

Sleiding continued, first looking about to make sure they were not overheard: "Either this Professor Clusius is a genius, or he is a scientific swindler. Now, whichever he is, he can be of use to me. On the whole, I should prefer the latter. It would make a first-class detective story."

"Is that why you want to follow him?" asked Schmidgruber, with another one of his quick, keen glances. "Well, as you say, it might be interesting, from any point of view, to continue one's study of the man."

"Suppose we follow him then," urged Sleiding; "to Nineveh, Babylon and Palmyra, or any other place? We shan't lose anything by going with him."

"I'm willing," said the Austrian; "but how about the professor? Didn't he tell us he had tried to disguise himself and

taken another name so as to be left alone?"

"H'm," grunted Sleiding, "if he had really meant that he would not have talked so much, or kept himself so much in evidence after discovery."

"Yes, you're quite right," agreed Schmidgruber, smiling openly.

"He would not have been so careful to let the whole ship know his opinion of Tannemore and his assistant."

"It was rather peculiar, that, wasn't it?" remarked Schmidgruber. "Hardly worthy of a 'great' man."

For a moment the eyes of the two men met with a glance that was a question. Then Sleiding laughed, and looked away. "My dear sir," he said, "it's been my experience that these great men are not always so great as one would expect. We may be quite sure Clusius is not so anxious to hide his destination as he would have you think."

"You think that we shall be able to follow him into Mesopotamia?"

"Why not? He does not own the roads, does he? Plenty of other people make that trip across the desert now."

"He may try to throw us off his track."

"I doubt it. But even if he does, it'll do him no good."

During the last few minutes they had been so absorbed that they had not noticed Tannemore standing behind them. Unwillingly he had overheard the last few sentences.

"They're quite harmless," he thought. "They won't be in our way even if they do come with us." As Sleiding turned away Tannemore exchanged a few words with Schmidgruber and passed down into his cabin.

Sleiding, walking down the deck, was saying to himself, "Didn't take him long to agree. He may be useful to me. Seems an intelligent little chap."

THE passengers on the *Pandora*, knowing that Professor Clusius was to leave them at Beyrout, gathered around him, asking for an autograph or a special word of farewell. He honoured the Englishman, Mr. Smithson, with a few words alone as they walked up and down the deck. Smithson seemed quite flattered by this distinction, and bowed himself off, when it was over, with an air of great pleasure. No one had overheard their conversation, and an autograph, flourished by Smithson in triumph, gave excuse for the colloquy.

The great scientist remained on deck while Smithson went below to his cabin, to reach which he had to pass the rooms occupied by the real Clusius and his friends. In front of one of them something white, gleaming on the floor of the dark corridor, attracted his attention.

Smithson bent down and picked it up. It was an envelope, unsealed, its contents a few sheets of thin paper. Unconsciously Smithson looked at the door in front of which he stood. It was Room No. 7, and the card on the door bore the name Lord Henry Lomond.

Smithson looked at the name, and then at the envelope, which had undoubtedly been dropped by Lord Lomond or someone visiting his cabin, but as the envelope bore no name and was not sealed, it was an easy matter, and one that did not oppress Smithson's conscience in the least, to raise the flap and take out the contents.

In the envelope were three or four photographs, silhouettes with faint outlines and shadings. They were the photographs of a young girl, a young man and two women, one middle-aged, the other very old. The two older women and the young man were strangers to Smithson, but the picture of the young lady bore such a resemblance to Miss Erna Lengdale, the pretty Danish girl, the centre of attraction on *Pandora*, that he had no doubt it was intended for her. Smithson may have been a rascal, but he had decency and insight, and did not think for a moment Miss Lengdale had ever visited Lord Lomond's cabin. And yet the envelope must belong to her; she had dropped it, going through the corridor, most likely. It had little interest for him; the best thing to do was to return it immediately.

He went back to the saloon and looked in; the lady he sought was there, writing a letter. She looked up when she heard him approaching, and seemed disappointed. But the man was evidently about to speak to her, and her natural politeness could not refuse him a passing word, though her thoughts were not with him and her bow was very formal.

"I beg your pardon for disturbing you, Miss Lengdale," said Smithson. "I found this envelope, containing some photographs, in the corridor, and I think it must be yours."

She took the envelope from him mechanically.

"Why, what's this?" she asked, looking down at the white paper.

"The photographs you lost," replied Smithson.

"Why I—I haven't lost any photographs; at least I don't think so."

"But one of them is your picture."

"My picture?" Erna looked greatly astonished. "Oh," she said, "there was a photographer came on board at Alexandria; do you think he could have—"

Erna took the slips of paper out of the envelope with more interest. Her own picture lay on top. "Why, how interesting," she said; "like a silhouette, isn't it?" Then suddenly she started, looked at the picture more sharply and involuntarily put her hand to her hair. "Why," she exclaimed, "I haven't worn my hair like that on board! I haven't worn it that way for a year."

"That's queer," said Smithson. And his astonishment increased as he watched her. She had laid aside her own picture, and was now staring at the next, her eyes widened in a surprise that was almost like fright.

"It's Axel, Axel," she exclaimed; "Axel Altborg! Why, Axel is in Iceland now—has been there for a year. And here he's in uniform. He hasn't worn uniform for months."

She raised her pale face to the man who stood beside her as if asking for explanations, but he was as astonished as she, and as helpless.

"I can't explain it to you, Miss Lengdale," he said. "Are you quite sure you didn't bring these pictures with you? Or that your father might not have brought them?"

"Quite sure," murmured Erna, "neither Axel—he is my cousin—nor I have ever had pictures taken of this kind. I can't understand it."

"There are two more," said Smithson.

MECHANICALLY, still bewildered, Erna raised her cousin's picture and laid it aside. When she beheld the next, she sank back into her chair, and grasped the man's arm convulsively.

"Why, what's the matter? What is the matter, Miss Lengdale?" he cried, in alarm. "Are you ill? Shall I fetch you some water?"

"No, no, stay with me, stay," gasped Erna. "Look at this. This is a picture of my grandmother, who was never photographed in her life, and who is now dead; and the other, the other is my aunt, who is also dead."

"Are you sure?" stammered Smithson, catching the infection of her excitement.

"Quite sure. I might have some doubt—just in those profile pictures—about my aunt. But my grandmother had very striking features, and a peculiar way of arranging her hair and her cap. There is no mistake possible. What does it mean? What happened?"

Smithson was conscious of a shiver, himself. There was some mystery here not to be explained in ordinary terms. He pulled himself together, however, hiding his fear under very real surprise.

"It is peculiar, most peculiar. Why, it's a miracle. And who works miracles nowadays?"

Erna looked up at him as he said the word and withdrew her hand from his arm. A little colour came back into her cheeks, and she smiled.

"Oh, why didn't I think of it?" she exclaimed happily. "Of course it is he, the only man who can work miracles to-day, the great Professor Clusius. He's been so nice to me, and I spoke to him about my grandmother and my aunt. I was so fond of them. And he's done this—somehow, I don't know how—to please me."

"Did you speak of this nice-looking young man, too?" asked Smithson, now smiling himself.

Erna's smile faded. She was quite conscious that she had not mentioned her cousin's name the entire trip. She was also quite conscious of the fact that she had not thought of the young man for ever so long. It was only a passing flirtation anyway, and as far as she was concerned the incident was closed.

"Oh, father may have said something about him," she continued. "Anyway, doesn't it show how wonderful the professor is? I must find papa at once and show him these. Thank you for bringing them to me."

With a pretty little nod she rose from her chair and ran out of the saloon.

Smithson stood looking after her in the grip of a feeling which he could not analyse at first. He saw no reason to doubt the truth of her statement about the pictures, and her excitement and bewilderment had been very real. It was true, then, that her own photographs had been somehow taken on board the boat, in a coiffure which she had not worn for a year past—a photograph had been taken of a young man who was many hundreds of miles away, photographs taken of two

women who were both dead, one of whom had never been photographed during her lifetime.

Either there was some trickery here, or it was indeed a miracle of science, inexplicable except to the initiate. Erna's solution of the problem meant nothing to Smithson. He knew very well that the man fêted on board the *Pandora* as Professor Clusius was incapable of such a *tour de force*. If anyone could have done it, it would have been the real Clusius himself.

Here Smithson's thoughts stood still, his blood rushed from brain back to heart again with a violence that turned him sick and giddy. He sank into a chair, and struggled to regain composure. With pale lips he murmured, "Then the real Clusius is on board."

CHAPTER VI

IN BEYRUT

"THE real Professor Clusius on board!" There was no other explanation of the mystery of the photographs.

The thought was anything but pleasant for Smithson, but the more he pondered it the more likely it seemed. Word had been given out that the real Clusius was to journey overland to Constantinople and take the ship from that point to Beyrut. But what was more natural than that the noted scientist should have spread abroad a purposely false report as to the route chosen, that he might remain undisturbed. And it was equally natural that he should not have made himself known on the boat, even during the comedy of the ovation.

Smithson's teeth chattered. Should the real Clusius demand an accounting for this ovation, Smithson's own part in it could not be overlooked. He had come on board to see that the coast was clear for the impersonator, to ascertain whether there were any among the passengers who knew the real Clusius by sight, even. It was humiliating to think that he should have been so easily duped, but this was the least of his troubles.

He was under orders from the man he most hated and feared—he was in that man's pay for services which he had not performed satisfactorily. He knew James Redfowles well, and he knew what he had to expect when Redfowles discovered how remiss he had been. His employer was in Beyrut awaited the arrival of the *Pandora*. He would recognize the real Clusius at once and the very least that would happen would be a flat refusal to pay Smithson more than his expenses.

"He shall pay me, the damned rascal—he shall pay me for all my time, and for every word I have said on board this boat. And if Redfowles won't pay me, then—by Jove, that is an idea! If the real Clusius *is* on board he ought to be interested in what I know. Interested enough to pay me well for the information."

Smithson tore at a bunch of papers in his pocket and pulled out a creased and worn passenger list. He ran his finger down the row of names until it halted suddenly. "Lord Henry Lomond," the only Englishman on board beside himself and Bridgeport. Who was Lord Lomond? He travelled in company with a good-looking young Norwegian who called himself Swendborg, and with a quiet elderly gentleman, a Mr. Digby, who kept much to his stateroom. Lord Lomond—the globe-trotting sportsman?

"Oh, Lord, what an ass I've been," groaned Smithson. "Serves them right for not telling me more about the matter, and sending me off on such a wild goose chase. Thought they knew it all, didn't they? We'll see this Englishman at once."

Smithson rose and slammed his cabin door behind him. He hurried down the corridor to the door in front of which he had found the envelope not half an hour ago. He stopped, thought the matter over, then set his teeth hard and knocked.

"Come in," said a voice inside.

Smithson entered and found Lord Lomond alone, packing his valise.

"Looks as if he wasn't accustomed to doing it himself. Wonder why he didn't bring his man along?" thought Smithson. Aloud he said, "May I have a few words with you?"

"If you don't mind my going on with this bothersome business of packing," said Tannemore.

"It is a nuisance, isn't it?—especially when one isn't accustomed to doing it for one's self. You must find it annoying to travel without your valet.

"I should think that was my business."

"Surely—surely," said Smithson suavely. "But I can imagine there may be times when it's more convenient not to bring a man along; those fellows are so indiscreet. That's not the point, however, Lord Lomond. I came here to talk to you about the—passenger list."

"Indeed?" Lord Lomond dropped a white cravat on top of a blue silk sock and put both hands in his pockets.

"Yes—our passenger list—how very incorrect these passenger lists are sometimes."

"May I ask what you mean?"

Smithson looked down at his own hands. "What I mean? I can tell you that now—or several days later—or several weeks later, just as you like."

Tannemore retained his air of polite indifference, but he was becoming quite interested. This man had evidently something to say.

"Do you want me to tell you anything about our passenger list?"

"Possibly. And I may possibly be able to impart some information to you."

"You are too mysterious, Mr.—?"

"Smithson."

THERE was silence in the cabin for a few moments. Tannemore looked at his visitor, who could not make up his mind to begin. Finally Tannemore said, "We drop anchor in about an hour. If it is your intention to sit here and say nothing, possibly you will permit me to go on about my business."

"We can settle our business in ten minutes if you wish," replied Smithson.

"It will suit me very well."

"Will you answer a question for me?"

Tannemore nodded conditionally.

"Lord Lomond, would you give me your opinion of the Professor Clusius who is so much fêted on board?"

Tannemore looked his visitor straight in the eyes and answered, with a slow drawl, "My opinion of this gentleman is a private matter of my own."

"Which you will not tell me?"

"Which I do not care to discuss with a total stranger."

"Very well then, and what is your opinion of this?" asked Smithson, and he held out a photograph of Erna's aunt. There had been two copies of this picture in the envelope and Smithson had kept one for himself before returning it to the girl.

Tannemore glanced at the picture and recognized it as one of those thrown on the fan. He realized, with inward amusement, that Lund must have copied the pictures for himself. But his face remained passive and quite indifferent as he answered, "It appears to be a silhouette of a middle-aged lady—with whom I am not acquainted."

Smithson rose. "Then you have nothing to tell me about this either, Lord Lomond? In that case I beg your pardon for disturbing you. We have nothing more to say to one another."

He had his hand on the door-knob when Tannemore remarked, "Don't go yet."

"What is it?" asked Smithson, surpressing a smile of triumph.

"Suppose you tell me your opinion of this picture."

Smithson put down his hat and took out the photograph again. "I find it extremely

interesting. Not so much because of the subject as because of the man who must have made it—Professor Clusius—the real Professor Clusius."

"And why do you think Clusius—the real Clusius—took this picture?" asked Tannemore, looking at his visitor sharply.

"That is quite unimportant to the matter in hand."

"Why do you emphasise 'the real Clusius'?"

Smithson smiled. "Because I have reason to believe that there are two Professors Clusius journeying to the East, one of whom alone can be the real one—and he who made this picture."

"And the other?"

"The other is an impostor."

"Of course," remarked Tannemore.

"An impostor—with evil intentions," continued Smithson, in a lower tone.

"Of course," repeated Tannemore.

"An impostor—with evil intentions," said Smithson, in a lower tone.

"Of course," repeated Tannemore.

"With carefully planned evil intentions," said Smithson. And Tannemore repeated mechanically, "Of course"; adding, as he sat down on the sofa again, "And now please be more explicit, Mr. Smithson."

Smithson sat down, leaning back in his chair and crossing his legs. He felt that he was master of the situation now.

"What is it you want me to say?" he asked.

"I want you to say whatever it was you came here to say," answered Tannemore sharply.

"Still—after all, why should I betray a man who has no intention of harming me?" said Smithson in a tone of meditation.

Tannemore understood. "Suppose you come to business at once."

"Are you really interested?" asked Smithson innocently.

"Yes."

"And why?"

"Because I happen to be a personal friend of the real Professor Clusius."

"And therefore you would like to know something more about the—the false Professor Clusius? I think I could tell you something about him—something quite interesting."

"That will do very nicely."

"What do you pay for interesting information?"

"That will depend on the information. I've never had any dealings with spies—"

"Spies? You are insulting, Lord Lomond."

"Oh, indeed? You're sensitive, then. I beg your pardon. What do you wish me to call it—this service of yours?"

"Call it a business favor; that sounds better."

"Very well. At what do you value this business favor?"

Smithson sat in thought a moment, then he said slowly, "About five hundred pounds."

Tannemore paused before answering. "And suppose I discover your information to be utterly worthless to me?"

"Why, then, my lord, you are a man of honour—if you discover my information to be worthless to you, you needn't pay me more than one hundred pounds."

Tannemore smiled openly, amused at the man's impertinence. "Very well, we'll call it a bargain. And what is your information?"

"It concerns the real name of the false Professor Clusius, and his plans for the immediate future."

"I am listening; say what you have to say."

"I overheard, by chance—"

Tannemore's lip curled scornfully, but he said nothing.

"—by chance, a conversation between Mr. William Bridgeport, the archaeologist—do you happen to know him?"

" I have never met him personally—before this voyage."

"Oh, I see—well, the other party to the conversation was a man by the name of Redfowles, James Redfowles. Does your lordship happen to know this man Redfowles?"

"Go on with your story."

"I have known Redfowles for some time, known him well. From the conversation between these two men I gathered that Bridgeport was to undertake his journey under the name of Professor Clusius. Redfowles was to await him in Beyrout. After landing, Bridgeport is planning to join the real Professor Clusius, who is expected in Beyrout within a day or two. Bridgeport is to watch any experiments the professor may make on his Eastern journey, to learn if possible the secret of the new invention. The object of this, of course, is that Bridgeport and Redfowles may utilize what they have learned, for their own benefit.

"You have seen part of the programme carried out already."

SMITHSON paused and Tannemore inquired, "And is that all?"

"You're disappointed?"

"Why, yes. With the exception of a few unimportant details, I was already in possession of the facts you give me. Besides, all the passengers on the *Pandora* know the plans of this Professor Clusius in his Eastern trip. But, of course, most of the passengers do not know, what a few of us do know, that this Professor Clusius is an impostor."

"Oh, indeed, you knew that already, did you? Lord Tan—Lord Lomond? Well, then I see that my information is valueless to you, and one hundred pounds will be all I get." He held out his hand, but Tannemore did not notice it.

"I think you can earn a little more," he said.

"Yes, I can," remarked Smithson decidedly. "You owe me a hundred pounds for what I've already said. You are aware now that I know Bridgeport and Redfowles, that I overheard their consultation and am in possession of their plans. I have kept back the most important part for the bigger payment."

"You're a clever business man," remarked Tannemore. "What is your price for the rest of the information?"

"The five hundred pounds agreed upon will do, my lord— With the one hundred extra for the introduction, you understand."

"Then for six hundred pounds altogether you will tell me everything you know about this matter?"

"Everything."

"Very well, you shall have the money. Now begin."

"Redfowles and Bridgeport, when they have obtained possession of the secret of the professor's new discovery, are planning to kill yourself, Lord Tannemore, Professor Clusius, who is down in the passenger list as Mr. Digby—and his assistant, Mr. Lund."

"Indeed!"

"They are secure from any immediate search for the professor in Mesopotamia because the famous man will be seen and heard from at various points in the East and on his return to Europe. Also his two companions will be heard from until their traces are lost somewhere in Europe. Then Bridgeport and Redfowles will return to England, in their own persons, and in possession of the professor's discovery—they believe that it is something of great value —where they intend to give it out as their own and gain fame and money from it."

Smithson was telling something he partly knew and partly guessed from scraps of conversation he had heard. That what he said was the actual truth he was not quite sure himself. But he did not let Tannemore see this, of course.

When his story was done Tannemore sat thinking it over, conscious of a feeling of admiration for the inventiveness and courage of the two rascals. Finally he said quite indifferently:

"How are they going to kill us?"

"Sorry to say I don't know the details of that."

"Have you anything else to tell me?"

Smithson reflected a moment, wishing there were something by which he could raise his price. But he could think of nothing, so he shrugged his shoulders and replied, "No, that is all."

Tannemore took a wallet from his pocket and laid six crisp English banknotes on the table. "Here is your money, and now—I bid you good-day."

He turned to his valise and recommenced his packing.

But when his visitor had left the cabin and disappeared round the corner of the corridor, Tannemore himself went at once to Clusius. The professor and Lund were busy packing their apparatus.

"I don't want to interrupt," said Tannemore. "but I come with some rather interesting news."

"You are always welcome, Richard. And what is your news?" asked Clusius in his usual gentle manner.

"There are plans laid to kill us—somewhere in Asia," replied Tannemore, stooping to pick up a little metal cap that had fallen from the table.

"To kill us?" repeated Clusius. "That *is* interesting. Please loosen these screws a bit, Hjalmar."

"Somewhere in Asia?" asked Lund. "They're both loose now, sir."

"We have to loosen these steel spools from the bars," continued the professor, laying his delicate hand on the rolls that held the long strip of paper. He and Lund gently removed the screw that held the rolls, while the professor added, "And now tell us all about it, Richard."

Tannemore told his story in a few words.

"Well, let us discuss this rationally and in good order," suggested Clusius. "The first question is, shall we give up the undertaking or not? I put the question for

the sake of argument merely. I say, by all means let us go on, let us carry out our experiments, in spite of all interruption, in spite of all danger."

"And the next point," suggested Lund eagerly, "is whether there is any use keeping up our incognito, also whether we had better have Bridgeport and Redfowles arrested in Beyrout."

If he did not have to persist in his incognito, he could clear himself in Erna Lengdale's eyes all the quicker; no doubt much of Lund's eagerness was due to this fact.

"That is hardly feasible," remarked Tannemore. "It's very hard to get anyone arrested in Turkish territory; that is, anyone in possession of as much money as Bridgeport and Redfowles no doubt command. And besides, Bridgeport did not start on this journey without all necessary papers. We may take it for granted their passports are as cleverly done as all his other forgeries. It will be easy for him to prove himself the true Clusius as for the professor here. It may also be quite as easy for him to have us arrested, in which case it might be weeks before we could get proper assistance from England or Sweden."

"And we should be losing precious time," put in the professor; "no, no. The longer we leave them alone the surer we are of remaining undisturbed."

"I suppose so," sighed Lund. "We may as well let the curious tourists continue to gather about him and leave us alone."

"Yes, yes, spare me from them," implored the professor. "We must keep up our incognito, and give no apparant attention to Bridgeport and Redfowles."

"Because we have no means of proving their criminal intentions," added Tannemore.

"How are we to meet them then?" asked Lund.

"Very cautiously and quite amiably," replied the professor. "It's to their interests not to harm us until they know the results of our experiments. I shall talk to you quite freely about them in Bridgeport's presence, if he joins us. No danger threatens us until we reach full success. And then —many a man who has been marked for death is alive and in good health to-day."

"We shan't be killed!" exclaimed Lund brightly, thinking of an errand that he planned to do on his return to Europe.

"No, we shall not die," said the professor, smiling, holding out his hand to Tannemore. "The message that we send to Lady Evelyn will not be a sad one. I myself am trying to do away with the one danger that threatens you. As for the danger that threatens us all, I think we are quite capable of taking care of ourselves."

"How kind you are—to think of others in this moment," sighed Tannemore. He himself realized how often he had neglected his wife in his devotion to science.

"There is something else too," continued Clusius. "If we do not return safely, the world of science will lose the benefit of our work. That is, it will not be quite lost, because Bridgeport and Redfowles will try to utilise it. Bridgeport is a scientist, and I shall let him see enough of what we are doing to gain a clear idea of the principles of the thing. But while he is a scholar, we know that he is not honest. How do we know that he will make a proper use of what he has learned? How do we know he won't use the stolen knowledge for evil ends? No, friends, we must not die on this journey."

"But if we let them see what we are doing?" questioned Tannemore timidly. And Lund exclaimed, "Yes, they will use their knowledge wrongly. How can we prevent it? We don't want to kill them."

THERE was silence in the cabin for some few minutes. Clusius looked out through the porthole to the open sea, shielding his eyes from the lowering sun. The lower part of his face was in the full light. His friends watching and waiting, saw his features change, the delicate lips press closely together, then part as if he breathed with difficulty; they could hear his teeth clench.

Finally he let fall his hand, and his friends read in his eyes an expression of firm determination, darkened only by sadness; hardly seeing, they wandered about the cabin until they rested on Lund's face. The professor smiled.

"No, my dear Hjalmar; don't be afraid those two will make bad use of our experiments. They won't. You may safely leave it to me." His kind, intelligent face grew hard as stone; the glance in his eyes was like a threat. But a moment later he smiled brightly and exclaimed, "Now, what are you doing, Hjalmar? Those screws belong in box C. And now we must, of course, once we have landed, take every possible care to insure our personal safety. We will engage an armed escort for our trips through the desert."

"And I will telegraph my cousin, who is chief of police in London, to send secret service men to our aid," said Tannemore. "They can come with all necessary warrants for possible use, and they ought to join us in two weeks."

"Then we'll start without further delay?" said Lund. "We had better let those two rascals think we know nothing of their plans. Besides which, we are three and they are only two, and the secret service men are coming to reinforce us. The situation may appear dangerous, but it's really rather absurd."

"Let us call is absurdly serious," remarked Tannemore.

The professor shook his head. "There is no use in your telegraphing to London, Richard; the message will never reach its destination."

"And why not?"

"Redfowles will recognise us when we land. And he will tell Bridgeport who we are. They will naturally watch us closely, and be sure to intercept any message to the outer world."

"Then I will have somebody else send the message."

"They will know where it comes from—and they will read it."

"We can bribe the telegraph operator."

"Yes, that is easy in Turkey—but the man who will take a bribe from one person will take a larger one from another."

"Very true," said Tannemore. "I will spare the money then, and telegraph in some Malayan tongue. Edward's valet is a Lascar. He can translate the message."

"Dear Richard, I hate to seem to oppose you, but you ought to know that there are men of every nation passing through Beyrout constantly. Redfowles need only take the paper with the message down to the docks and ask the next best Lascar sailor he meets, to interpret it for him."

"You are delightfully clever in combining possibilities," said Tannemore, laughing. "But I'll manage to send that telegram somehow, and I think I know how. Why otherwise should we three have our knowledge of chemistry—except to serve us in an emergency? There are inks which fade an hour after writing, as you know—and there are other inks which are invisible when written and which gain colour some time later."

"Excellent," said young Lund, "that's the way."

"Yes, that will go," said the professor.

"It's a crook's trick," said Tannemore, "but when you're dealing with crooks you must adopt their methods."

"Where are the new men to meet us when they come?" asked Lund.

"I've laid out the route day by day," replied Tannemore. "Barring accidents I know exactly where we ought to be at a given time. Good gracious, what's all this?" he added in astonishment, looking down at a mountain of paper piling itself up in front of him.

"That's the paper off the rolls," laughed the professor. "Let's get it out of the window, Hjalmar."

Lund turned the crank busily to free the last of the paper from the roll, while the professor started the first portion on its journey out of the window. Suddenly Lund's hands halted in their movements and he looked down at the paper. He saw the outlines of Erna's head, then the other head bending over hers—and then—the kiss. He laughed, and tore off the paper that showed the kiss, putting it carefully away in his pocket. "I'll show her that when I call in Copenhagen," he thought.

THE turmoil of an oriental harbour surrounded the *Pandora*. Busy officials climbed up and down the gangways, and a fleet of little boats, rowed by noisy Arabs, swarmed about her tall sides.

A special uproar of cries and laughter attracted the attention of passengers and sailors on the steamer's seaward quarter. They looked down and saw boatmen cutting their way through the convolutions of a seemingly endless strip of paper. Yards and yards of it floated on the surface of the water, rising and falling like some monster of the deep.

There was a general rush to the side of the boat, and much merry conjecturing as to the nature of the obstacle. Our three friends laughed with the rest of the passengers, and smiled at each other meaningly, but took no part in the discussion. Suddenly Lund put his hand to his pocket, turned pale and dashed down the companionway. He realized that he had lost the envelope containing the four photographs.

It was not to be found in his cabin or anywhere else, and he had to return to the deck, greatly depressed. On his way up he overtook Erna. She looked prettier than ever in a pale grey gown with a soft grey veil hovering like a halo around her fair face. She was smiling and happy, and Lund felt a pang of unreasoning jealousy.

The hour of parting had come and she was taking it with most unflattering calm. In fact she seemed to think of nothing but the delight of landing in a new and interesting country. Lund felt it wasn't fair to him.

All gracious self-possession, the girl held out her hand. "Oh, Mr. Swendborg, I'm so glad of this chance to tell you how much your instructive talks have added to the pleasure of my voyage," she said.

"And that's all you have to say? Now that we are to part?" asked Lund, speaking low, looking into her eyes. "Is that all you are thinking of?" She coloured deeply, but her pretty lips curved in a roguish smile. "Oh, no, I'm thinking of a great many other things. I'm thinking of the wonderful desert, and the camel-riding, and the date palms, and Niniveh—oh, there are ever so many other things. But there's papa waiting for me. Good-bye—for a while." She fled fleet-footed up the stairway, her silvery laugh ringing like low music. Mrs. Henning followed, after a demure farewell to Lund.

The young man's depression grew. He did not understand her behavior, and it hurt him deeply. He went up on deck and joined his friends in gloomy silence.

The first passenger to leave the *Pandora* was Smithson. No one noticed his departure, for most of the others were grouped expectantly about the deck, waiting for a last look at the celebrated scientist who had been their fellow voyager. He came walking majestically through the space left open for him. As he neared the gangway Erna Lengdale stepped in front of him.

"Oh, Professor, how can I ever thank you for this evidence of your genius, and your kindness to me!" she exclaimed, gazing up at him, her soft hazel eyes filled with admiration and awe. She held a small white envelope in one hand.

The pseudo-professor, quite at sea as to her meaning, kept his dignity with difficulty. "My dear young lady," he began slowly, sparring for time.

The passengers drew nearer to hear what was going on.

"Papa, Papa, come here," cried Erna; "I couldn't find you an hour ago to show you these things. But it's all the better this way; now you can thank him with me. Just look at these pictures! He must have known how they would please me. I don't know how he ever did it, but just look at them, look!"

Mr. Lengdale looked down at the pictures in his daughter's outstretched hands, and the expression of dazed astonishment that came over his face fixed the bystander's attention on him. This was fortunate for the "great man" who was the cause of all the excitement, since it allowed the embarrassment he was struggling to control to escape notice; to escape notice, that is, from all but three of the passengers, who happened to be standing near, and who exchanged meaning glances.

"Erna—girl—where did you get these pictures?" exclaimed Langdale. "You say the—the professor gave them to you, my dear?"

"He made them, Papa; he made them. Is it not wonderful? Grandmother's picture and Auntie's and here's one of Axel, too." She turned to those nearest her. "It is really a very wonderful thing. These pictures are not copies of any in existence. This gentleman is now in Iceland—and these two ladies in the pictures are long since dead."

"And one of them," added Lengdale, still bewildered, "my mother-in-law, was never photographed at any time during her life."

A murmur of surprise followed his words. "How remarkable! Wonderful! Why, it's a miracle," were the sentences heard on all sides.

"It is a miracle, and one man only could have done it," cried Erna. She grasped the professor's hand in both her own, and gazed up at him with her whole heart in her eyes.

Tannemore coughed, to hide the word that nearly slipped from his lips. Lund clenched his fists tightly behind his back, as if afraid to trust himself. The real Clusius remained calm, smiling unperturbed.

"How can I ever thank you?" exclaimed Erna again, fervently.

"It was a little thing to do for so charming a lady," replied Bridgeport, in solemn gallantry.

"Damned insolent cur!" murmured Lund. But Tannemore whispered in his ear, "That comes of making such pictures—and then losing them."

The little scene broke up in a general ovation, in the midst of which the pseudo-Clusius walked down the gangway and stepped into the captain's boat that waited to take him ashore. He stood up in the stern sheets, bowing his thanks to those on board the steamer.

THE delay occasioned by the incident of the photographs had given Smithson a good start. As his boat neared the landing he saw, among the natives hanging about the pier, a solitary watcher in European garb. He recognized the man and sprang out of the boat before it had scarcely touched the stone quay. Redfowles came forward to meet him. Their interview was short and apparently satisfactory to both sides.

When Bridgeport landed there were no signs of Smithson, and Redfowles was in great good humor. The two exchanged a noisy greeting for the benefit of anybody within hearing, then, safely in the carriage on the way to the hotel, they spoke more freely.

"Smithson told me of your success. Good scheme, wasn't it?"

"It was all right," said Bridgeport. "How about the passes?"

"I have them here with me." Redfowles laughed. "Money will do anything in this country. Smithson is to wait for us at the hotel. Once he's paid off, we can work out what's to come."

"I'm just as well pleased that the voyage is over," remarked Bridgeport; "something queer happened just now."

"What was it?"

"There were some photographs shown, said to have been made on the ship—one of them the picture of an old woman who is now dead and who was never photographed during her lifetime."

"What nonsense are you talking?"

"I am quite serious. There seemed to be no deception about it, either."

"What the duece was it, then?"

"It was something only one man could have done, the real Clusius. You said, you know, that his new discovery concerned the bringing out of faded impressions, of lost writing. I don't know why I should think of it in this connection, but the thing makes me uneasy. I can't imagine how those pictures got on board—how they came to light just as the voyage was nearly over. I wish I knew what to think about it all." He wiped his brow and cast an anxious glance at his friend; then he started suddenly and his knees shook.

Redfowles was looking out and beyond him, at a carriage which had cut across their path and turned a corner quickly. His face was ghastly pale, and he hissed through his clenched teeth, "The devil! That was Tannemore! He came from the *Pandora*—there were two men with him, an older man and a young one. That was Clusius, I know. Damn you! I believe your story of the photographs, now. You confounded idiot! You've made a pretty mess of things."

Bridgeport leaned back in the cushions and shut his eyes. He felt physically sick. How the three must have watched him throughout the absurd comedy on board the ship! He was thoroughly ashamed of himself, and the feeling hurt. He was utterly unable to think out the situation.

"What an ass I've made of myself! And he looked on," he groaned.

Redfowles paid no attention to his words, but seized him by the lapels of his coat, and shook him in a fury.

"Why the devil didn't you see that the coast was clear before you sprung the game?" he snarled. "Now it's all up, don't you see? All up with us!"

"It's all that man Smithson's fault. Why didn't you give me a helper with some brains!" murmured Bridgeport, trying to reassert himself.

"It's my own fault. I should have played a lone hand . . . . Serves me right for taking in such a pair of idiots. You may have sense enough for an archaeologist, but that's just about all. And I'll smash that Smithson to powder."

Redfowles' rage was still hot when they reached the hotel. He stormed through the house, calling angrily for Smithson. When the startled proprietor and servants had finally discovered that the Smithson who was demanded so violently was not a drink or a piece of furniture, but a man, they protested that no one by that name had ever been in the place.

And it was quite true. Smithson knew better than to keep the appointment. After the short interview at the quay he disappeared into the labyrinth of the native quarter. And before Redfowles had finished his angry quest in the hotel, the man he sought was on a fleet horse riding out into the open country.

Alone in their own rooms, Redfowlers' rage subsided and he took stock of the situation.

"Clusius knows then that an impostor is using his name," he said finally. "He will naturally take steps to have you arrested. And it wouldn't do for us just now. You'd better get on to Damascus at once, and hide there until I tell you what to do. He must not see you again until you are both in the desert, beyond the reach of even the Turkish police. If you have as strong an

escort of Arabs as his, he will not be able to refuse you the permission to accompany him. You can find some excuse for doing so."

"And what do *you* do?" Bridgeport felt that here again he was assigned the more dangerous part of the task.

"I? Why, I'll stay here and watch our friends," replied Redfowles. "After all, we have accomplished something. The passengers of the *Pandora* will spread abroad your point of view concerning the Babylonian tablets. They will give interviews, and it will be discussed in papers everywhere."

"But why don't we hear from Smithson? What does his absence mean," queried Bridgeport anxiously.

"If it means treachery, Clusius will seek to have you arrested. If not—well, the matter of the photographs may have made him suspicious. If he realizes the truth, he's afraid to show himself, for he knows we'd not pay him a shilling . . . ."

MEANWHILE Clusius and his friends had chosen for their stopping place the small but pleasant Hotel d'Orient. Immediately on his arrival, Tannemore shut himself in his room, let down the blinds and lit the candles. Half an hour later he emerged again, asked for the address of the nearest telegraph office and sauntered off in the direction indicated.

He had not gone far before he became aware that Redfowles was shadowing him. He strolled on as carelessly as before, stopping now and then to look at some picturesque oriental figure passing him, or to gaze up at the mysterious curtained windows of some private house.

He entered the post-office in the same leisurely manner, and made his way to the telegraph window. As he did so, he turned slightly and caught a glimpse of Redfowles disappearing behind an angle of the corridor.

Tannemore took no apparent notice of this discovery, walked to the writing stand, took up a telegraph form, and began to write. After a few words he laid down the pen again and tore up the paper. Then he took a fountain pen from his pocket and began to write on a piece of paper which had not been there before. When he had finished he read the message through carefully and stepped to the window. The operator was leaning back in his chair, smoking a long pipe and reading a newspaper.

"Good evening," said Tannemore in English: "I want to send this message."

The operator looked at him uncomprehendingly. "What do you wish?" he asked finally in French.

Tannemore pointed to the two cable forms on the counter. The man took them up and looked at them. "Can't you write them in French?" he asked. "I don't understand English."

"The people to whom these messages are sent don't understand French," said Tannemore easily. "Send this carefully please, word for word."

The man telegraphed slowly, spelling the words out to himself letter by letter. The telegram was a long one, and Redfowles, standing where he could hear the click of the machine quite plainly, cursed himself for not having learned telegraphy. It would have saved him the trouble and the expense of getting the man to show him the telegraph blank later.

The first message which the Turk sent off, without understanding it, was as follows:

Sir Edward Ceaser, Park Lane, London.

Am sending this to your private address intentionally. Arrived here by steamer, impostor on board, giving himself out to be Clusius. Believe him to be Bridgeport of the Babylonian tablets. His friend Redfowles here also. Have learned that they are planning to kill myself and companions during journey through desert. Impossible to arrange arrest just now. Send two good men, with warrants, at once. Shall be in Damascus on the 23rd, Palmyra on the 9th of April. in Bagdad until the 20th, in Babylon on the 25th. Services of detectives not likely to be needed until later date.

Tannemore.

"One hundred and ten words," said the operator when he had finished.

The second message was much shorter. It was addressed to

Lady Evelyn Tannemore,
Bedford Hall, Lincolnshire, England.

Arrived safely. Will write as soon as possible. Sent you letter before taking steamer giving you dates and addresses. Forgive me for leaving you again. Once this journey is over it shall be the last for some time. Thinking of you—as always,

Richard.

"Fifty-one words," said the Turk indifferently, looking in his price schedule. He counted the money carefully, laid the blanks in a drawer at his hand, and took up his pipe again.

But the Englishman did not leave him

alone just yet. He had a great deal to ask. He wanted to know the rate to Japan, and whether there was a direct telegraph connection with California, and who was the head of the telegraph department in Syria, and who was the chief authority in Beyrout, and other questions of similar nature. Then he took out his watch, held it to his ear, touched the spring, made it strike, and compared it with the clock on the wall.

While doing this he walked slowly towards the door of the little room devoted to the telegraph department, and stood there in such a way as to prevent anyone going in or out. The telegraph operator looked at him with a smile. He was not unaccustomed to the ways of the traveling English.

Finally Tannemore put up his watch, smiled as if satisfied, and strolled out of the building, with the same casual manner as before.

"Took you some time, didn't it?" murmured Redfowles to himself. "Now I will see to whom His Lordship was writing, and what he had to say. Then I shall know how we stand."

HE CAME up to the little window just as the telegraph operator had settled himself to the enjoyment of his newspaper again.

"Peace be unto you," said Redfowles, in the vernacular of the country.

"And peace attend thy ways," answered the Turk, without looking up from his paper.

"Abundance be in thy house," continued Redfowles.

"Cooling shade and sweet milk in thine," replied the telegrapher, still reading.

"And may thy salary be paid regularly," persisted the stranger.

The operator looked up and saw that it was a foreigner who was speaking. He inquired the stranger's wishes.

Redfowles answered, "There was a man here just now who wrote two telegrams."

The Turk nodded. "It is so, Effendi," he answered indifferently.

Redfowles crossed his arms on the counter and leaned in at the window. "I should like to read these two telegrams," he said in a low voice.

The Turk looked at him, astonished, then shook his head. "It will not be possible, Effendi," he said, still quite indifferent. "There is an order that I may not show the telegrams to anyone."

"And who gives this order?" queried Redfowles.

"The Minister."

"And does he pay you well?"

The Turk sighed. "Very often he does not pay at all."

Redfowles laughed. "Who follows orders which are not paid for?" he persisted.

The Turk began to understand. He took the pipe out of his mouth and thought the matter over. "And why should I not follow the orders?" he began cautiously. "Is there anyone who will pay me for not following them?"

Redfowles wasted no more words. He took a handfull of silver out of his pocket and laid it on the table. With a quick glance the telegrapher took in the sum, pulled open the drawer beside him and handed out the two top formulas among those lying there.

Redfowles took up the papers with a hand that trembled. The first one was addressed to

Mr. Robert Pailing, Russell Square, London.

Arrived safely after splendid trip. Clusius

and I much amused over fact that the inventor of the new hieroglyphs was also on board.

At this point in the message Redfowles took out his notebook, in case there should be anything to copy, then he read further.

Please send my mail to the addresses in the letter sent you from Trieste. Also please send an order to Bentworth for a dozen silk shirts to be forwarded at once to Bagdad. Order two new suits for me to be ready when I return. Good tobacco here, I'll bring you some. Greetings to your family,

Tannemore.

"Fop!" murmured Redfowles, greatly disappointed, although he copied the message word for word. Then he tossed it aside and took up the next paper.

"You've made a mistake," he said to the man at the window. "You've given me a blank sheet."

"Forgive, Effendi, it was only a mistake. Your eyes shall see at once that which your heart desires." The operator crushed the empty blank in his hand, and threw it on the floor. Then he hunted through the drawer for the second telegram sent by the tall Englishman. He sought for it anxiously, but it was nowhere to be found.

"Can't you find it?" asked Redfowles impatiently. "Are you sure you put it in the drawer? Look on the table."

"I cannot find it, Effendi. I cannot find it, unfortunate man that I am."

Redfowles groaned. "This lost telegram was probably the most important. Can you remember at least to whom it was sent?"

"Yes, I remember the address. The Effendi's name was Lady Evelyn."

Redfowles laughed loudly. "Oh, if that was it, then you need look no further, you son of misfortune," he said, still laughing, taking up his hat to leave the place.

"Looks all right thus far. They don't seem to suspect our plans. If they don't, the rest will be easy. . . ."

CHAPTER VII

DESERT RENDEZVOUS

THE travellers made the journey from Beyrout to Damascus by diligence, a drive of thirteen hours. The landscape was barren and monotonous, but the road they travelled was the main artery of traffic and offered a constant succession of pictures of oriental life.

The day after their arrival in the ancient Syrian city, Tannemore set about arranging the final details of the expedition. The outfit ordered from London was there, as well as the extra baggage sent on by rail from Stockholm. The last purchases only were to be made in Damascus.

Leaving the professor busy at his writing in the hotel, Tannemore and Lund threaded the narrow, malodorous streets of the city, dodging the multifarious native traffic. Lund was as excited as a child. It was all new to him, and everything that he saw fascinated him. Tannemore, to whom the sights, sounds and smells of the East came as old friends, familiar and beloved, shared his companion's exhilaration and led him gleefully in and out among the tangle of streets and the labyrinth of the bazaars. Finally he stopped in front of a row of prosperous-looking shops.

"This is the sword market, the richest of all the bazaars," he explained. "And over there is my friend Abu Hark, to whom we must go for passports that will take us safely through the desert."

A majestic Arab, grey-bearded and deep-eyed, clothed in flowing white and gold robes, who sat throned on a platform covered with rich rugs, raised his head at their approach. His grave face brightened, and his eyes lit with pleasure as he bowed ceremoniously.

"Salaam! Tannemore Effendi," was his salute.

"Good health be thine, O Abu Hark! and beloved guests within thy tent," answered Tannemore in the vernacular.

"Lies thy journey toward the rising sun as before?" asked the Arabian. "My blessing shall go with thee and smooth the way before thee."

"Thanks to thee, O friend! I come now for three of thy passports. With two friends have I journeyed hither from Beyrout, and when the morrow dawns we would go further."

Abu Hark pulled out a heavy seal hung on a long chain about his neck. He dipped it into a bowl of crimson ink. Then he took three strips of parchment from an urn at his right hand.

"How far lies thy goal?" he asked, pressing the seal on the paper.

"Towards sunrise we journey until we reach Bagdad. From there we follow the water to Hilleh," answered Tannemore.

"That is beyond the land where rule my people, the Anazeh," said Abu Hark thoughtfully. "Good guides will be needed,

A broad ray of light fell into the room, and a deep voice intoned the greeting, "Mahaban".

guides who know the land of the waters."

"Thou speakest truly, wise friend. Canst thou procure us guides and escort?"

Abu Hark nodded. "At what hotel is my friend Tannemore to be found?" he asked.

Tannemore gave the address and the merchant continued, "When the sun is but just arisen, the escort, the camels and their drivers will be ready before thy door." He handed out the passes to Tannemore, who paid for them, pressed the Arab's hand warmly and took ceremonious leave of him.

"What an imposing person," said Lund, who had been greatly interested in the proceedings although he had not understood the conversation.

"Abu Hark is a big man hereabouts," explained Tannemore. "He is one of the richest merchants in the town, and is closely allied with Mischoel, sheik of the Anazeh tribe of Bedouins. The Anazeh rule in the desert, and the traveller who has his passport from Abu Hark can pass onward in safety—usually. And here are the goldsmith shops full of attractive things. Wait for me here a moment, please. I see a man over there whom I must speak to."

Tannemore crossed the street and Lund turned to look at the shop behind him. A very old man sat there, aided by a young woman bundled in her veils.

Lund examined the pretty jewelry laid on the counter, while the old man murmured something and held out for his inspection a little object that looked like an amulet. Lund did not understand the words, and he shook his head, smiling.

An answering smile awoke in the soft dark eyes of the young woman and she laid her little brown hand on the old man's arm. He drew back the amulet and the young woman leaned forward to talk to the stranger.

"The Effendi has no interest in the sacred amulet," she began in halting French. "For his eyes are still turned towards the pleasures of this world. Fatme is not mistaken in thinking that a piece of jewelry for some fair hand or throat would be more useful to the stranger."

"The beautiful Fatme is not mistaken," answered Lund, smiling. "She knows wherewith the mind of a young man is occupied."

"Then will not the Effendi choose a gift here for the Flower of the West of whom his heart is thinking?"

"It is a Flower of the North."

"May her soul be white as is her face."

"It is as white and pure," murmured Lund. He took a delicately worked golden bracelet from a dark velvet cushion. It was formed in the shape of a lotus flower, the slender stem representing the circlet. A diamond glistened like a dewdrop on one of the leaves—an exquisite and artistic specimen of the jeweller's art. The price was four hundred piastres.

LUND thought of the journey he planned to Copenhagen and the hope that he might there place the dainty circlet around a pretty white arm. "It shall be my engagement gift," he thought, and laid down the money without any attempt at bargaining. Fatme gathered up the coins with a smile of pleasure, and Lund walked off down the street.

A few steps further on he met Tannemore. "What have you got there?" asked the Englishman, pointing to the pretty little wooden box.

"Just a little remembrance for a friend. One likes to take home these little things."

"Of course," replied Tannemore gravely. "May I guess that it's a bracelet—from the shape of the box?"

The sun of the East had not sufficiently darkened Lund's fair skin to conceal his boyish habit of blushing. Without further words he opened the box.

"How very pretty," exclaimed Tannemore. "Come back with me, won't you? I want to buy a present for my wife." He took up the bracelet and looked at it carefully. "It's charming—such exquisite taste. By the way, why don't you have the initials put on it while you are here?"

Lund colored again, but laughed this time. "Now, that's horrid of you," he exclaimed. "But I think I'll take your advice and have the initials put on."

"And suppose you can't use it as you hope to?" teased Tannemore.

"Then I'll throw it in the Sound," answered Lund in tragic tones. But he looked brightly into the Englishman's eyes and continued happily, "I don't think it will be necessary—at least I hope it will not be necessary—to throw away this pretty trifle. I'm glad you saw it. Sometimes you know a man wants to talk—it's good to have a friend who understands one."

"I hope you will look on me as your friend," said Tannemore cordially, holding out his hand. "I congratulate you heartily, and now come back and let me see what I can find for the lady who waits for me at home."

They returned to the shop and to pretty

Fatme. Tannemore chose a delicate gold chain on which hung one great pearl in the shape of a heart. It was cut in two in the middle and closed with a fine gold edging.

He too paid for his purchase without bargaining. He wrote a few words on a strip of thin paper, rolled it up and enclosed it in the pearl. Then he had the jewel packed securely in proper shape for mailing.

On the way back to the hotel Lund had the experience of an optical delusion, or what he thought was such. Passing a house which had several windows towards the street—he did not know that it was a private hotel—he happened to glance up. He started and looked a second time, for it seemed to him that he had caught a glimpse there of Erna's sweet face at one of the windows. Then he realised that it could not possibly have been, that he was getting quite foolish, and that it was high time for him to pull himself together and think of something else.

The rest of the day was spent sorting out and repacking the outfit and baggage in preparation for the desert journey. They retired early that evening to be fresh for the morning's start.

Shortly after dawn they were awakened by a tumult on the street outside their windows. Looking out they saw the camels, the busy camel-drivers, going to and fro from the well to their animals, the extra pack horses and the donkeys. And a moment later eight Bedouins in flowing white cloaks, armed with long muskets, rode up and joined the group with a great clatter. These sons of the desert were not calculated to awaken confidence in the soul of the timid traveller. They were about as dirty and evil looking a crowd of bandits as one could have wished for. But Tannemore knew he could depend upon his friend Abu Hark to give him safe escort. On his last journey he had been able to do a service to a Bedouin chief, a relative of the sword merchant's, and Abu Hark knew how to be grateful.

THE travellers hastened their toilet and joined the caravan. The baggage had been loaded on the pack animals before they mounted their saddle-beasts. When all was ready the leader of the Bedouins encircled the caravan for a last searching inspection. Then with a shout, he galloped to the head of the procession which started off down the street, passing through the old gateway out to the desert.

Before them lay their field of work, the mysterious land whose century-old riddle Clusius' genius had come to solve. By land and by sea, amid all the disturbances of a varied journey he had come, but never once had his mind ceased its labours on the problem before him; it was ready now for the last and most important investigation of them all.

To Tannemore, a born rover, the life of the wilderness had a never-failing charm. His joy at being out on the trail again, beyond the confines of modern civilisation, made him forget at times the very serious reason for the expedition. Yet it was not only as a traveller but as a scientist too, that he loved this land of open spaces, this monotony of barren present covering the ruins of the past.

Lund turned to him, now.

"Then Bridgeport did read your telegram after all," he said.

The Englishman looked his surprise. "What makes you think that he did?" he asked.

"Why, his intention was to join us, and we haven't seen him since we landed. He must have changed his plans after discovering your message." He halted suddenly and flushed red. "What a fool I am!" he exclaimed.

Tannemore laughed gently. "Your mind is full of more agreeable things, I fancy, or you wouldn't have forgotten my trick with the chemical ink. No, neither of those precious rascals knows that we have sent for help, and there is no reason why they should give up their original plans."

"Then we shall meet them in the desert," said Lund decisively.

"Yes, in three days."

"The third day? Isn't this the desert yet?" cried Lund in a tone of disappointment.

"Patience, friend Hjalmar," said Tannemore, laughing. "We shall not be in the true desert until we leave Kurietain, and it's some distance yet to Kurietain."

"Then our text-books are not exact."

"They seldom are. But the true desert is hard to define and hard to limit. And it is wonderful—wonderful."

"Tell me something of it," begged Lund. "It is all so new to me."

They rode on through the sunshine, swaying with the uneven gait of the camels. One of the drivers at the head of the caravan played a simple melody on his flute. Tannemore's rich-toned voice fell easily into key with the rustic accom-

paniment as he began to talk of the land he knew and loved so well. He talked and Lund listened spellbound, while the professor, absorbed in his studies which even the discomforts of camel-riding could not interrupt, looked up now and then to put in a word.

Tannemore talked of the great past of the country through which they were to travel, then of the wild Bedouin tribes who now people it. The Englishman had spent many months among these nomads in whose inscrutable oriental hearts poetry and bloodshed, romance and knavery were so strangely mingled. He knew their legends and tales of imagining and of actuality. The sun-bathed hours passed so pleasantly in this manner that Lund aroused with a start of surprise when the mid-day halt was called.

THE first camp was made, and the first night spent in the open at the village of Othneh, in a barren rocky valley lying between two ranges of hills. The next day's ride brought the caravan to Kurietain, and early on the following morning Lund found himself at last looking out over the yellow sand of the true desert.

All about him, stretching out into dim distance, lay the seemingly boundless expanse of the North Arabian plateau, the Palmyrene wilderness. A silence as deep as the silence of the desert fell on the party as they rode out into those trackless wastes which hid the secrets they had come so far to discover. The sun rose higher and higher, pouring straight shafts of light down upon them, light that broke into myriad glittering particles in the loose sand.

When they had ridden for some hours Tannemore looked up at the sky, then urged his camel to a quicker pace until he had ridden some distance ahead of his friends. Then he signed to the Arab guide Davud.

"It is high noon," he said; "Why is not the signal given to halt? Why do we still push on?"

Davud, the leader of the Bedouins, a small keen-eyed man, lithe and tough as whipcord, had been riding about the caravan talking to several of his men. A certain uneasiness in his manner had not escaped the Englishman's attention. At his question Davud pulled his horse closer up to Tannemore's camel and spoke low and and solemnly.

"Allah alone is All-Knowing, but the eyes of a good guide in the desert must see more than the road before him. For two days now men follow our footsteps. Their tents are pitched scarce more than an hour's journey behind us. They rest when we rest and they ride when we ride. They ride with our pace and they have no bales or wares, they are not merchants. Duhamil on his speedy runner has been sent back to watch them. He has told me of them. He has told me furthermore that one only of the travelers is not of the Orient. With him are fifteen riders of the desert, his escort. They are stronger than we. Is it thy will that we shall ride on faster or that we should await their coming?"

Tannemore pondered a moment, then asked, "It is thy belief, then, that this white man is following us, and that he and his escort could easily catch up with us if they wished?"

"That is my belief."

"And they are stronger than we?"

"Fidelity is stronger than all else," said Davud gravely. "And fidelity is here with thee. That is a good thing when enemies draw near to us in the desert."

"Thous speakest truly, O Davud. This man behind us has evil in his mind. If his riders are as true to him—"

Davud smiled. "They are true—but in a different way—they are true to him as one is true for gold."

"And thou, Davud?"

"I am true to thee, Effendi, as a man is true to one who has saved that which is dearest to him."

"Thou must speak more plainly, friend."

The Bedouin looked up, his eyes softening. "The light of my tent is Laila, of Mischoel's kin."

Then Tannemore understood. A year ago he had by chance been able to save the woman from capture by a hostile tribe, and had won thereby the undying gratitude of the powerful sheik. He had not known that the leader of his escort was the woman's husband.

"Why should I not be faithful to thee, O Protector? Abu Hark, with whom be the blessing of God, knows of thy deed and of my thanks to thee. Who but I should lead thee through the desert? And now, Effendi, thou knowest that I and mine will be faithful to thee. What wilt thou that we shall do?"

"Friend Davud, we will ride no more quickly than before."

"And if they attack us?"

"We will defend ourselves and we shall be victorious, O friend, for I tell thee now that it is a sacred duty that I should protect these two who have come into the dangers of the desert for my sake."

Davud nodded and rode back to his place at the head of the caravan. An hour later the rear guard announced that a cloud of dust, evidently made by approaching riders, was seen on the horizon behind them. It drew no nearer until towards evening, however, when the shapes and outlines of a number of riders appeared more distinctly in the midst of the dust. Among the Bedouins of the troop, Tannemore, through his glasses, could see one white man, whom he recognized as Bridgeport.

He turned to Clusius. "Bridgeport is coming," he said. "He has fifteen riders and three camel-drivers with him."

"A larger force than ours," remarked Clusius, carefully underscoring some words he had just written.

"We will wait for them," said Tannemore, making a sign to Davud.

The caravan halted and faced about, the camels in the middle and the Bedouins of the escort on either side of them.

"It's undoubtedly Bridgeport," said the professor. "A most impertinent face he has."

The riders approaching them halted also and the white man rode forward alone. As he came near he called out, "Good evening. Are you surprised to see me here?"

"Not the slightest. Good evening," answered Clusius.

"My name is Asville, Dr. Asville, from Lausanne," continued Bridgeport, with calm impertinence.

"I thought you were Professor Clusius from Sweden," said Clusius.

"Oh, no," returned the other; "you never thought that, because you yourself are the celebrated Clusius. But now that we are out in the desert it is no longer necessary, for your sake, that I should represent you."

Clusius was just a little astonished, but he answered with an ironical smile. "Then your usurping of my name—'representing me,' as you term it so neatly—was done for *my* sake? This is most interesting. But I'm afraid I shall have to ask you to explain."

BRIDGEPORT sighed audibly. "I'm very sorry you're not ready to thank me for it," he said. "Ingratitude is hard to bear. You evidently did not know that one of the passengers thought he recognized you. The man was not quite sure of his case, but it took a good deal of pains on my part to persuade him that you were not the man he believed you to be.

"I assumed your name to spare you all the inconveniences and annoyances that would have come to you, had you been obliged to give up your incognito. I also freed you from a swarm of tourists who would otherwise have accompanied you, by telling them that I was going to the southern part of Arabia."

"Very kind of you, indeed," said Clusius. "And possibly you will tell me the reason for your doing all this? Dr. . . . Asville—I think you said your name was?"

Bridgeport sat erect in his saddle, and his face wore an expression of great dignity. "You wish to know why I was anxious that your studies should not be interrupted? The reason for it is my friendship for the man whom you are trying to disgrace—the archaeologist Bridgeport."

"And how do you expect to serve that friend here?" persisted the professor.

"I shall watch over such of your experiments as are designed to prove Bridgeport's tablets a forgery. I wish to control your manner of working and to see that you are absolutely impartial and honest."

Tannemore had been listening with impatience. Now he took part in the conversation. "You will have to answer to me for your doubts of the professor's honesty," he said sharply.

"Don't let yourself become excited, Richard," said the professor; "we all know what value such words have in this case." Turning to Bridgeport he continued, "And was it for this reason, Dr. Asville, that you gave out opinions, as coming from me and my friends, which had no relation whatever to the truth?"

Dr. Asville smiled coldly. "You were frank enough in espousing Lord Tannemore's cause before there was any proof against Bridgeport. I did not think it wrong to offset the harm which you have done in this way by whatever I might say on the steamer."

"And you think such action quite right and proper?"

Dr. Asville shrugged his shoulders and gave a glance back at his Bedouin escort. "We are in the desert now," he said. "In taking your name on the *Pandora*, and sparing you all disturbance, I have done you a favour. Besides which we are in

the desert—you have much to do yet and so have I. When we return to Europe we can discuss the other matter. As for the present moment, the desert roads are free to all. You cannot prevent my going with you, before you, behind you, or if—the road being wide enough—beside you."

"You are quite right, we cannot prevent it," said the professor.

"Therefore," continued Bridgeport, "would it not be to the interest of all of us to forget any personal differences and to guard against the dangers of these wastes by traveling together in one caravan?"

The professor said nothing for some time and Tannemore and Lund were careful not to interrupt. They realized that Clusius wished Bridgeport to think the proposition so new to him that it required consideration. Finally he spoke, with icy politeness. "Very well, then; I accept your proposition. Circumstances compel me to do so."

Bridgeport bowed stiffly and the others answered his greeting with the same formality. The newcomer withdrew into the circle of his own escort, talked to its leader for some minutes, then all joined the caravan.

Davud rode in the van. But he looked around uneasily from time to time, and finally dropped back until he was alongside of Tannemore's camel.

"Would you speak with me, Hadchi?" asked Tannemore.

"My lord and protector knows doubtless what it is he does," began the Bedouin; "but the enemy is at our back."

"Do not be alarmed, friend Davud. We need not fear these people yet."

"Not yet? Then they are to be feared only later?"

"It is so. The day will come when the stranger Effendi and his people must ride before us, that our lives may be safe from murderous attack. When that time comes, O friend, I will make a sign to thee that thou mayst be watchful. Until then be at ease. For until then, those behind us will help, should other danger come near, not hurt us."

The halt for that evening was made at the ruins of Kasr-el-Hair, and on the following day the caravan expected to reach Tadmor, the modern village built on the ruins of Palmyra.

All day they rode over the sand, between low ridges of rock hills. Conversing on the subject of the country through which they passed, the travelers forgot their strained relations, or at least hid them in their mutual interest in the civilisations of the past.

As the sun sank lower and threw horizontal rays across the yellow expanse of sand, the caravan halted for a moment, while Davud stretched out his hand and called, "Palmyra." They topped a ridge and looked out at a wonderful spectacle.

Hundreds of stone columns stood before them in endless colonnades. Great arches spanned some of them, and mighty temple walls and monuments arose from a mass of scattered ruins that covered the ground for acres. Far and wide they stretched, these witnesses of a bygone life, of a mighty civilisation that was dead. The glow of the sinking sun touched with colour the tall columns, and threw their slender shadows far out over the desert. Beyond them, in the gathering dust, lay the boundless desert.

Gigantic ruins only, told of the glories of the desert city Palmyra, the seat of mighty tyrants, the most brilliant Fata Morgana in all the history of the Orient. For three miles it stretched, this mighty graveyard of ancient power. To the south and the east of it the plateau on which it stood sank gently down to the open desert. On the other side, rose bare hills.

ALONG the edge of the city the caravan traveled to the far eastern end, where lay the mighty Temple of the Sun God. Finally Davud halted his horse. "Let us pitch our tents here," he said.

The traveller knew that a large colony of Arabs was living amid the ruins, but as they passed there was no sign of life to be seen. None came to meet them with a greeting, not even a curious child peeped out at them.

They rode through a great breach in the city wall, and entered the modern village of Tadmor.

The great square court of the temple, surrounded by stately columns, and among the straight shafts and the still superb entrance some sixty miserable mud huts, clinging to the ancient walls as if for protection, made a strange picture—a meagre modernity in the shadow of the mighty past.

A few Arabs, old men, women and children, sat about in front of the huts. They did not move as the caravan came in to the temple court, and they gave no sign of welcome. On the contrary, the moment

they saw the travelers they rose and disappeared inside their houses.

Tannemore and Clusius looked at each other in surprise and some slight uneasiness. The Englishman made a sign to Davud, who rode up to them. "What does this mean?" he asked as the Arab came near.

"Allah alone is all-knowing," replied Davud. "I do not know what this means. But I know that when the Bedouins do not greet the traveller there is something wrong."

He dismounted at the corner of the great court, which was the farthest from the native settlement. An hour later tents were pitched, the animals unsaddled and everything arranged for the evening meal. The four Europeans sat at one side, a little distance from their native escort. The moon rose with a reddish glow over the skeleton of a distant viaduct. The stars stood out clearly in the dark sky, and a soft singing, like a low plaint, came from the group of the camel-drivers.

The scene, with its mingling of wilderness and historic grandeur, affected them all, even the experienced travelers, and in spite of the constraint caused by Bridgeport's presence the little supper party passed off very pleasantly. Towards the close of the meal the professor raised his silver drinking-cup filled with wine, and turned to Bridgeport. "Dr. Asville, I hope you have no objection to our drinking a toast which occurs to me here in the shadow of this Temple of the Sun God?"

Brideport bowed stiffly. "I have no objection," he answered, "provided I am not the object of your toast."

"You are not," said Clusius. Then looking upward he continued, "It is to Thee, O Mighty Star of Light, that I drink this glass—thee in whose honour these stones were reared—to Thee, O Sun, that bringest forth the truth!"

And he held out his glass.

His friends smiled at him with so much meaning in their eyes that Bridgeport was conscious of a sensation of discomfort, not unmingled with alarm.

When the coffee was brought to them, Davud came and asked Lord Tannemore to come with him to where the camels lay. The Englishman arose.

"Is anything the matter?" he asked.

"I want to speak with you alone," answered the Arab, in a low tone.

They walked on without further words until they turned the corner of the wall; then Davud quickened his pace, but instead of turning towards their camp he took the opposite direction, across an open square paved with great marble flags. At its further end was a broad flight of stairs, once leading up to some great public building, but now rising into empty air. Davud ran up the steps, motioning Tannemore to follow him.

When they reached the top, the Bedouin held out his hand, pointing towards the west.

Before them lay the vast expanse of the desert, white in the moonlight. Their sharp eyes saw something moving over the brightness. Tannemore took his fieldglass from his pocket and put it to his eyes. "It is a rider," he said.

"It is Omar, the leader of the caravan which has joined ours," said Davud. "The strange Effendi talked to him while we were still making camp. He gave him a letter."

"Indeed? You should have told me before."

"Lord and protector, I did not believe that they were planning treachery."

"I believe thee, and even had we known it, we should not have stopped the man from riding away. We do not wish to break the peace as yet. But now, Davud, whither thinkest thou does Omar ride?"

"He rides no further than those hills there."

"Then in the Jebel-Hajau lies the man to whom Omar is sent?"

"That is my thought, O master."

"And when, thinkest thou, can he return?"

"Before the sun returns. I shall see him coming."

"And thou wilt watch when he shall speak with Dr. Asville? And wilt watch the two further?"

"I will, O protector of my happiness."

Tannemore put his glass to his eye again. The horse and rider were but a tiny black dot now, moving slowly over the white expanse. Before them stretched a barren ridge of hills. "Then Redfowles is there to-night," thought Tannemore. "He is following close behind us."

THEY returned to the camp, and Tannemore joined his friends. Bridgeport looked at him closely, but could see nothing more than the usual calm poise in the other's face.

"Don't you find this wonderful, friend

Hjalmar?" asked Tannemore, coming up to where Lund sat.

"I do indeed," answered the young Swede, with flashing eyes. "For me these ruins are peopled with the shades of the myriads who lived here ages since."

"Suppose we take a little stroll about the ruins, before we turn in? I will be your guide; I'm as much at home in Palmyra as in London."

Lund scrambled to his feet. "Oh, that will be very good of you!" he exclaimed, delighted. "I was longing to see something of the place, but I knew that I could never find my way about alone, and I was ashamed to ask you to go with me; I knew it must all be an old story to you."

"I'll go with you myself," said the professor, rising.

"And so will I," said Bridgeport quickly.

"As you wish, Dr. Asville," said Tannemore.

They buttoned up their coats before they started out, for although it had been a warm day the night was cool. Talking in low tones, as if in fear of disturbing the sleep of ages around them, they walked through long colonnades, under spectral arches, through skeleton doorways. On either side of them the moonlight threw bluish shadows from great blocks of granite half buried in the sand. Beneath their feet splitting marble flags gave place to soft sand, then spread again a firmer pavement for them. Mists arose at a little distance, glimmering ghostly in the moonlight. Before them arose suddenly a great shadow, darkening the path.

"What is it?" asked Lund, full of interest.

"A doorway," said Tannemore.

"A triumphal arch," corrected the professor. "The opening is just a little further on."

And as they turned the corner of the wall beside which they walked, they found themselves under the huge arch. At their feet lay massive carved blocks, and little sand-snakes played in and out of the heaped stones.

Then another wall arose before them and they sought for some time until they found an opening, passing through which they found themselves in the well-preserved court of a majestic temple. They crossed the marble floor to the further wall, and discovered there a small door which they opened with little difficulty. It led into an absolutely dark room and a blast of cold air came to meet them.

Tannemore lit his lantern and the four men looked about them, in a small circular apartment.

"There's another door," said Bridgeport, pointing to the opposite wall.

Tannemore held him back as he started in that direction. "Let us see what is here first," he said sweeping the light of his lantern around the walls and then up to the ceiling.

"There's something painted on the roof," cried Lund. "Capricornus—the Archer; why, it's the whole zodiac!"

The colours of the painting were fading but still clear, and the signs of the zodiac were plainly visible.

"I wonder who painted that?" mused Lund thoughtfully.

"Some caliph had this place decorated, I suppose," suggested Bridgeport.

A sharp exclamation from Tannemore made them all turn around. He was turning the pages of a book which he had found on a ledge of the wall. It was in Latin, the margins covered by comments in Arabian letters. "Do you see what it is?" he exclaimed, handing the book to Clusius. "It is your work 'Concerning the Nature and the Movements of the Stars,' the Latin edition."

"How astonishing," said Bridgeport. "What is it doing here?"

"Delightful!" cried Lund. "Here we take a moonlight stroll through the ruins of Palmyra, we come into this ancient temple and we find a book written by my famous Master—this is truly wonderful."

"Yes, it appears to be my book," said the professor calmly. "You had better put it back where you found it, Richard." And Clusius carefully wiped a particle of dust from his fingers.

CHAPTER VIII

AN OVATION AMID RUINS

AN HOUR or so after Bridgeport's caravan left Damascus, another much larger expedition set forth over the same route, with two women in the party and considerable baggage, making progress necessarily slower than that of the troop of riders which had preceded it.

This second party consisted of Mr. Lengdale, his daughter, Mrs. Henning and Lengdale's valet Knute. There was a third man—who had joined them in Damascus. He had met Mr. Lengdale in the office of the British Consul and had asked per-

mission to accompany the caravan. He introduced himself as Mr. John Walker, of Belfast, Ireland. He looked to be about forty-five, strong and confident, and Mr. Lengdale was not averse to so useful an addition to the company.

The Danish millionaire had no liking either for the actual discomforts or the possible dangers of this journey through the desert, but he was willing to please his daughter, and he knew that a judicious expenditure of money can alleviate discomfort anywhere and minimise danger. He could not quite understand why Erna did not want to join the "Professor," whose large armed escort inspired confidence, or why his capricious child had so evidently avoided the celebrated scientist since leaving the steamer.

Next morning early, Erna stood at her window carefully hidden by the curtain. She had been awakened by the trampling approach of a caravan. A deep flush reddened her white skin as she looked down at the three men on the camels. She looked at the three, but saw only one. She clasped her hands nervously and drew a deep breath. She really ought to doubt and despise him, but she would never do that.

No, if she hated anybody it was that odious professor. In spite of the mysterious photographs, she did not like him and never would. Her admiration for the unknown Clusius was now an illusion shattered.

"Lund said he would not come to Copenhagen," she murmured. "Very well, then, I will go to Nineveh; anybody can go to Nineveh. But my coming shall be my answer."

Several hours later her own party set out on its ride, and Erna's heart sang a glad melody to the swaying step of her camel. Every moment of the journey was a delight to her.

In Kurietain, to their mutual surprise, they fell in with two other passengers of the *Pandora*, Mr. Sleiding and Mr. Schmidgruber. Lengdale was pleased at the meeting, and glad to join forces for the further journey, but Erna objected and made various excuses to delay her own party in Kurietain. The two men were traveling light, on muleback, with a guide, a cook and two Bedouins, and gave out that they wished to join the famous professor as soon as they could. They had met with unforeseen delays earlier in the journey, and were now anxious to push on.

Erna's manoeuvres succeeded, and Sleiding and Schmidgruber went on alone. Somewhat to her surprise, the girl found herself ably seconded in her scheme for delay by Mr. John Walker, who like herself, seemed desirous of no further additions to the party. Indeed, in Kurietain he kept to himself as much as was possible without pointedly avoiding the other two.

"I wondered why he was so anxious to be with us," thought Erna. "If he likes solitude he could have had it. I wish I could!"

She did not know, of course, that Mr. Walker particularly made a point of traveling in a caravan with ladies, not from any special liking for their company, but for the look of things. If news of their approach reached the ears of travellers preceding them, a party consisting of two ladies, two gentlemen and a servant sounded most innocent and unsuspicious. And if any of those in the preceding caravan had an inkling that Redfowles was near them, they would never look for him in this perfectly harmless party of tourists.

Once safely rid of Sleiding and Schmidgruber he had his own party guided out of Kurietain by a shorter route known only to the natives, and gave secret orders that the camels should be pushed to the limit of their speed. His companions would have suffered much physical discomfort from this forced march had they not been good sailors by race and habit. As it was, being quite ignorant of the usual methods of desert-travelling, they took their shaking up as part of the day's work, but were glad neverthless when the evening halt was called and camp made in the shadow of the hills of Jebel Hajan.

LATER that evening the little colony of tents lay quiet in the white radiance of moonlight. The camels rested in a hollow of the ground and beyond them lay the armed Bedouins, each beside his horse. One of the camel-drivers stood sentry on the edge of the camp. The bleak, rock hills behind it were sufficient guard in that direction.

A little breeze drove the loose sand into occasional ripples, and now and then a camel changed position with a grunt. Otherwise there was no sound heard. Then a tent flap moved, scarcely louder than the sighing of the breeze, and a slender figure stood in the opening, looking out into the splendour of the Eastern night.

"Erna, child, why aren't you asleep?" came a voice from inside the tent. "It must be night." Mrs. Henning's uneasy slumbers were broken by a troublesome mosquito.

"I can sleep enough at home," answered the girl, without turning. "We haven't nights like this."

"Mercy on us, aren't you dead after that awful ride? I'm shaken into little bits."

"You poor old dear," laughed Erna, coming back into the tent. "Now be good and go to sleep again, and don't mind me." She smoothed the covers over her companion, and kissed her lightly on the forehead.

"Put on a coat if you stand there long," murmured the older woman. "The nights are cold here." Her eyes closed and she fell asleep again.

Erna obediently snatched up a long coat, and went out into the night. She followed the path up the hill but only halfway to the height, and stood sheltered by a boulder, her pale garments melting into the background of white rocks and sand about her. The plain lay stretched at her feet, ghostly white in the moonlight. Her imagination pictured the caravans ceaselessly crossing this wilderness throughout the centuries, leaving no trace of their presence except here and there some bleaching bones in the sand.

Suddenly she started and bent forward. A black dot moved across the white plain, in the direction of their camp. Nearer it came and nearer until it took shape and form to her peering eyes. It was a Bedouin on a black horse. He galloped rapidly onward, dodging among the loose stones, though she could hear no sound of hoofs. Silent as the night itself, the speeding rider came on. Erna shuddered. She tried to step from her hiding-place, to return to her tent, but her feet refused obedience to her will. She stood motionless, spellbound, watching the silent approach of the galloping steed.

Suddenly a sound broke the stillness, the hideous, hoarse laugh of a hyena. A new terror struck to the girl's heart. Then she saw that the ghostly rider had halted in his speed and was walking his horse slowly over the sand. At the same time, looking back at the camp to regain her courage, she saw the flap of Mr. Walker's tent—it lay nearest the rocks—open, and that gentleman himself stepped out, fully dressed.

The hyena laughed again, and the ghostly rider stood still, a short distance only from Erna's hiding-place. Suddenly the girl realized that it was no phantom of the desert, but some human intrigue that she was witnessing, and her fear gave way to a great curiosity.

She shrank into the shadow of her rock and watched Mr. Walker approach the Arab and talk to him. The rider handed him a letter. Walker moved out from the shadow into the clear moonlight, which was bright enough to read by, and read it; then tore the paper into several pieces, stuffing them in his pocket, and pulled out a pencil and a notebook. He scribbled a few words on one leaf, folded it and handed it to the Bedouin. Another whispered conversation followed, then the Arab swung his horse around, and galloped away as silently as he had come. Walker returned to his tent and did not emerge again, although Erna waited some time, before leaving the shelter of the rock, to make sure.

As she climbed down the hillside she cast one last glance at the place where the ghostly rider had stood. "I wonder why there was no sound of hoof-beats," she thought.

Presently she spied a piece of paper glistening in the moonlight, and walked over to the spot and picked it up. "It's indecent to read other people's letters," she thought, "but I'm going to read this one, just the same."

There were several torn scraps of paper, and such words as she could make out were very clearly written in English, a language that Erna both read and spoke easily.

—shall watch—no experiment possible—keep you informed—Lund and Tannemore restless —Clusius indifferent—taking his name on ship — day's journey behind — Palmyra tomorrow—

Erna was still trying to form a connected idea of what she had read, when she heard again a noise from Walker's tent, and dropping the pieces precipitately had just time to hide behind a rock when her fellow-traveller came out. She saw him stride quickly to where the note lay, pick up the pieces, and with a glance apparently to satisfy himself they were what he sought, go back into his tent.

Erna hurried back to her own shelter and jumped into bed pondering over her adventure in the darkness, repeating to herself the words on the paper as far as she could remember them. Suddenly she sat up with a gasp.

"Can—can it be possible?" She clapped

her hand over her mouth, not to let the words escape. "Why, then—then that is the reason—"

A low happy laugh escaped her delicate finger-tips, and a glowing cheek buried itself in the friendly coolness of the pillow. Erna's quick wit had made a discovery of considerable importance to various people. But at the moment she could think only of what it meant to her—to her and to one other.

* * *

Just as Tannemore placed the book back upon the stone window-ledge where he had found it, and the professor wiped the dust from his fingers, a broad ray of light fell into the room, and a deep voice spoke the greeting, "Mahaban."

All four men turned quickly in the direction from which the sound came. The door that Bridgeport had discovered was open and on its threshold stood an old Arab. A long loose gown of grey silk fell in heavy folds from his shoulders to the ground. Thick white brows arched above dark gleaming eyes, and a snow-white beard reached to his belt.

"Mahaban!" he said again, then added, "What brings you here?"

Tannemore, who spoke the most fluent Arabian, answered with a deep bow, "Pardon if we intrude. We did not think to find anyone in this old temple. We were studying the ruins of Palmyra."

"And you take the hours of the night for that?"

"The sun was sinking as we came hither. Before we had eaten our evening meal the moon was high above the hills, ere the sun rises again we must be in our saddles."

The old man looked at the speaker and then at the others with grave attention. In his eyes there was another expression, a look as of pity. He turned to the professor, who had again taken the book from the window-ledge and was fingering its pages. The old man shook his head, and turned again to Tannemore.

"You will journey onward to-morrow morning?" he asked. "Must it be?"

"It is our plan."

"And you cannot remain here?"

"Our business takes us towards the sunrise."

"Come you not from Damascus, and go on to Bagdad?" asked the Arab quickly.

"It is as thou sayest," answered Tannemore in surprise. "How dost thou know?"

The old man did not answer. Again his eyes were turned towards the professor, who was reading in the book and shaking his head as if in disapproval. The Arab took a step or two nearer and asked, "What displeases thee in the book that a wise man hath written and that belongs to me?"

"There is a comment written here which runs counter to the author's intention," answered Clusius.

"And how dost thou know the intention of the author so well?" asked the Arab with a smile.

"I know it quite well," replied the professor, smiling himself, "for I am the author."

The old man stood silent for some moments. His trembling hand stroked his beard, while his dark eyes bored themselves into the professor's very soul. Finally he said again, "Thou art he who has written this book?"

"It is so."

"Cannot any man who comes this way make the assertion?"

"Yes, anyone might," replied Clusius calmly.

The old man snatched up the book. "Tell me then what is in the first chapter," he whispered in excitement.

Clusius complied. "And the seventh?" The old man's voice was scarcely audible, but the listeners heard him, and the professor gave a detailed explanation of the seventh chapter.

The inmate of the ruined temple grew pale in his excitement. "Then thou art indeed this great, this famed man?" he cried, his voice echoing uncannily from the domed roof. "Or—could it be that thou knowest the book so well because thou hast read it often?"

"I cannot compel thy belief," replied the professor.

The Arabian took his hand. "Oh, yes," he cried, "Thous canst compel me, thou canst prove to me that thy words are true. Come with me, please, come all of you—"

Still holding the professor's hands he led them through the door from which he had come. They found themselves in a large, high room. At one of its windows stood a great telescope, pointing upward to the skies. Old books and rolls of parchment lay about on the floor and were hung on the walls. A table, piled high with them, held a lighted lamp, beneath which lay a huge open tome.

"If thou be really Clusius, the great one, then speak to me now, and my soul shall know thee as him for whom I have longed —then shall I be happy for the days that are still given to me, because that my eyes have seen thee." The old man spoke with deep gravity, and stepped toward the telescope. "I will set it," he said; "stay thou there by the table."

CLUSIUS did as he was asked, and the Arab arranged the telescope. Then he turned and spoke. "Stranger and guest, canst thou tell me what star I would see now? Here is the table by which I have set the glass."

The professor looked at his watch. "Ten o'clock," he murmured, and stood silent a moment, thinking. Finally he said, "My friend, thou has seen Ras-Algethi, in the sign of Hercules."

The old man stroked his beard again with a trembling brown hand. "Thou hast said it," he stammered. "Thou art indeed he whom I revere—"

"No, wait a moment," said Clusius. "That was six minutes ago. Thou canst not see the star now, for it is eclipsed."

The Arab hastened to the glass. "Yes! It is eclipsed! It is eclipsed." He stood a moment silent, then turned back to Clusius, and crossed his arms over his breast. "Allah loveth me—he has spent his mercy upon me—he let mine eyes see in the flesh the longing of my heart—the great wise man of all the wise." And to the others he said, "Leave us alone, O friends; let me sit at his feet and listen to his words."

Quietly the others turned and left the room, taking their way back to the tents, still under the spell of the scene they had witnessed. As they came past the group of the camel-drivers, one of them was telling a story to his fellows and the travellers stopped to listen.

Undisturbed by their approach the narrator continued his tale:

"But there is one night in which the Bedouin cannot sleep, for shadows flit about his tent and shake its walls. And the echoes, the souls of the dead, float through the desert. The jackal whines and the women in the tents huddle together in fear, for the spirits of evil are abroad. Then the wind arises and the storm sweeps over the sand. And through the storm there sounds a note of music. And the camel-driver long since dead of thirst gathers his bleaching bones together; the traveller, buried ages since in the sandstorm, arises. And over the desert a great head appears, high as a mountain and the eyes full of great sadness.

"It is Cain, the Lord of the Wilderness. About his forehead a serpent is twisted, a serpent hissing. And the camels tremble and men shudder at the sound. Beneath his glance shadows of all the caravans that have fallen by the wayside move past in ghostly procession. And the lips of Cain open, and a loud, a terrible cry resounds across—"

Just as the last words were spoken a loud and terrible cry indeed sounded from behind them. The camel-drivers shivered and shrank together in a huddled group, fearing to raise their eyes. The three Europeans started involuntarily, and each laid his hand on his revolver. They turned in the direction from which the sound had come.

A human head was slowly rising from behind a broken wall. In the white moonlight it looked ghostly pale and might have been taken for some spirit of the wilderness. The camel-drivers rose as if to flee. Then suddenly the three Europeans broke into a hearty laugh. The natives stopped and looked on in astonishment at the scene which followed.

"Good idea of mine, wasn't it?" laughed Sleiding, climbing over the wall when he saw himself recognised. Schmidgruber followed, and the two were greeted heartily by their friends of the voyage.

"You certainly do look surprised, Professor," continued the Australian, greatly pleased at the sensation he had made. Bridgeport, to whom his words were addressed, looked bewildered enough, it was true, but more by realisation of the complications which the coming of the two others would bring about than from fright. Sleiding, not waiting for an answer, continued to talk.

"To tell the truth, we're both a little surprised to find ourselves here. We didn't intend particularly to come in this direction, but having had the pleasure and the honour of meeting you on the boat, sir, and of hearing of your plans, we thought we should enjoy following you more than going anywhere else. We will promise not to annoy you in any way, and we hope that you do not object to our joining you."

"Oh, certainly not—certainly not," answered Bridgeport, in embarrassment.

"And we are delighted to find that some of our other fellow passengers have had the same good idea."

"This last fact is a particular pleasure to me," said Schmidgruber, holding out his hand to Tannemore and Lund. He had paid little attention to Bridgeport.

"Wasn't my scream a great idea?" continued Sleiding, laughing. "Splendid curtain effect—I'll have to make a note of it."

THEY sat talking together for some time, until Clusius returned to them. He seemed pleased at meeting the newcomers and held out his hands to Schmidgruber with particular friendliness. The quiet manner of the good-natured little Austrian seemed to have made a favorable impression on him. Then the members of the original party returned to their tents, leaving Sleiding and Schmidgruber to partake of a late supper. A few minutes afterwards, Tannemore returned and sat down beside them.

"Can't you sleep?" asked Sleiding with a laugh. "Have the ghosts been flitting about your tent and shaking its walls?"

"Not yet," answered Tannemore; "but I have a question to ask you."

"Am I in the way? Do you want to speak with Mr. Sleiding alone?" asked Schmidgruber, looking at the Englishman's grave face.

"No, no. I want to speak to you both. Can you tell me if on your way hither, say about nine o'clock, you met, or saw, a rider, passing out?"

"A Bedouin?" asked Sleiding.

"On a black horse?" added Schmidgruber.

"Exactly."

"Wearing a red baschlik?" put in Sleiding.

"And a white burnous?" Schmidgruber finished the sentence as before.

"That's my man," said the Englishman.

"Your messenger?" asked Sleiding.

"No. I ask you kindly not to speak of this meeting to anyone else. And now I should like to ask you if you saw this night rider join anyone?"

Sleiding and Schmidgruber exchanged a secret glance. The Australian took a long puff at his cigar and answered casually, "No, we didn't see him meet anybody. He disappeared from our view between the hills."

"Did you meet any other party of travellers on your way from Damascus?"

Again Schmidgruber said nothing and Sleiding answered after a second's pause. "No. We didn't meet anybody, but we followed a little distance behind another caravan. It disappeared in the foothills of the Jebel Hajan. The rider may have gone to meet them. He went in that direction."

"Was it a large caravan?"

"Five travellers and their escort, I believe."

"Indeed? How big was the escort?" Tannemore's voice had a note of astonishment in it.

"About a dozen or so."

"And you don't know anything about the travellers in this caravan?"

"No, Lord Lomond."

"Many thanks then, and good night."

Tannemore returned to his tent and the other two sat silent until he had disappeared.

"Interesting intrigues can happen even in the desert, it appears," remarked Sleiding, with a pleased expression.

Schmidgruber took his cigar from his mouth and looked at his companion reproachfully. "You seemed pleased at it," he said. "I compliment you on your ability to lie."

"Part of my business," answered Sleiding. "Besides, a gentleman should always be ready to do a lady a favor, particularly such a pretty one."

"Much good your politeness will do you," said Schmidgruber. "Miss Lengdale thinks of nobody but Mr. Swendborg."

"That's where you make a mistake. I must say he'd be more to my taste if I were a girl, but the young women of nowadays have their heads turned by the things they learn in their high schools and colleges and they run after anybody who has made a reputation for knowledge. It's the professor she's after. Didn't she ask us not to tell him that she was following him?"

"H'm! A girl like that shouldn't waste a thought on a man with such dreadful hands," remarked Schmidgruber. "By the way, talking of hands, do you know that I have just pressed the most beautiful, the most noble hands that my eyes have ever seen?"

"Do you mean mine?" laughed Sleiding.

Schmidgruber laughed heartily. "Put them back in your pockets," he said. "You and I had better keep still on the question of hands. I'm talking of Mr. Digby. I don't know why I never noticed his hands before—they're exquisite, just to touch them is like a blessing. I could love that man. He must be a remarkable character; but this doesn't interest you, and you wouldn't understand it anyhow," said Schmidgruber, ending suddenly.

"You don't seem to be able to understand my admiration for Professor Clusius," said Sleiding, shooting a quick glance at his companion.

"H'm!" was Schmidgruber's only answer. Sleiding scrambled to his feet and set off in the direction of his tent, which their guide had set up. "Harmless sort of crank," he thought to himself.

Left alone by the fire Schmidgruber lit a fresh cigar and looked out over the shadows of the great ruins. "This Sleiding is one of those smart shallow men," he said. "It's just as well I fell in with him; he may be useful to me. The plot thickens hereabouts. B-r-r! How cold it is! I think I'd better walk a bit before turning in."

He rose and took a turn through the ruins until he came to a broad open square in one corner of which a group of Bedouins, belonging to Bridgeport's escort, rested in the moonlight. Schmidgruber halted. Across the plains a rider came towards him, heading directly for the open square. Over the broken marble flags that dotted his path here and there, he came at a reckless, easy gallop, but with no sound of hoofs. The moon was no longer brilliant but it was still clear enough to show the rider's figure distinctly.

Schmidgruber watched with intense interest, and finally he recognized the white cloak, the black horse and the handsome Bedouin whom he and Sleiding had met earlier that evening. And now he could see too why there was no sound from the horse's hoofs—they were wrapped in cloths.

"Now, of course, this man may be out on a lover's errand," said Schmidgruber to himself. "But—*hm*—he's joined the troop of riders which we saw setting out from Damascus with the so-called professor. That alters the matter. And I thought I was taking merely a little pleasure-trip, for rest and recreation. It will pay to keep an eye on this gentleman of the criminal thumbs." With that he returned to his tent and went to sleep.

Bridgeport lay awake for some time, thinking over the complication caused by the arrival of the two men.

"I am sorry," he murmured to himself, "but it wasn't of my wishing. If anything happens to them, it is their own fault . . . but I must send word of their arrival."

WHEN Professor Clausius had returned to his friends from the temple, Ahmar, the Arab astronomer, accompanied him a part of the distance. The Swedish scientist had been conscious of darker shadows skulking near them beneath overhanging walls.

"Who are those who follow us?" he asked of his companion.

The old man smiled gently. "Great friend," he said, "they are men of Tadmor. To-morrow they will kill thee, and those who are with thee."

"To-morrow?" exclaimed Clusius in surprise. "Art thou not mistaken, friend?"

Clusius did not believe any attack would be made until his experiments had gone far enough to be of use to the rascals who plotted against them. Bridgeport and Redfowles were not foolish enough to murder without cause or profit to themselves. And should he, Clusius, not succeed in his undertaking, his presence in Europe alive would be of more importance to them than his death.

"Art thou not mistaken?" he asked Ahmar again.

Ahmar shook his head. "I know whereof I speak," he answered.

"And dost thou know why we are to be killed?"

"It is because of a mistake—in thy case I know it must be a mistake. A rider reached here yesterday, coming from far, with little delay. His horse fell dead as he halted before the huts. But the rider was made rich by his journey."

"So richly was he paid for the ride?"

"It is so. But the man made the ride not for gold alone. He is a pious man."

"A pious man? Who orders murder done?"

"Yes, it may be so. When those who scorn the faith are destroyed by it."

"And in what way have we scorned the faith?"

"The rider told us that ye had defiled the Kaaba."

"And dost thou believe that I would do this thing?"

"I know thou wouldst not. But I do not know thy companions."

"They are my friends," answered Clusius quickly, then he added, "That is—the tallest of the three and the youngest are both near to my heart. The other is a stranger to me, but he had not been accused?"

"He also shall die to-morrow," said Ahmar.

Clusius halted and turned around in astonishment. "He too?" he repeated. "Art thou sure of that?"

"I am. There are four of you—you are all

accused and condemned. O great friend, do not despise the men of Tadmor. They have naught but their poverty and their faith, their faith for which they die."

"And for which they murder," said the professor calmly.

"And for which they murder," repeated the Arab. "He who brought the news inflamed their hearts with his words. Ye are to be destroyed, and the wicked books and writings which ye carry with you are to be given to him who brought the news, in thanks that he has told of you to the men of Tadmor."

"Oh—that is it, then," murmured the professor, suddenly understanding.

"It is not in Tadmor ye shall die," continued the other. "Ye are to fall somewhere far out in the desert, where no trace can be found again. But listen, my brother" —here the old man stopped and laid his hand on the other's sleeve—"I wish to speak the truth to thee, and for this I have told thee what is to befall. If thou wilt stay here with thy friends and thy company, no harm shall come to thee, for here I rule. If thou must go from me it will be night in my heart, and my eyes will be sad, but wherever thou goest thy ways shall be made safe for thee and all thy company. And now rest well. I have much to do."

The Arabian scholar returned to the temple, and the professor stood for some time in meditation. He was greatly surprised at the news he had received. Up to this moment he had considered Bridgeport the greater rascal of the two, believing Redfowles merely his tool. What Ahmar had told him proved that it was Redfowles who was the more to be feared, for he was ready to sacrifice not only his enemies but the man who considered himself his friend.

It was clear that Redfowles had hired some fanatic of the desert to excite the men of Tadmor to murder. Results for him would be less from such a course, but danger also would be less, in that Bridgeport too, his fellow plotter, would be put out of his way. And he hoped to gain enough knowledge of the planned experiments from the professor's books and writings, to attain some measure of success along this line for himself.

"A good brain—a remarkably clever rascal," murmured the professor as he fell asleep.

Next morning the caravan was awake early and soon ready to start. Not one of the natives of Tadmor approached to help in the preparations or to say farewell.

Clusius told Tannemore and Lund the tidings he had heard from the old astronomer. The Englishman told his story of Omar's midnight ride, adding that he had seen the Arab in earnest conversation with Bridgeport a little while ago, also that Schmidgruber had told him about the wrapping of the horse's hoofs. They realised that the crisis in their affairs might be at hand. All looked to their re-

volvers, and Tannemore examined the state of the general arms.

JUST before the start Bridgeport joined them with an expression of embarrassment on his face. "Is there anything you wish?" asked Clusius in a friendly tone. He was sorry for the man, now that he knew that Bridgeport also was betrayed.

The latter had come to ask, with much halting embarrassment, whether he might be permitted to continue the comedy of the steamer trip as long as the newcomers were with them. When he had finally brought out his request Clusius looked at him with deep gravity, and answered, "Please use my name as long as you like. It seems to matter very little now who is the real Clusius." Then turning to his friends he said, "I am going to bid Ahmar farewell."

"I'm going with you," said Lund.

And now, before they had started on their walk to the temple, there was a general movement in the caravan, and all eyes turned towards the east, from whence the noise of many galloping hoofs arose. A troop of riders came towards them, gathering recruits everywhere as they passed.

At a few yards' distance, however, the advancing riders halted suddenly and dismounted. Their leader came forward, looking from one to the other of the little group of white men, and stepped in front of Clusius.

"It is good for my eyes, O great one, that they may see thee," he said, crossing his arms over his breast and bowing his head. "I bring thee here the men of Tadmor. They had promised their Sheik Ahmar to be faithful to him, and to those who are near his heart. We have heard false tales of thee; forgive us, O great one. We are no longer thine enemies, but thy friends, who will protect thee to the nearest waters."

"It is good to hear that the men of Tadmor are no longer angry wih us," returned Clusius. "We shall be happy to have thee and thy friends guard us a little space on our journey."

Scarcely had the Bedouin ceased speaking when the huts became alive with women and children, who stood before the doors waving white cloths or palm leaves. Their shouts of delight changed to a song, and their ranks parted, leaving an open path through which the old sheik came solemnly forward. He reached out his arms and embraced Clusius, kissing him solemnly on the forehead.

"Go thy way in peace, O friend and master," he said. "My children will guard thee safely through the waste places. And take from me this humble gift—the book in which I have written down that which I have seen in the desert for many a year."

Clusius paused a moment, then answered, "I have nothing now, O noble Sheik, my brother in knowledge, which is worthy to give thee. But the moon will not return to its fulness many times before I shall send thee something, that thou mayest not forget me."

A parting embrace and the learned sheik turned back to his temple, passing through the ranks of the villagers with a gesture of benediction.

Suddenly there was another cry of astonishment, and the caravan, about to start, halted again, the camels grunting and the horses shivering in terror. Two immense lions came from the direction of the temple, harnessed together by a steel chain and driven by a young lad of astonishing beauty, who rode a milk-white mare. He guided his strange steeds to the head of the caravan and called out, "Thus doth Ahmar, the learned Sheik of Tadmor, honour his master and friend from the far North. His path shall lead him in the footsteps of lions, and the King of Beasts shall guard him."

Then they started out, the lad and the lions leading the way ahead of Davud the guide. The riders of Palmyra circled about the caravan on their horses, and in that early morning light Lund's dazzled eyes beheld for the first time the marvelous feats of horsemanship for which the Bedouins of the desert are noted. Behind them in the ruins the women waved their palms and sang a song of farewell as the travellers departed towards the eastern light.

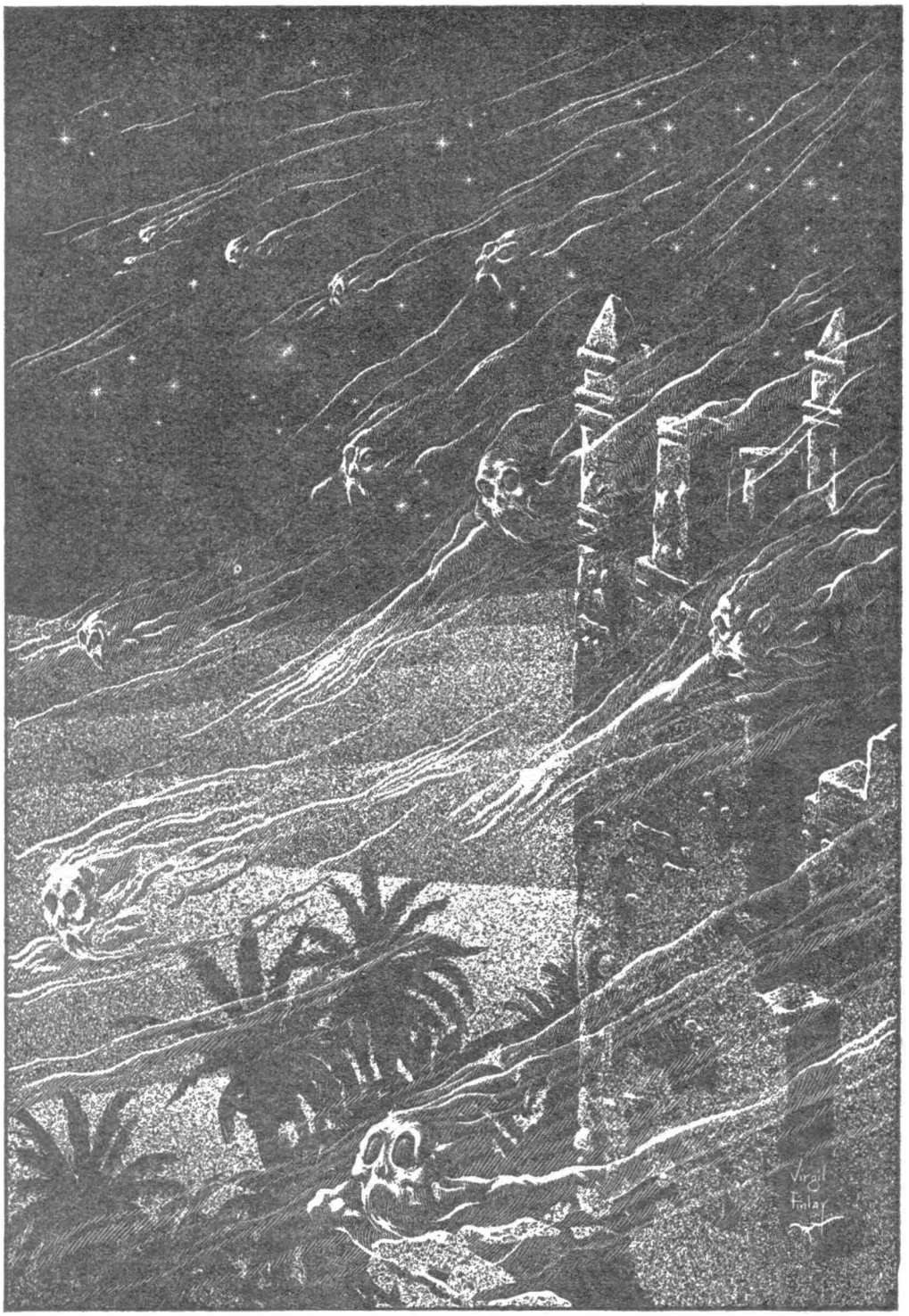
CHAPTER IX

AN AUDIENCE THAT FELL ASLEEP

THE Tadmor riders accompanied the caravan for two days. Then with a last salute they turned homeward, and the European travellers went on their way with their own escort.

Towards noon that third day the heat grew intense. The sun's rays poured pitilessly from a burnished sky. They had ridden in silence for nearly an hour, when Clusius spoke.

"What perfect peace about us in this



"The echoes—which are the souls of the dead—float through the desert. . . ."

wilderness," he said. "Let me take this opportunity to tell those of you who are interested something of the principles upon which I have been working for my new scientific discovery. Are you ready to listen?"

His words aroused his friends from their lethargy. They prodded their tired horses to close the distance between them.

Clusius began:

"Before I come to the basic principle of my experiment I will say a few words of general import, which, however, have a direct bearing upon the subject. As you all know, successful work in any line is impossible without the aid of the imagination. The scientist, the lawyer, the diplomat, need the vision just as surely as the artist, the poet. But no man's imagination, to be useful, can be greater than the limit of his knowledge, as indeed the imagination is shaped and aided by our special knowledge in our particular field. And at either end of the scale of our actual knowledge there are measures of space and substance, of which we may dream but which we cannot visualise. Here it is, however, that our imagination can take wing and soar for a little distance, at least, out into the Unknown. Follow me with your imaginations then, while I aid it with known facts.

"Now we all know that material bodies change their size under the influence of heat. And we all know the reason for the change in the action of heat on the molecules, the atoms and the intermolecular spaces. These intermolecular spaces are filled with a substance of incalculable delicacy, *aether,* we call it. It is the medium through which heat and light are carried, and its vibrations transmit them through from one atom, from one molecule to another. When the electrical or magnetic processes set these aether atoms into vibration, and they react on the vibrating molecules of any material body, the united effect of the double vibrations produces light and heat.

"The vibrations of the sun's gases give out four to eight hundred tiny shocks each. The vibrating aether waves take them up and transmit them, let us say, to the red cover of this Baedeker which I hold in my hand. Then something very interesting happens. The vibrations of the sun-gases are not all alike. Therefore, the vibrations of the aether atoms that strike the book cover are unequal. Those waves of light which make four hundred and fifty billion vibrations a second, look red to our eyes; these light atoms strike the atoms of the book cover moving at a different pace, and are thrown back, reflecting the red color directly into our eyes.

"Now there are other waves, moving at five hundred and ninety billion vibrations a second, which throw off a green light. These sink into the book cover, are absorbed and we do not see them. We all see the red light, and it is so strong that it is reflected on any object within its reach. Let me hold the book so that its reflected light will fall directly on the neck of my horse.

"If the vibrations of the surface atoms of the horse's neck were moving in harmony with those of the reflected light, red would be the colour reflected here also. But, as you see, the horse's neck is brown and the waves of red light have been absorbed, have gone down through the intermolecular spaces to a substratum of atoms. This substratum, not being so constantly under the influence of the outer light, has a different force and influence in its atoms. They do not retain the picture brought down to them; they destroy it. The light-picture of the Baedeker has gone down into the inner surface of the horse's neck and has been destroyed there. But the very effort of destruction has brought about a different rate of vibration.

"Now—and here comes the kernel of my theory—now if a species of aetheral gas could be constructed, the atomic vibrations of which could be added to the vibrations of the subsurface atoms, and thus restore to them their condition before the entrance of the light from outside, the process of the change would influence the aether of the intermolecular spaces, and the red light received by them would be reflected to our eyes again. As long as the influence of this gas lasted we could see the picture of the Baedeker here on my horse's neck, and see it clear enough to photograph it.

"Science tells us that there are three million strata of atoms in a body one millimetre thick. If, then, a particular body received about three hundred light impressions a day—which is the average—then a body twenty centimetres thick would contain six hundred million atomic strata. It offers a field from which, with the proper medium, we can draw out the pictures of over four thousand years, draw them out and photograph them by their own light. The new gas which I have com-

pounded will influence the surface from the outside in. Therefore the latest pictures will be seen first, then the older ones. . . ."

CLUSIUS paused abruptly, leaned over and caught Lund's arm just as the latter was about to topple off his horse. Deep embarrassment struggled with deadly lassitude in the young assistant's face. He tried to open his eyes, but they seemed locked as if by a cramp. Finally he managed to pull himself together, and stammer, "Oh, yes, sir—you were speaking of the sun's gases—"

"And a few other things besides," said the professor, smiling. "But you can read my lecture; I've written most of it out."

"Oh, please, let me read it. I don't know what was the matter with me. Please forgive me?"

"It was my fault, my dear Hjalmar," answered Clusius. "I should have known better than to hold forth on a scientific subject on such a hot day. And after our shaking up on those odious camels, the gentle pace of our Arab steeds is like a rocking-chair. Now I, too, can say that for once my audience went to sleep while I was lecturing. Wake up the others as gently as you can and tell them that I'm truly sorry to have added to the burden of their fatigue."

Clusius nodded amiably to his still bewildered assistant, touched the whip to his horse and forged ahead at a quick canter. Lund looked after him with awe and admiration. How little physical discomfort seemed to influence that fragile, aging body, dominated by such a mighty mind and powerful will! He thought of his own young strength and how he had suffered from the hot ride, and it seemed indeed incredible that the other, older man should be so calm, so completely master of himself.

He looked back at his companions. They all hung listless in their saddles, apparently asleep, saved from falling only by the rhythmic, easy gait of their well-trained horses. Lund blushed at the thought that he himself must have looked just as foolish but a few moments ago.

"By Saint Olaf of Gulbrandsdal!" he cried, touching Tannemore's arm. "Wake up, friend! We slept through the whole lecture! Wake up, gentlemen, we have lost all that Professor—that Mr. Digby was telling us."

They were all awake now, staring about.

"Why did you wake me?" exclaimed Schmidgruber; "I was having such a beautiful nap."

"Did I lose anything?" asked Sleiding, alarmed.

"Everything! Most interesting lecture, full of new thoughts and ideas."

"For pity's sake, do tell me what he said," cried the Australian.

"Deuce take it—I was asleep myself," grunted Lund.

Tannemore was too deeply ashamed of himself to say a word. It was unendurable, the thought that he should have fallen asleep during the explanation of a theory which was to revolutionize science—to save his own life, and honour, dearer to him than life. He could not understand it at all.

Half an hour later "Mr. Digby" returned to the caravan, fresh, unheated, and calm as ever. He appeared not to notice the embarrassment of the others.

"Friends, I have made a discovery which may be of importance," he announced. "There are some mounted Arabs circling around us at a distance, and I think they are following us. It would be well to consult our faithful Davud on the subject."

He and Tannemore rode forward to the head of the caravan. "Allah alone knows all," said the Arab, turning his gloomy eyes upon them when they had scarcely uttered their greeting. "But I know what thou art come to say to me now. Bedouins are watching us. There are but few hereabouts, but they are spies of the Rowali, to whom news came of us in Tadmor. Ahmar, the learned one, has honoured thee as one honour's princes, and this came to the ears of the Rowali. They are dogs and sons of dogs, robbers and plunderers on the high roads. They have but four men more than we, and therefore they are afraid—afraid of us while we are awake."

"Thou art a good guide, Davud, and a wise counsellor. What would thou have us to do? Is there a shelter for our night camp?"

"We cannot reach Bagdad by nightfall," answered the guide. "We must rest in the desert, but it can be by the grave of Ezekiel, the prophet."

"By the sweet waters," said Tannemore.

"Beneath the three tall palms," added Clusius.

"Will the grave serve us as fortress or stockade?" asked Lund, who had joined them.

Davud crossed his arms over his breast and gazed up at the sky as if in prayer. "An honest battle is good," he said. The Koran saith, 'He whose feet bear the dust of the Lord's battle will be saved from the torture on the day of the great judgment.' But the Holy Book says also, 'Man shall not battle where lie the dead—a grave is a place of peace.'"

"Then it is thy advice that we keep the peace at the grave of the prophet Ezekiel?" asked Clusius.

"And not defend ourselves?" queried Lund doubtfully.

"Let him talk," whispered Tannemore in English; "there's something else on his mind, some local superstition."

"The grave of Ezekiel is a holy place, and a place of terrors," continued the guide. "It is wide and high and has a tiny portal. The natives tell us that this door was once much smaller, so small that a man must creep in on hands and knees if he would enter there. But once, on a high Jewish feast day, the door became so wide and tall that one might ride in on a camel. And after that it is as one sees it now. It it better one does not do battle in such a place."

THE caravan reached the grave that evening. It was an ancient building of stone, with a bubbling spring shaded by three stately palms, beyond which rose tamarisks. The tents were pitched near the walls, and the travellers made themselves comfortable for the evening, after seeing that the proper sentries were placed at a considerable distance out in the desert.

Later in the evening Lund asked the professor, in humble embarrassment, if he would repeat what he had said to them that morning, which they had stupidly lost.

The professor sat in silence in a moment and then answered, "It was only the principle of my work that I described to you this morning. Many unexpected complications appear in practice, so that it would hardly be worth your while to go over the theory again. But I can try some practical experiments right here if you wish."

The three arose and went to their own particular baggage, which had been set up by the door of the tomb. They put the photographic apparatus together and fitted it out with the prepared paper, taking it into the interior of the little building. While Lund and Tannemore were bringing the bottles and instruments necessary, the professor was searching up and down the inner wall by the light of his electric lamp.

"Now we can use some of the new gases which I prepared at home," he said. "Hjalmar, will you kindly give me the bottle marked KL? Thanks. And now SSB. There, that will do to bring out the light. Now for the colour, which is more important. Now please give me NNZ."

The professor's voice trembled with an emotion he did not try to conceal.

Lund bent over the basket where the chemicals had been placed. He sought among those still remaining there, and an expression of distress came over his face as he could not find what he wanted. He opened box after box, all carefully ticketed, until the basket was empty of its contents. Then he put them all back one by one while his hands trembled.

"Don't be nervous," said the professor; "take time for it; the bottle will be found somewhere. You have probably overlooked it in this dim light."

"I'll go through the basket again," said Lund, his voice trembling now.

The bottle sought was not there, and Lund looked up at the others in despair.

"It is probably in another basket," said the professor gently. Tannemore took out an envelope and drew from it the list of contents of their various pieces of baggage, as packed in Damascus.

"Basket No. 1," he read, and then continued the list of contents. There was no NNZ among them.

"Basket No. 2 is the only other one with chemicals," said the professor calmly; "let us hear what is in that."

"No," said Tannemore hoarsely; "it's not noted here."

"We'd better go through the basket, though," said the professor. "We were hurried in Damascus, and we may have forgotten to note it down."

Lund started, and stopped in his occupation of opening basket No. 2, halted so abruptly that he knelt there holding a bottle in his half-raised hand.

"Is this it?" asked Clusius, low.

"No, it is not," gasped Lund.

"We couldn't have lost it in Damascus," exclaimed Tannemore; "look further."

But Lund made no attempt to look further. He let the bottle which he held drop back into its place, and his arms fell to his sides.

"Be calm, Hjalmar," said the professor. "Think it over a moment and you will remember where you put it."

"That's just it," said Lund, in a hoarse whisper, "I didn't pack it at all." He dropped down over the basket, his face buried in his hands. There was a second's intense stillness in the tomb.

"I'll ride back to Damascus at once and find the bottle," said Tannemore.

Lund looked up at him, his eyes full of despair. "That will do us no good," he said; "the bottle is not in Damascus, but in Stockholm. I left it there, the bottle NNZ. It is on the right-hand corner of your desk, Professor."

"In Stockholm? On my desk?" repeated Clusius. "That means that it is lost to us," and he smiled sadly while his eyes showed his disappointment although there was no anger in them. Tannemore put both hands in his pockets that the others might not see how tightly they were clenched, and his lips shut firm over his strong white teeth. Lund cowered by the basket again, his face in his hands.

Finally the professor spoke. "This decides the result of our work. We shall still succeed, but in less measure than I had hoped. We can see light and shadow, although we cannot produce colour. And now please let me have the lamp again. I need it here."

Busily the three worked inside the old tomb, unheeding the happenings of the outer world. Suddenly there was a noise which caught their attention, absorbed as they were. There was a shout, then another and another, and a bustle as of moving animals.

"What is it?" called Lund, opening the door. Their experiments ended, the apparatus was repacked.

"The Rowali are coming—over a hundred of them," cried Davud. "My scout has just brought the word—a large troop of them is moving on us."

"This is a good place to stay and meet them, isn't it?" asked Lund. In his disgust with his own remissness he would have welcomed the excitement of a fight.

"No—not here—the Rowali are dogs. They respect not the dwellings of the dead and are stronger than we. In the desert they may lose our trail."

"He is right," said Tannemore. "Our superstitious escort would be of little assistance to us here. Give the order to break camp, Davud."

All night they rode in close formation, a strong force of Bedouins bringing up the rear, the travellers holding their rifles in readiness. From time to time a rider shot like an arrow far back into the desert, and returned again to inform Davud that the foe had apparently been outdistanced or lost the trail. When morning broke, the horizon was clear in all directions.

"That's strange," said Tannemore. "Why should they have given us up so easily when they were stronger than we?"

"They are cowardly dogs," said Davud. "They must be three to one ere they will attack by day. But now, O protector, we are far off our chosen path, and beyond the road that leads to Bagdad. Shall we turn back?"

"No," said Tannemore; "if the Rowali are spying upon us it were better that we press on with as little delay as possible towards Hilleh."

That night they slept in the open, fearing even to pitch the tents, as there was still danger of a night attack. But to their surprise none of the scouts sent out, circling the horizon, had seen any sign of hostile Arabs.

The start was made early the following morning in the direction of Hilleh, the native village which hides its squalor among the mighty ruins of Babylon.

"Did you ever believe water could be so good?" remarked Schmidgruber to Sleiding as they rode along.

"Where did you get any water?" asked the Australian in surprise.

"I didn't; that's why I spoke," replied the other. "If camping in the open and drinking the juice of preserved fruits when there isn't any water, is travelling for pleasure—then I think I've had all I want."

"You're getting thinner by the minute, if that's any comfort to you," said Sleiding, with a laugh.

"Yes, it's some comfort. And if farming doesn't pay I know how I could earn good money right here. I would start a sanitarium for inebriates. After a week or two in this sort of climate they'd hate the very sight of alcohol and sell their souls for a glass of water."

"By Jove, that's a first rate idea," cried Sleiding. "What will you sell it to me for?"

"You can have it for nothing," said Schmidgruber sadly. "For I doubt if either of us will ever get out of this place alive."

"Maybe not. But I might as well have an eye to business."

The German laughed, and pushed ahead to where Clusius and Lund stood before an oddly shaped, many tipped sand hill.

"It's a tel," the professor was explaining.

"What is a tel?" asked Schmidgruber.

"A tel is the grave of a lost city, or perhaps only of a village, deserted and forgotten, and gradually covered by the sand drifts." It was Tannemore who answered.

While the caravan was slowly passing the tel, the Englishman dropped off his horse, poked about in the sand and then picked up something.

"What did you find?" asked Schmidgruber, who was waiting for him.

Tannemore showed a well-preserved clay tablet bearing traces of cuneiform writing on its surface. "You can find hundreds of them in Babylon."

"After all these centuries?" asked Schmidgruber, "I understand that you gentlemen are learned in such matters. Are these marks really meant for writing, or are they only ornamentation?"

"They were considered such up to a hundred years ago, but we know now that they are meant for writing. However, our friend the professor here—" they were riding immediately behind Bridgeport—"can tell you all about it. He is an authority on the subject, and has made remarkable discoveries in that line."

"Indeed?" Schmidgruber bowed, seeming greatly impressed. "Remarkable discoveries you say?"

"Yes, most remarkable," continued Tannemore, with an irony that was not hidden from either of his companions. "It was that noted scholar Grotefend who first proved to us that the inscriptions were indeed written messages. And he showed us also that there are three forms of hieroglyphic writing."

"Grotefend did not know of the fourth kind as seen on the newly discovered tablets now in the British Museum," interrupted Bridgeport.

"Exactly, and we are here now to study the composition of this newly discovered writing—if indeed it be proved genuine." Tannemore's voice was steely hard.

"Oh, indeed; then you are travelling in the same purpose as Professor Clusius." Schmidgruber looked most innocent and not a little bewildered.

"Quite the same," replied Tannemore. "But, of course, I should explain that we are this gentleman's opponents in the matter."

Bridgeport sat up stiffly in his saddle. Drawing in the reins he started his horse into a quick canter, not deigning to say another word.

THE GERMAN looked after him with a glint of steel in his keen grey eyes, out of which all the innocent bewilderment of a moment before had vanished. Pulling his horse nearer the Englishman's, he spoke in a lower tone than before.

"Lord Tannemore, my theory regarding the shape and expression of the hands is as sound as ever. That man's thumbs would mark him for a criminal anywhere. A man who steals another's name is a criminal, is he not?"

Tannemore started at hearing himself called by his own name. "I could almost wish you hadn't discovered it," he said in slight irritation. He believed that something he himself had said had revealed the secret of their incognito. "It must have been my own carelessness."

"Oh, no, don't distress yourself on that score, my lord," said Schmidgruber quietly. "I did not believe in that man on the *Pandora*. It scarcely needed the scene in Tadmor to show me who is the most notable personality among us. And then when I had seen his hands—the hands of the real Clusius! How you must have laughed to yourself at the comedy on the ship."

"We were a little angry too."

"But your anger was evidently not so great as the reasons which prevented you from unmasking the impostor."

"You are right there."

"There is something else I should like to say to you," continued Schmidgruber. "You remember the Bedouin rider about whom you questioned us the evening of our arrival? His name is Omar, and he belongs to the escort of this man who has just left us."

"Exactly."

"Very well, then. Now, during the evening that we spent at the tomb of the prophet I made some observations regarding this Omar which might interest you. First of all he was apparently very anxious to be made sentry that evening. But your friend Davud was just as anxious to prevent it, for Davud is as distrustful of the handsome Omar as we are."

"You are a good observer, Mr. Schmidgruber."

Schmidgruber smiled a quiet little smile and went on. "Well, on that evening, while you were inside the tomb, I sat at the fire with the others. Our friend here, who uses

another man's name, rose and left us after a while, wandering apparently aimlessly about the camp. Finally he disappeared behind a sand hill in the direction in which I had seen Omar go. He was not gone long, and sat near us when he returned. It was dark, but I caught a glimpse of his face, and I must say I liked it as little as I do his thumbs. Then he went into his tent, and I strolled off to see where he had been."

"Why?" asked Tannemore.

"Natural curiosity, possibly. I looked over the edge of the sand hill and saw Omar cowering on the ground, counting out the money from two purses which he held. He weighed and counted it, then finally satisfied himself that one was very much heavier than the other."

"And what does this mean, in your opinion?" asked Tannemore.

"It is very clear, is it not? The Arab is being paid by two different parties, and if I judge the character of these simple children of the soil aright he will eventually do the bidding of the party who pays the higher. Now, it does not take much combination to realise that one of these parties is somewhere in the direction towards which he rides on his midnight errands. Also, you will have observed that that is the direction from which the invasion of Rowali threatened."

"Exactly," said Tannemore, "and you are quite right in your belief that the man who paid the Rowali is in that direction."

"One man alone? There is no solitary traveller following us."

"Possibly he may have joined a caravan."

"Then you were not aware that Mr. Lengdale and his party are following in our footsteps?"

"No, indeed," said Tannemore quickly; "that is a surprise to me."

"We met them in Kurietain, and Miss Lengdale asked us not to mention the fact if we should meet with your party."

Tannemore laughed openly now. "That's easy to understand," he said. "She wants to surprise us, or rather one of us. When does she intend to appear?"

"In Nineveh, I believe."

"Then my young friend will find Nineveh doubly interesting."

"Yes, my lord—unless some deviltry interferes."

"What do you mean?" asked Tannemore quickly.

"I mean that the Lengdale caravan is following us in the direction from which the Rowali came; and that in their party there is a stranger who joined them in Damascus."

"Did you see him?"

"I caught only a glimpse of him in Kurietain. He kept out of the way most carefully. But from that glimpse I should describe him as in the late forties, of medium height, muscular, reddish hair, just a little cross-eyed. His hands are ugly and hairy."

"Redfowles!" exclaimed Tannemore.

"He calls himself John Walker," corrected Schmidgruber.

"Calls himself? You must have seen by this time that there's very little dependence on what a man calls himself—on this trip at least."

The Austrian's grey eyes twinkled. "Very true, my lord. It seems to be a game of hide-and-seek on this journey, with all of us. Then this man Walker's real name is Redfowles and Redfowles is—"

"Redfowles is—the man we have most to fear. But you've seen so much I might as well tell you why it is that these men are hounding us, this Redfowles and the man who is with us here under a false name."

In a few hasty sentences Tannemore gave his companion the principal points of their story, including what he had learned on the ship from Smithson. Schmidgruber listened gravely, his eyes lighting up now and then.

"Then this Oriental with the alias is Bridgeport, and he is working together with Redfowles. As far as I can make out, you need no further justification for your stand, Lord Tannemore. The actions of these men prove their villainy."

"Ah, yes, but the world must have a material proof. And that is what my great friend has promised to find for me."

"That's the part I can't understand—but then I am no scientist. The human side of it is what interests me. And now let me tell you, Omar was off again last night—he was gone from here scarcely an hour."

"Did he speak to Bridgeport on his return?"

"I think not. For this morning I saw him making signs to the other, as if he were trying to say that he had delivered something to somebody."

"H'm," grunted Tannemore, and fell into deep thought.

CHAPTER X

LOVE IN THE DESERT

ALL that day Lund had ridden alone, apart from the others. He could not seem to overcome the depression into which his forgetfulness had thrown him. Neither the professor nor Tannemore had mentioned the matter again, had indeed both tried their best to cheer up the young assistant; but even the following morning he remained gloomy and silent.

The midday rest was taken in a large field of ruins, the towering walls of which gave a welcome shelter from the sun's heat. While the others sat about, resting, Clusius and Tannemore rode their horses through the ruins toward the centre of the dead city. The mighty walls of a great temple in an excellent state of preservation attracted them. Lund, who was sitting alone brooding, took their horses while they climbed on over the great heaps of fallen stone.

In ten minutes they had reached the temple, and Clusius led the way to a wall which was still standing, and on the surface of which one could plainly see traces of inscriptions and hieroglyphic pictures. The two scientists rubbed the sand from the wall as well as they could.

"This looks like polychrome," said Tannemore, delighted.

"If we had our chemicals here we could find out at once," answered the professor. "Let us clear away as much as we can. If things hold out like this it will be worth while remaining here several days. There is no reason why we shouldn't make our final experiments here as well as in Babylon, provided water can be found, so that we can make camp."

"The sand lies high here," said Tannemore, kneeling down and scraping at the walls with his pocket-knife. "Half the picture at least is buried."

Soon they were both on their knees in the sun, and dug and scraped with their hands or loose stones. Little mounds grew steadily on either side of them. They seemed to forget the rest of the world completely.

Suddenly the professor started. "What's that?" he exclaimed.

"Redfowles!" cried a voice behind him, and at the same time a muscular hand pressed him flat upon the sand. Tannemore, too, turning to rise, was struck down by a blow on the head.

Simultaneously twenty Arabs appeared from behind the wall, and in a moment had both men bound hand and foot and quite helpless. It had all come about so suddenly that even Tannemore, trained to quick action as he was, had not had time to defend himself or his friend.

"If either of you speaks a word," Redfowles warned them, "the *other* will be shot." The two revolvers which the Arabs had taken from the prisoners he thrust into his own pockets. "I have your weapons, as you see," he continued, "and I think you will be quiet for a while. I will invite you to follow me."

The Arabs lifted the prisoners and carried them through the ruins in a direction opposite to that in which their own party were settled. Tannemore shivered with impotent indignation and rage. He knew that one cry would attract Lund's attention and the camp be alarmed in a moment and come to their assistance. But he knew the man in whose power they were; it was quite true that if one cry came from his lips death would be meted out to Clusius.

Redfowles came up beside him and spoke again. "Another thing, gentlemen. If any of your following hear us and interfere with us, I shall see myself compelled to kill you both."

"To murder us," corrected the professor calmly.

"As you will, the result is the same," sneered Redfowles.

When they reached the edge of the ruined city they came to a little group of camels watched over by several more Arabs. They were a full half hour now from the place in which they had been captured. Under orders from Redfowles the Bedouins helped them up into the saddles of the camels. Then the Irishman spoke again to his captives:

"Then, you remember, gentlemen, that a single word from either of you, except in answer to a question, will cost the other his life? I may as well add that a single suspicious movement will have the same effect. As I see you understand me, I will loosen your fetters."

Upon that the hands and arms of his captives were freed, so that they could take more comfortable positions in the saddle. The party rode for at least an hour onward through the sand at a rapid pace, till finally the bank of the Euphrates was reached and a halt was called.

The prisoners were lifted down from the

camels, and the thongs on their ankles loosened sufficiently to permit them to take short steps. Surrounded by the Arabs, Redfowles led them a few yards further, where stood a deserted hut formerly used by the river sentry. It was a small stone building, windowless, the door the only opening, the roof partly in ruins. Into this the two captives were pushed, and ten of the Arabs, with knives in their hands, sat down in the sand outside, on guard.

IN THE interior the broken roof gave little protection from the glare and heat of the sun. Clusius sat down in the darkest corner and motioned Tannemore to join him. The Englishman's teeth were set and his eyes gleamed red, but the famous scientist kept his usual gentle calm, and his eyes were clear and quiet. He held out his hand to his friend and smiled in encouragement.

Redfowles entered the hut, and with a look of grim hatred began to speak to them.

"I'm very sorry, gentlemen," he said "that you should have come thus far for nothing. You could have been just as useful to me at home. And I am equally sorry that it will not be possible for me to compensate you for the discomfort and expense of your journey. I can only hope you will carry pleasant impressions with you out of this world. Well, why don't you speak?" he demanded, after a pause. Then as they were still silent, "Answer me!" he commanded.

"Gladly, if we have your permission to do so," said Clusius.

Redfowles laughed. "Oh, yes, I forgot that it was fear for your lives that kept you silent."

"Fear for the professor's life," said Tannemore angrily.

"Fear for my friend's life," explained Clusius gently.

"Well, neither life is worth much now," remarked their captor. "Have you nothing to say to me, Lord Tannemore?"

"Nothing," said Tannemore, looking up at the roof.

But Clusius looked carefully at the man who stood before them. "So this is Redfowles," he said with unconcealed interest.

"Yes, I am Redfowles," said the other. "And now I will explain at once what I want of you both." He clapped his hands, and when an Arab appeared, commanded, "Bring in the table and the other things."

Two Bedouins brought in a rug and spread it out in the middle of the room. A third set up a low folding camp-table and placed on it a lacquered box richly ornamented in silver. Redfowles opened the box and took out writing materials.

"Gentlemen, will you take your places?" he said, motioning to the carpet in front of the table. "Make yourselves comfortable. There is no particular use in conventional politeness at such a time. I have your weapons, as you know. Twenty armed men surround the house; men who obey my slightest word. You cannot move two steps out of this door with safety. Neither force nor cunning will help you. Do you realise that?"

"I think we do," replied the professor. "But you are in danger yourself. A scorpion has just crawled up your sleeve. You had better get rid of it. It was the most poisonous kind, and in heat like this its bite would mean death, or at least long illness."

Redfowles sprang to his feet and dashed out of the hut, tearing off his coat and shaking it violently. Stamping the scorpion in the sand thoroughly, he came back and continued his speech as if nothing had happened.

"I am taking it for granted that men of brains like you will not waste your energy in useless endeavours to escape; also that you will waste no time in idle reproaches, but come at once to the matter of which I wish to speak to you."

"The sooner you come to it yourself, the better we shall be pleased," said the professor. "We do not wish to be too long delayed in returning to our camp."

Redfowles looked at him in surprise. "Professor Clusius," he remarked, "I am astonished that a man of your dignity should be willing to end his life in silly jesting. Listen to me, now. I know the plans that brought you to Mesopotamia; I know the principle as well as the details of your new discovery, for I am in possession of the manuscript containing all your memoranda on this journey. It is certainly most interesting and extremely instructive."

Now for the first time Clusius looked a little uneasy. Redfowles opened his box again, and took from it a big note-book which he laid on the table. Tannemore could see that Clusius was excited in spite of his quiet demeanour, for the book before them was undoubtedly the one that contained all his recent notes.

"You recognise this book, Professor?" asked Redfowles.

"I do," said Clusius, his voice hard and cold. "I had thought your friend Bridgeport a rascal of a rather higher type. Now I see that he is just an ordinary thief."

"Whatever comes handiest," said Redfowles cynically. "Yes, Bridgeport stole the book and sent it to me last night, just like an ordinary thief. One can't forge Assyrian antiquities every day, you know. Anyway, Bridgeport has his limitations. He would be nothing without me. And now, gentlemen, as you see, I am in possession of the important details of your new discovery. Also, besides the men around the hut, there are forty-five other Bedouins in my service. They are now in the neighourhood of Babylon. When your caravan reaches that place—"

"It will be destroyed—including Bridgeport," the professor finished the sentence.

Redfowles looked at him surprise. "And how did you know that?" he asked.

"What does it matter to you how I learned it, as long as I did learn it?"

"Yes, that's true," said Redfowles; "it matters very little. Very well then, your entire caravan, including Bridgeport, will be destroyed, and I shall be in sole possession of the valuable information you had planned to give the world yourself."

"You will be, but you are not yet," remarked Clusius.

"Very true," said Redfowles; "that's why I have brought you here. There is one thought missing, a thought which I know that you have worked out, but have not yet written down. Perhaps you remember that on that rainy evening when you sat in your smoking-room at home with your friend here and your assistant, you said to them, 'All Mesopotamia will be like a mirror for us. We will release shadows of the past, we shall see lost colours; we shall—but that is only conjecture as yet. I cannot say decisively that it can be done.'"

"And how do you know that those were my words?" asked Clusius, interested.

Redfowles bowed politely. "An agent of mine sat in the top of the beautiful linden tree just outside your window."

"Ah, indeed?" said the professor; "then what is it you want of me now?"

"I want to know that last link. It is not noted in this book, is it?"

"No, it is not."

"Ah, then, there is still something precious in your mind," cried Redfowles in admiration. "This thing will mean much to me—you are a remarkable man, Professor. You are a giant in the world of science. And now will you kindly dictate to me that other thought which is not yet written down in your book?"

"You expect me to do this?" asked Clusius.

"I can compel you to do it."

"How?"

"There are various ways. You may listen to reason, for instance. You know that you will both of you die, here and now. Are you willing, as a scientist, to let this work die with you, as it certainly will if you do not complete it?"

"That *would* be a pity."

"I knew you would agree with me. Nothing that you have ever done has been done for your own sake— for your own sake alone. You have always worked for the good of mankind. Or, possibly, for fame."

"My fame can certainly be no thought of yours at this moment, Mr. Redfowles. As I understand it you are planning to take not only the money which my invention will bring you, but the fame as well; you intend to give yourself out as the discoverer of it."

"I shall have to. If I published the matter in your name, the world might connect me with your disappearance."

"Suppose I refuse to give you this last thought, without which the rest is useless?"

Redfowles gnawed his lips for a moment, then replied: "Oh, no, you will not refuse it. What scientist worthy the name would refuse to give to the world an important and useful discovery, merely because he himself would receive no advantage from it? Could any scientist worthy the name be so selfish?"

FOR A FEW moments there was complete silence in the river sentry's hut. A faint groan that sounded like a muttered oath from Tannemore, was the only sound heard. The professor's eyes closed and his face showed that he was pondering deeply. Finally he looked up and spoke. "No, no scientist worthy the name would ever keep back from the world, for whatever consideration, a useful and important discovery." His eyes shone, and his face was illumined as if by a light from within.

Tannemore sprang up now. "You devil!" he cried to Redfowles; "you think to bend his mind to your will by your cursed sophistries, do you?"

He made a step forward, forgetting his fetters. He stumbled and would have fallen had not the two Arabians at the door sprung forward at a sign from Redfowles

and caught him. They bound his arms to his sides and tied his feet securely, then laid him in a corner of the room. Redfowles stood over him. "Your Lordship's turn will come later," he said scornfully. "You and I have a little account of our own to settle, and it will be settled suddenly, if you don't lie still."

The professor looked on, pale but quiet, at the scene. "Mr. Redfowles," he said, "is it absolutely necessary for us to die? Why will you not let us return to Europe?"

"Because you would betray me there."

"And if I promise not to?"

"I should not trust you."

"Then we *must* die? And if I implore you earnestly to let us go back to our camp, to give up these fiendish plans? To leave the rest, if you will, to mere force? You have more men than we have."

"It shall be as I have ordered!" cried Redfowles impatiently. "You will stay here, you will die here, you will be buried here. And if you do not tell me what I need to complete your work, I will leave you here without food or water until you are ready to sell everything you know for a drop to drink or a crumb of bread. And you will die after that in any case."

Tannemore groaned, but Clusius was quite calm. A slight flush appeared on his cheeks and he turned to his friend.

"Very well, Richard, what matters it if we die now, or a few years later! And this man is right, my new discovery must not be lost, even if—if we die. Mr. Redfowles, I will tell you what was in my mind that evening in Stockholm. No, you need not make yourself ready to write yet; I must speak a few words in explanation first."

"Spare yourself the explanation," cut in Redfowles harshly. "I have read your book through carefully; I am ready for the last arguments. I have an excellent whip of rhinoceros hide handy in case you do not come to the point quickly enough."

The flush in the professor's cheeks deepened. "Very well, then, write down what I say. You have forced me to it," he added in a lower tone. "Listen carefully now.

"You know that the main object of my work was to construct a gas which should react on the vibrations of atoms, and bring out lost and faded colours. Now you know that two different substances brought into the proper relations to one another will achieve a colour which neither could have alone. Also—now write every word carefully—glass, for instance, is a transparent substance because of the perfect relation between the vibrations of its atoms to the vibrations of the aether atoms around it.

"And now listen most carefully. This is the main point. *Starting with an understanding of the atomic vibrations I have been able to construct gases which will act upon the atoms of substances reflecting light in such a way as to make other substances transparent.*"

"Other substances transparent?" repeated Redfowles in a strangely weary voice. His hand held the pencil loosely, and his head drooped as if an iron ring were tightening around it.

"Other substances transparent?" he murmured again, hardly articulate this time. Slowly and with tremendous effort he raised his heavy head, and found himself looking directly into the professor's eyes. These eyes, usually so gentle, sparkled like facetted diamonds now. An electric current seemed to go out from them, passing through his body from his own eyes down to his knees, from his fingertips up to his elbows, a current that made Redfowles shiver. Struggling to control his will power, which was fast slipping from him, he murmured, "This is—this is hypnotism."

"Yes, it is hypnotism," said Clusius, holding out his hands toward Redfowles. "I am sorry, but you yourself have forced me to use this last and simplest weapon against you."

Redfowles stared at him helplessly. Some of his brain cells were still free enough to feel a consciousness of anger, but not enough to permit of resistance. He smiled helplessly and sank back in his chair, as powerless to move without the other's command as if fettered.

FINALLY, when every vestige of the man's will had been conquered, Clusius said, "And now, Mr. Redfowles, kindly turn to that book, and write down on the first empty page what I dictate."

Obediently Redfowles turned the page, took up his pencil and wrote:

It was I who sold the forged tablets to the British Museum, knowing that Bridgeport had forged them.

It was at my command that Bridgeport stole Professor Clusius' book containing his latest discovery.

It was I who, with the help of my Bedouins, captured Professor Clusius and Lord Tannemore, and carried them away with intent to murder them.

It was my intention to have Bridgeport killed that I alone might profit from all the results of Professor Clusius' last work.

This confession is written by my own hand, in a river sentry-house by the banks of the Euphrates.

J. Redfowles.

When he had finished, Clusius spoke again. "Now put down your pencil," he commanded, "Shut the book and give it to me. Now give me our revolvers and your own; also any other weapons you may have about you."

Redfowles laid three revolvers and a sharp knife on the table, then put his hand mechanically into an inner pocket of his coat and laid a tiny bottle alongside the weapons.

"Poison! You may keep that," said Clusius. "Loosen his lordship's fetters."

With the mechanical movements of an automaton Redfowles rose, walked to the corner and released Tannemore.

"Tie your own feet very carefully," was the next command. When it was done Clusius threw a corner of the carpet on which Redfowles was sitting over his feet and continued, "Call in the leader of your men and tell him to return with the others to Tadmor and wait for you there."

Redfowles gave a sharp whistle and upon one of the Arabs coming in gave the order as Clusius had demanded. Presently, while silence reigned in the hut, outside could be heard the hustle and movement of Bedouins tightening saddle girths and mounting their horses. The sounds of the departing troop came almost at once.

When the quiet of the desert surrounded them once more, Clusius bent over Redfowles and passed his hand over his forehead several times. Tannemore, dazed and happy at the unexpected deliverance, gathered up the weapons from the table, handing Clusius his own revolver. A change came over Redfowles' face as the power of the other's will loosened its bonds over his mind. The sight of Tannemore walking about unfettered spurred him to rise, but now his own feet were tied.

"What does this mean?" he cried.

"It means," answered Clusius, "that I was obliged to hypnotise you to frustrate the crime you planned."

Still scarcely understanding, Redfowles whistled sharply once and again, but no one came.

"Your men are gone by your own orders," remarked Clusius. "Also we have a complete confession of your crimes, those already committed and those planned—a confession written and signed by your own hand."

"A confession that will keep you in prison for many years if you should ever attempt to return to civilisation," added Tannemore. He was about to say more, when he suddenly stopped and looked towards the entrance. There were voices outside, although no words were yet distinguishable. All three men looked and listened.

Suddenly a slender figure, in a white gown, with a silvery veil floating around her large hat, appeared in the doorway.

"Papa, there's somebody in the house," Erna Lengdale exclaimed. Then she added in English, in a tone of great astonishment, "Why—why it's Mr. Walker, who left us so suddenly—and Professor Clusius—the real Professor Clusius, and Lord Lomond, Lord Tannemore I mean, and—"

"That's all for the present, Miss Lengdale," said Tannemore, falling into her tone of merriment, as he saw her eyes wandering around the room. "The rest of the party are at the camp. And there's one I know who will be delighted to see you."

"Oh," stammered Erna, smiling and blushing, and she turned to Redfowles to hide her embarrassment. "Why, what's the matter?" she cried, at sight of him. "Your feet are bound!"

"Have you fallen among thieves, Mr. Walker?" asked Lengdale, coming in behind his daughter, and nodding cordially. "What's the matter with him?" he went on, as Redfowles did not answer.

"Suppose you tell our friends who is the thief here," said Tannemore, touching Redfowles with the toe of his boot.

Erna started back in terror at the expression on the Irishman's face, then looked helplessly at Tannemore.

"This man joined your caravan under the name of Walker, I have heard," said Tannemore gravely. "And I know someone who would have been in hourly terror for you had he learned of it. This man's real name is Redfowles, and he is not worthy of any consideration on your part at all."

"His own confession here will explain all this to you," said Clusius, handing the book to Lengdale.

The Danish merchant read the confession with astonishment. "Won't he deny it, if he escapes?" he asked.

"He will affirm it now, in the presence of other witnesses," said the professor. "Mr. Redfowles, did you not deceive the author-

ities of the British Museum? Did you not capture us with intent to murder us? Answer me!"

"I did," muttered Redfowles. "Bridgeport forged the tablets and I sold them to the British Museum. I planned to murder Professor Clusius and his entire caravan, to have them murdered by Arabs in my pay." His voice grew louder toward the end, and he hissed out his words as if it eased him to say them.

Mrs. Henning and Knute, following the others, had now come into the doorway, and although they did not understand what Redfowles was saying, they caught some sinister meaning in the scene from the expressions of those around them.

MR. LENGDALE took a pencil and wrote his name as witness under Redfowles' signature in the book. Then he handed it to his daughter and to his servants, who also signed.

"And now I think we had better go back to our camp," said the professor, when he had put the book into his pocket. "Our friends will be anxious about us. And I hope, Mr. Lengdale, that you and your party will come with us, for you will find friends there. My namesake of the *Pandora* is there, and two other fellow passengers, and oh, yes . . . my assistant, too, I had nearly forgotten him."

His kind eyes, now calm as usual again, turned to Erna as he spoke, and she blushed sweetly under his friendly glance. Her father looked at the two and murmured, "Was this why she chose Nineveh?"

Tannemore offered his arm to Erna and led her out into the sunshine. "It will be a short two hours' ride," he said, helping her into the saddle of her camel, for the guides had now brought the entire caravan up to the hut.

Clusius beckoned to one of the Arabs of the escort.

"Watch over the man in there until evening," he commanded.

"Musa will watch carefully," said the Bedouin, the leader of the troop. "But permit me, Effendi, to pull the saddle girths tighter on the camels; they have become loosened."

Lengdale and Clusius unconsciously turned their eyes towards the animals, following the direction of Musa's hand. In the second that they did so, the Arab tossed a small sharp-pointed knife behind him. It fell close to Redfowles and he seized it eagerly.

"Wilt thou not permit me to water the camels?" continued Musa, walking slowly towards the animals. "They have come far without a rest."

There was a sudden shout from the escort, some of them laughing and pointing towards the river. "Oh, the dog, the son of a dog," cried Musa. "See, he has escaped." They all turned towards the river and saw Redfowles swimming vigorously towards the opposite bank.

"I will catch him," cried Musa, running to the bank and jumping in.

The others crowded as near to the bank as the crumbling sand hills would allow. "He's down, he's drowned," exclaimed a voice. Redfowles was no longer to be seen, but the Bedouin's white turban rose above the ripples.

In the middle of the river a tiny islet, scarcely more than a rock, arose from the water. A single spreading tree towered above the shrubs on its surface. Musa had reached the island and clambered up on it, breathing heavily after his swim; now he disappeared behind the tree. Tannemore followed every motion through his sharp field-glass, the others watching as well as they could with the naked eye.

Suddenly Musa's white turban appeared in the river again at the other side of the island. The Bedouin was swimming directly across the river to the opposite bank. The eyes of the watchers followed him—all except Tannemore, whose glass was still trained on the island. When he put it down there was a smile on his lips. He turned and whispered to Clusius:

"Musa is in the pay of Redfowles; he is helping him to escape."

"Is he there?" asked Clusius, in the same low tone.

"Yes, on the other side of the island, hiding in the shrubs."

"What does it matter?" said Clusius. "He has no men, horses or camels; he is helpless to harm us further. We can keep on with our experiments undisturbed."

"Then you will continue even though it is no longer necessary?" asked Tannemore, his eyes shining.

"Surely. We want to see what the walls of Babylon will tell us, do we not? Your quest is answered, Richard. Now we will work for the sake of science."

Half an hour later the caravan left the hut by the river bank. Musa, coming ashore after his apparently fruitless search, had tried to remain behind with several of the camels, or at least with a

donkey or two. But Tannemore watched him carefully, and saw that every last man and beast started with them.

When they had been gone for some time and the hut by the river lay deserted and quiet as before, there was a little movement on the island, and the discomfited Redfowles parted the shrubs and looked across to the main bank. Seeing himself quite alone he stood up, took off his coat, and satisfied himself that the broad leathern money-belt around his waist was safe, its contents unharmed by the water.

"Well, I have plenty of money yet, what more do I want?" he thought. "Two days' walk will take me to Hilleh, where I can find the rest of my men—and after that—well, if I can't use this new discovery, no one else shall! The caravan will disappear, not one of them shall escape. I'll go home as Bridgeport's heir, double as rich as before. Come to think of it, I'm sorry about that girl. She's far too pretty to die so young. But if she's sensible she can return to Europe as my wife. She's really very charming."

MEANWHILE, all was excitement in the caravan among the ruins when, as the signal for a renewed start was given, Professor Clusius and Lord Tannemore were nowhere to be found. Led by Lund, beside himself with anxiety, the other members of the party scattered through the ruins, shouting the names of their friends everywhere.

"See here—they must have been here," called Schmidgruber, pointing to a heap of freshly upturned sand.

"Yes, but where are they now?" groaned the young Swede.

Schmidgruber was kneeling in the sand. "There are footprints here," he said, "as far as one can tell in this loose sand, marks of sandalled feet. And look here—here." He rose in excitement and dropped to his knees again a few paces further on. "Somebody has been lying flat on his back here, and there are faint marks as of a cord."

"They have been captured," cried Lund; "captured and carried away. Shall I call the others?"

"No, wait a moment," said Schmidgruber, in a sudden tone of command; "follow these traces a moment first." He walked along carefully, his head bent. "They have been carried along in this direction. Horses or camels must have been waiting for them beyond the ruins."

"That's Redfowles' work," cried Lund. "I may as well tell you that my revered master has been followed by a black-hearted villain ever since we set out on this trip."

"I am aware of that already, Mr. Lund."

"Why—how did you know my name?"

"That does not matter now, does it?" said Schmidgruber. "I have known for some time that I have had the honour of travelling with the greatest scientist of Europe, Professor Clusius, and his friends."

"And with that villain Bridgeport."

"He's not so very much of a villain," replied Schmidgruber.

"He's Redfowles' friend, in league with him. The best thing to do would be to kill him first, and then hunt for our friends."

"No, I don't think you'll do that," said Schmidgruber gently.

"Will you prevent me?"

"It will not be necessary. Your own kind heart and your common sense will prevent you. Believe me, this man is deeply repentant. I have been watching him for the last twenty-four hours. I think he has known of this attack on the professor and Lord Tannemore, and it has worked on his nerves terribly. He is getting his punishment now—and besides, his repentance will make him valuable as an instrument against Redfowles."

As they talked they had been hurrying back to the camp.

"We must find out what direction they took and follow at once," said Lund.

"And it's just as well to put that Arab Omar under arrest, if he's still in the camp."

Davud was waiting for them when they reached the group around the horses and camels.

"Let me have my horse," said Schmidgruber, "and follow me," he added to Davud. "The rest wait here."

Upon their return in a short time he said, "They have been taken towards the river banks; we must follow in that direction.

"Where is Omar?"

"I have been looking for him everywhere," said Lund, "and I can't find him; nor Bridgeport."

"Where is Omar?" he asked in French of Davud.

"Omar?" questioned the Arab. "Follow me, Effendi."

He led them around a corner in the wall and then showed them the missing Bedouin, leaning against it. He held a dagger in his hand, and his head had

fallen to one side. Schmidgruber moved forward quickly and raised the man's chin. Another dagger was buried to the hilt in his throat.

"It was my life or his," said Davud calmly, taking the weapon from the dead man's hand. He pulled his own dagger out of the wound, wiped it on his cloak and put it in his belt again.

"He attacked you?" asked Lund.

"It is so, O Effendi."

"But why?"

"I wished to prevent some new treachery —he was about to steal from the camp."

Just then a step behind them made them turn, to see Bridgeport standing near them, ghastly pale. "Look upon me as your prisoner," he said in a hoarse whisper.

"Your repentance is somewhat sudden," said Lund scornfully.

Bridgeport laid an icy cold hand on the young Swede's arm. "I am very ill," he murmured. "I do not know how I shall be able to hold myself in the saddle. Anxiety —terror—are killing me since I have known that the professor and Lord Tannemore are in Redfowles' hands. I will tell you now that Redfowles—"

"Has been following us since Beyrout," interrupted Lund.

"How do you know that?" cried Bridgeport quickly.

"And that you were on the *Pandora*— and the whole conspiracy—you should choose your helpers better for such work, Mr. Bridgeport."

"Oh, they have all deceived and betrayed me," groaned Bridgeport.

"Be a man about it!" exclaimed Lund in disgust. "Your own record is black enough in this matter."

"I know—I know. I am greatly to blame, but believe me, this man is a devil. Without him I should never have done any of these things. He awakened the greed of money in my soul. It was he who led me on to everything—he who commanded me to steal the professor's notebooks and send them to him."

"You did that?" cried Lund, taking the other by the shoulder and shaking him in his rage.

Bridgeport made no resistance. "Yes. Why don't you kill me?" he demanded. "I wish you would."

"I feel like doing it."

"Death would be easy compared with this terror in my heart, now that I know they are in his power. He is capable of anything—"

Lund groaned. "He will not kill them as long as I live— Their death would serve him little without mine, if he wants to use for himself the professor's latest work. I know too much about it—and he is too clever to murder uselessly."

"That is true—that is true," gasped Bridgeport. "That is our only hope. I will be honest with you. I was willing to be Redfowles' helper in his devilish scheme— but now that they are gone, now that they are in his power, I seem to realise what it means to be a murderer. And I am not strong enough for that—not strong enough for evil or for good.

"I shall never have a peaceful moment again if anything happens to them. If they come back to us safely I will guard them as no one else can. Oh, it is terrible —terrible!" He sank down on a stone and covered his face with his hands. They were quite alone now, Schmidgruber and the Arab having returned to the camp.

Lund stood silent, looking down at the unhappy man before him. In his anger he hardly knew whether to believe in the sincerity of the other's repentance. But the thought came to him how Professor Clusius would have acted in such a moment and shamed him again into magnanimity, which was his natural trait. Bridgeport's hands dropped, and he looked up again.

Lund started at the change he saw in the man's face. It was as if he had aged twenty years in a few moments.

"You don't believe me—you don't believe that my grief is sincere?" he asked bitterly. "Please write down what I want to say now —the confession of my part in this evil work, from the beginning."

With short but lucid sentences, between labouring breaths, he told his part of the conspiracy from the beginning up to the present moment. Lund's pencil moved quickly, but his brain was in a whirl. He realised that he held the liberty, possibly even the life, of a man in the words he was now writing down. He felt himself very young for such responsiblity. And the thought of it calmed the anger in his heart as nothing else could have done.

When Bridgeport finished speaking, the young Swede put his book in his pocket and held out his hand. Bridgeport took it hesitatingly. "Then you—you forgive me?" he murmured.

* * * * *

The four Europeans left the ruins and set out over the sand at a quick pace,

leaving the pack animals and the escort to follow later in charge of Davud. Duhamil and another Bedouin were sent on in advance, to report any sight of friend or foe.

They had ridden for an hour at least before the scouts returned with the news of a caravan approaching from the direction of the river. Duhamil believed he had seen the missing men among the riders of the party.

Setting spurs to their horses Lund and Bridgeport darted forward, followed at a slightly slower pace by Sleiding and Schmidgruber. These two had had little to say to each other during the ride out from the last halting place. A change in the demeanor of each had attracted the other's attention. The burly Australian, himself trying to conceal a very real anxiety as to the present turn of events, noted with surprise the authoritative manner in which the genial little Schmidgruber had taken charge of the search and ordered the line of pursuit. They had both lost their joviality and entirely neglected their good-natured chaffing.

A dust cloud appeared on the horizon ahead, and over the brow of a low sand ridge a stately caravan sailed into sight. Four camels carried European riders, two of whom seemed to be women. But Lund and Bridgeport, hastening towards the approaching party, had eyes only for the two horsemen who, on sight of them, shouted a welcome and rode out to meet them.

Lund gave an answering shout which expressed but inadequately the thankfulness of his heart, drove his horse in between theirs and held out his hands to each alternately, inarticulate with emotion.

"God be praised that you are safe," said a trembling voice behind him.

"Mr. Bridgeport? I hadn't expected so much interest from you," said Clusius, the amiability of his manner touched with a slight reserve.

"Is anything the matter?" asked Tannemore. "You look ill."

"I am—I am ill with terror and anxiety —I—I am not the man to murder in cold blood."

"Ah—then you are implicated in this trick also," Tannemore's voice was sharp.

"I have his confession," whispered Lund. "He is truly repentant; be kind to him."

A camel towered over Lund's horse. "Good afternoon, Mr. Swendborg," called Mrs. Henning from the height. "How these camels do shake one up."

Lund put his hand to his hat mechanically. For the moment he did not know whether he was awake or dreaming.

"Good afternoon, Mr. Lund," said another, sweeter voice, as the first camel made way for a second. This time Lund looked up and found himself gazing into the face that was the fairest in all the world for him, the soft cheeks tinted by a flush deeper than that caused by the rays of the sinking sun. Above the waves of golden hair floated a light veil, framing the picture in an opal-tinted cloud.

"Will you forgive me?" asked Erna, bending forward so that none but himself could hear it. "I had to speak as I did—believing what I did. But it hurt me to do it. And, oh—I am so glad to know that I was mistaken. I came here to tell you this."

"No—you did right then—and—and how can I ever thank you for coming now? Does it mean—that you really care?" He reached up and caught her hand, holding it fast, as his eyes held her eyes. Bravely she answered their compelling question, and the glow of the westering sun wrapped them in a mantle of fiery light.

Their friends, withdrawn to a discreet distance, felt the spell of the moment. The two camel-drivers standing near gazed delighted at the charming picture made by these two lovers from a far Northern land. Intelligent sympathy shone in their dark eyes, for love is the same, be it East, West, North or South, when the heart beats high in the springtime of youth.

Mrs. Henning, on the camel next Erna, wiped a tear from her eye. Then she spoke, very gently, as if afraid to break the spell.

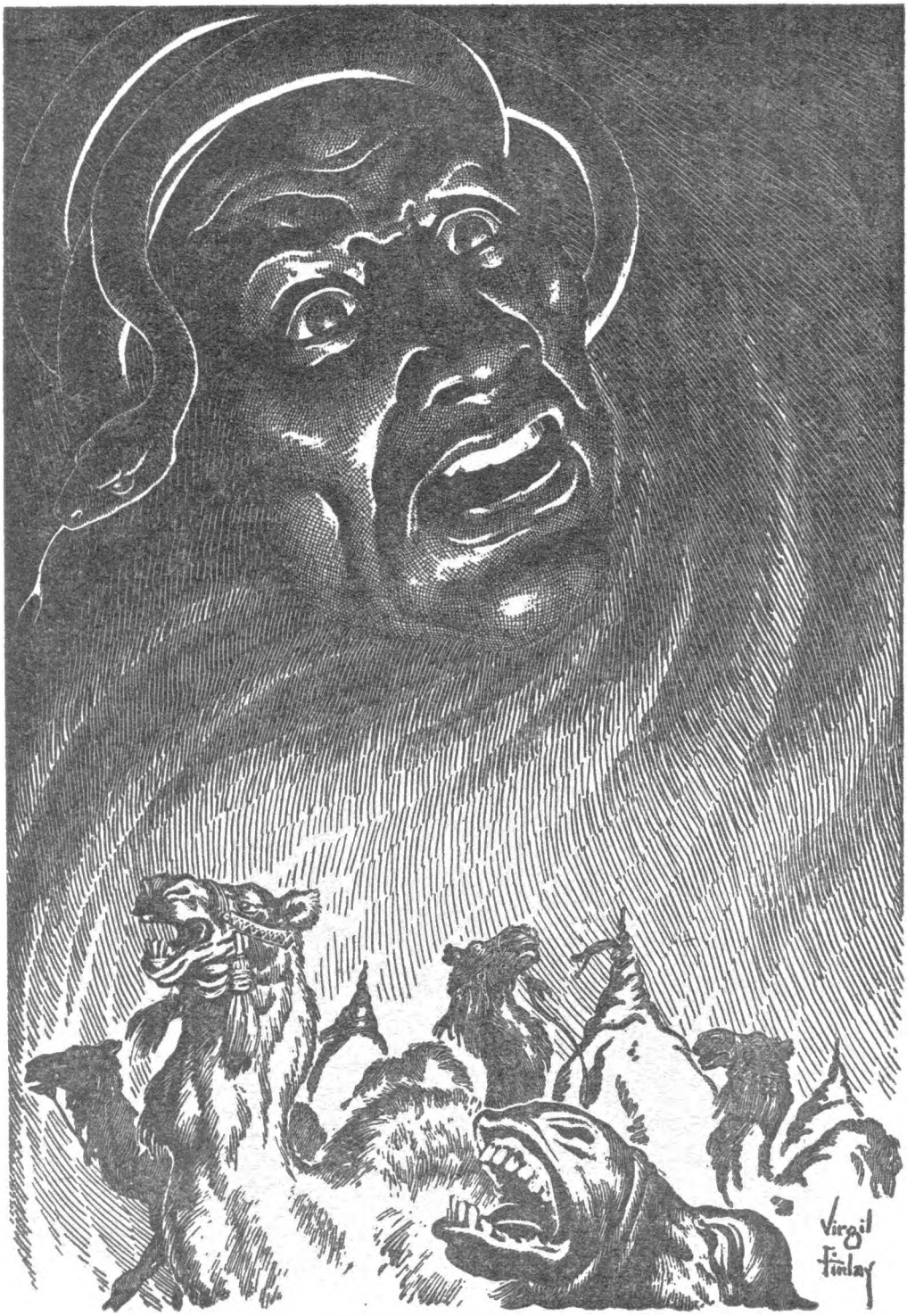
"Mr. Lengdale is just behind us, Mr. Lund. Hadn't you better speak to him?"

LUND came a few miles nearer earth, although a trace of the heaven of happiness in which the last moments had been passed still shone in his blue eyes, as he answered, "Mr. Lengdale? Yes, I will speak to Mr. Lengdale."

Slowly he released Erna's hand, still more slowly his eyes turned from her face. He drew in the reins hanging loose on his horse's neck and rode a few yards further to where Mr. Lengdale sat on his camel, watching the pretty scene with no very great appearance of surprise. He nodded amiably as the young man approached.

"Mr. Lengdale, I love your daughter—do you give your consent?" were Lund's first words, as he raised his hat mechanically.

Lengdale smiled down on him from the



Cain, Lord of the Wilderness.

camel's back. "You two seemed to have settled matters between yourselves," he answered amiably. "There's not much left for me to say, so far as I can see."

"Well, as long as you don't say no, that's all we ask," said Lund magnanimously.

Lengdale leaned over, holding out his hand. "I liked you well enough on the *Pandora*," he said. "Even before I knew who you were. And now Professor Clusius has been telling me about you. I am glad indeed that my dear child has won the love of such a man."

* * *

The quick-falling tropic night was on them as the Lengdale caravan made its way back towards the Euphrates. Musa led, but Duhamil rode by his side, watching him carefully. The second scout had been sent back to tell Davud of the meeting-place chosen.

Lund and Erna rode behind the Arabs, talking low to one another, living over again the exciting events of the day, with its many surprises, harsh and pleasant. Above them the stars shone out in the clear sky, and the white sand gave back the myriad radiance. Their new-found happiness wrapped them in a complete isolation.

Last of the party, Clusius, Tannemore and Bridgeport rode together, absorbed in earnest conversation. Less impulsive than Lund, still the two older men were impressed with the sincerity of the forger's remorse, and met him with kindness and sympathy.

"Then you insist on visiting Babylon?" Bridgeport asked as they neared the river. "The task which brought you here has been accomplished. You have my written confession, as well as Redfowles'; why go further?"

"Why turn back so near Babylon? Surely there is no fear of Redfowles now?"

"He is always to be feared."

"Even when he has no weapons or men?"

"He is sure to have money to buy weapons and men. And I know that there are plenty of the latter in his employ, waiting for him in Hilleh."

"But until he reaches there he is one against many, and we are now too strong a force to fear him when we reach the town."

"And yet, I implore you, do not go to Babylon. I fear you may never leave there alive."

"We thank you for your warning, Mr. Bridgeport," replied Clusius, "but we cannot follow it. Why, man, you are an archaeologist yourself! Do you think that we could turn back now that we are so near that most fascinating of all treasure-troves for the student of antiquity. I know an old rose bush there—" his voice warmed with eagerness—"an old, old rose bush—I discovered it just on the eve of departure of my last visit. But I know where it is, and I am certain that behind it is a hidden portal leading into the richness of the Past. This time I shall see my rose bush again and I shall see what is behind it."

"But *you* can go back if you are afraid of Babylon," said Tannemore.

Bridgeport faced about and looked at him in surprise. "How do you mean that?" he stammered.

"I mean that we shall hinder you from leaving us whenever you wish to."

"Then—then I am free?"

"Surely. The matter of the Babylonian bricks is definitely settled. All that is left for you to do is to return the money to the Museum. As for what has happened since, we can afford to forget that. You have your escorts and your guides; you can return to Damascus and from there to Europe as soon as you like."

Bridgeport closed his eyes for a moment, covering them with his hands. "You *are* good," he said, "but I will stay with you. If any harm comes to you I must be there. I can never forget what might have happened here."

"It did not happen, so do not let it concern you, as it no longer concerns us," said Clusius gently, laying his finely shaped hand on the other's icy-cold one.

THE camp was made in a favourable position near the banks of the Euphrates, and the men of the professor's party were Lengdale's guests for supper. The Danish merchant had provided amply for his journey through the desert, and the meal cooked by Mrs. Henning, deftly served by Knute, was a delightful change from the simple fare on which his guest had been living lately.

Supper over, the older men made themselves comfortable over the coffee and cigars, while Lund and Erna strolled out of sight along the river bank. When they were quite alone Lund drew a little box from his pocket. The delicate fragrance of the sandalwood arose like a soft murmur through the evening quiet.

"I had not hoped to give you this before we met in Copenhagen," he said, fastening the dainty lotus bracelet around Erna's arm. "Let it serve as engagement ring for a time, dearest."

"Were you so sure you would give me this lovely thing—in Copenhagen?" asked Erna roguishly.

"I hoped to—that's why I had the initials cut in."

"Oh, indeed—then you were quite sure of me?"

"Yes."

"Why? asked Erna, thoughtful and a little embarrassed. "Am I so—so lacking in reserve?"

"You are the dearest, truest, and most honest-hearted girl in the world. There isn't a bit of calculation or false coquetry about you. That's why I love you, and why I felt sure you cared for me."

"Then you weren't angry because I made such a fuss over the false professor? How could I do it, when the real one is so fine, so kind and sympathetic, so really wonderful? How could I ever believe him to be like—that other man?"

"I did feel like smashing him, particularly when you thanked him for the pictures."

"Oh, yes, those pictures—of course it was the real Clusius, your Clusius, who made them. How did he ever do it?"

"I'll explain to you some time. . . ."

"What's the matter?" asked Erna, as Lund stopped suddenly, apparently struck by an unpleasant thought.

"Who—what was that young man to you?"

"What young man?"

"In the picture—he was in the garden with you about a year ago."

"Oh, you mean Axel? He's my cousin. I believe you're jealous of him."

"I am, very much so."

"But you needn't be." Erna laughed merrily. "I did like him for a while—or I thought I did. Then he bored me dreadfully. I feel ashamed of myself for ever listening to his foolish talk. And—I ought to tell you—I let him kiss me once."

"I know that, my darling," said Lund. "But I'm glad to have you tell me—I'm glad that you are so honest."

Erna looked at him in great surprise. "How on earth could you know that? We were all alone in the garden; there was no one but just us two."

"And the sun," laughed Lund.

"What do you mean?"

"The sun, and your fan, the fan I cleaned for you on the boat."

"Hjalmar, I don't understand you at all!"

"It was the sun and your fan; they told me that Axel kissed you about a year ago in the garden."

Erna shook her head and did not attempt to speak again. Lund took a folded strip of paper from his pocket and lit a wax match.

"Look at this, dear; it may explain things to you." He unrolled the paper, showing her some of the pictures thrown from the shadows on the fan. The process by which the thing had been done seemed like magic to her and she did not attempt to understand it. She gazed in awed silence at the outline of the heads of her dead grandmother and aunt and her faraway cousin. "Why, it's wonderful," she sighed; "maybe I shall understand it some day, but it doesn't seem possible now."

When they returned to the camp, Mrs. Henning noticed the bracelet at once. "Why, Erna," she exclaimed; "this pretty thing was evidently intended for you from the beginning! Wasn't it funny that you should have wanted it so when you saw it in Damascus?"

"Where did you see it?" asked Lengdale.

"In the bazaar in Damascus, the day we went out with Knute to guard us, don't you remember?"

"If you wanted it so why didn't you buy it?" asked her father in surprise.

"Miss Erna didn't want to pay three hundred piastres for it," exclaimed Knute, handing about a tray with filled glasses.

Tannemore laughed and leaned over to whisper to Lund, "Fatme demanded one hundred more from you. She's a clever business woman."

"I wouldn't have missed buying it if she'd asked a thousand," was Lund's rejoinder.

CHAPTER XI

IN THE HALL OF BELSHAZZAR

ALL was quiet in the camp. The sentries alone, sitting their horses like dark statues against the night sky, kept watch across the rolling stretch of sand.

Lund could not sleep. The excitement of the day, the terrifying capture of his friends, their return, and the great happiness that had so suddenly come into his life, raised a turmoil in his brain.

He lifted the flap of his tent and slipped out into the soft gloom of the night. He passed Duhamil, on sentry duty, with a whispered greeting, and walked on to the river bank. He followed the course of the stream upwards, walking rapidly, glad of the physical exertion which restored order to the chaos in his mind. But as he reviewed the events of the day, the thing that concerned him most, outside his own happiness, was the escape of Redfowles.

"I don't think we've heard the last of him," he murmured to himself. "He'll be up to his deviltries again, wherever he is."

Suddenly he dropped to his full length in the grass.

He had seen that he was not alone. A man came towards him across the sand, a man alone and on foot.

"Redfowles would have to travel on foot now"; this was the thought that made Lund drop to the ground. The lonely wanderer could be no one else but Redfowles.

The stranger, whoever it was, seemed not to have noticed Lund in the second that the young man stood on the top of the little knoll where he now lay hidden. He came quietly nearer, and Lund felt for his revolver. Now he halted, dropped a bundle from his shoulders to the ground, and sat down beside it.

"He seems to feel quite safe," thought Lund, watching on the knoll. The man's back was towards him and he rose cautiously and crept nearer, holding his revolver ready. The man stretched himself out comfortably on the dry grass, as if to sleep. But he was not sleeping, and as Lund drew gradually nearer, he heard him murmuring to himself.

"He's talking Latin! Why, how strange," thought the listener. He took a step or two more, with infinite caution, and now he could understand the words:

"*. . . eadem nocte, in qua Herostratus quidam templum Dianae Ephesiae incenderat, Alexander natus est, quadecausa. . . .*" By this time Lund was at the other's side shouting aloud, "Good Lord! It's Klaus! It's Klaus!"

Klaus sat up and remarked, "Thank goodness, I have found you! How is the professor?"

He held out one hand to Lund while with the other he pulled a little bottle from his pocket. "You left this in the professor's study, on the right-hand corner of the desk," he said.

Lund shook his head, dazed. "And you came all this distance to bring it?"

"I thought you might want it. I knew the professor would not have put the bottle out to pack if he hadn't needed it for his work."

"Klaus—you are a wonder!"

"I took the shortest way here, but of course—this is just for you—it cost me all my savings. I had just money enough left in Damascus to buy a donkey. But I don't know much about donkeys, and this one must have been very old. I left him to his last rest in an oasis between Tadmor and the Tomb of Ezekiel."

"And you came the rest of the way on foot?"

"Yes; I've been walking for some days. I got rid of all the fat that bothered me so at home. See how slender I am now." Klaus had risen and stood before Lund.

"Yes, indeed," said the latter; "it's improved your figure wonderfully. But what's all this?" Lund pointed to an immense bundle in the man's coat pocket.

"That is the map that showed me the way," answered Klaus, taking it out. It was an immense hanging map of all Asia.

Lund laughed heartily. "Why didn't you cut out the part you needed instead of bringing the whole thing?"

"Oh, how could I cut it? It belongs to the professor. And I'm sorry to say there's a little crack here through Siberia; it's too bad." Klaus seemed most unhappy over the crack.

"I'll buy the professor a new one," said Lund. "And, of course, I will give you back all this trip has cost you, for it was my carelessness that made it necessary. But, Klaus, do tell me how on earth you ever got so far without an outfit, or food or water, or without a guide even."

"Without a guide? Oh, this map is an excellent guide. And then besides, I brought your pocket compass. I hope you don't mind, sir."

"But how did you feed yourself?"

"I've gotten out of the habit of eating since I left Damascus. It's astonishing how little you can get along with in this climate. I had enough water with me. I have three bottles in my knapsack, and I filled them at the spring by the tomb before I left there in a hurry. That was the only place in all this desert that frightened me."

"But why? We were there. There wasn't anything to frighten one there."

"Wasn't there? I must have been there later. The very thought of that tomb makes me shiver now."

"An empty tomb?"

"Empty? Well, there were nearly a dozen dead Arabs in it when I got there."

"Klaus, that must have been imagination."

"Does your imagination work through your nose, sir?"

"That's strange," said Lund thoughtfully, while Klaus continued his strange narrative.

"I drank the water one swallow at a time, and then I recited all the Latin I knew to amuse myself in this stupid desert, where you don't see a thing but stones and sand all day long."

"Klaus, you're a wonder," said Lund again. "It's all the more astonishing because you yourself used to say at home that you hadn't a bit of courage. That's the reason the professor didn't bring you with us."

KLAUS laughed cheerily. "I don't know why I thought I was such a coward," he said. "The idea of coming on this journey frightened me, but the moment I got started I felt all right. There wasn't anything to be afraid of in the desert, but something very queer happened—very queer."

"What was it?"

"It was about two nights ago. I went to sleep with the thought that when I woke up in the morning I shouldn't have strength enough to get up again. I hadn't had a thing to eat for forty-eight hours. It made me angry to think—that the professor should be in Babylon and not have his bottle. Then when I went to sleep I heard a hyena—or I dreamt that I did. And it seemed to me that the beast was prowling about me waiting for me to die so he could begin his meal.

"Then my dream changed and I thought I was sitting at a table before a dish of meat that smelt so good. I seemed to hear something and after a while I woke up. I saw the stars over me and nothing in sight but that monotonous desert as before. Then I looked down at my side and what do you suppose I saw? It was a tin plate and cup. On the plate was a piece of meat and some vegetables and in the cup was wine and water. There was a knife and fork there, and a piece of paper on which was written, 'Good appetite to you.'"

"That must have been a fever dream," said Lund, "the result of hunger."

Klaus laughed again. "Well, I shouldn't mind more of such dreams," he said, "if they were all so agreeable. It was real meat and it tasted good. I tore a leaf from my note-book and I wrote on it, 'Many thanks,' and left it on the plate. Then I went to sleep and slept soundly this time until morning. When I woke up there was nothing there."

"Then it must have been a dream," said Lund.

Klaus took out his notebook and handed the assistant two pieces of paper. On each was written in Swedish, "Good appetite to you."

"This astonishing but very pleasant thing happened again last night," explained Klaus. "I don't understand it, but it helped me on my journey."

Lund took the faithful fellow back to the camp and made him comfortable in his own tent. The next morning he was greeted with great surprise and cordiality by the professor and Tannemore. Late that day the caravan came in sight of Hilleh.

Nowhere else in the world, perhaps, is there such a contrast of modern squalor and ancient glory as on this spot. Twenty-two centuries ago Babylon stood there and ruled the world. Now a small but thickly populated Arabian city, wretched, lacking in comfort or even decency, clings to the mighty ruins like a toadstool to a fallen tree. Hilleh is built of stone that once formed the walls and towers of Babylon the Ancient. It huddles fearsomely in one corner of the miles or ruins as if ashamed of itself in the presence of these bleached bones of imperial grandeur.

The caravan entered the ruins at the northeastern corner. Professor Clusius called a halt and announced his intention to pitch camp where they were, by the banks of the Euphrates, near the Palace of Neriglissar, rather than risk the discomforts of the huts of Hilleh. The others agreed, and a much more comfortable camp was made than on the two previous nights.

After breakfast next morning Professor Clusius suggested to the others that they make a sight-seeing trip to Hilleh, including a visit to the post-office for possible letters. He himself would remain in camp to make the last preparation for his experiment.

Tannemore, secretly anxious, offered his company and assistance. But Clusius preferred to be alone, and his friend joined the exploring party, which included Erna and Mrs. Henning. The Bedouins received

a holiday and permission to go whither they pleased. David and Duhamil alone remained on guard at the camp.

Sleiding also excused himself from the trip to Hilleh, pleading fatigue. But soon after the others had set out for the town, the Australian left the camp in a different direction. He had slipped his revolver into his pocket, too.

The professor remained in his tent for some time, then came out and walked quickly through the ruins towards the river bank. A little electric lantern hung at his belt, and in one hand he carried a map drawn in pencil. He wandered along near the stream, stopped now and then to verify his landmarks. Once or twice he halted completely, looked behind him and listened. It seemed to him as if he heard a stealthy footfall, the rattling of a loose stone, as though he were being followed. At such moments, he slipped one hand into the pocket where his revolver lay hidden.

Finally his pace quickened. A scent of roses filled the air, and following it he turned the corner of a broken colonnade. Below him, halfway down the steep sand cliff bordering the stream, a great rose bush clung to the crevices of an ancient wall. Its long thick branches, attesting its great age, were covered closely with hundreds of little pale pink blooms.

"This is the place," murmured Clusius, his eyes shining. He scrambled down the bank, parted the fragrant swaying branches and disappeared into the blackness of an opening in the wall.

SOME little while later a man appeared on the bank above. He climbed down carefully, following the footprints in the moist sand. When he had satisfied himself that they led to the hidden portal behind the rose bush, he stood there for a while and listened. Then he climbed carefully up the bank again and looked about him.

A few paces beyond was a low wall, with one or two small window openings in it. The man walked behind it and found that it commanded the only descent to that part of the bank where the rose bush was. He cowered behind one of the windows, in such a position that he could look through it at the slightest noise. He looked about with a satisfied expression and settled down comfortably to wait, taking some dates from his pocket.

As he sat eating comfortably he had not the faintest suspicion that he was under the eye of another watcher who had followed him as he had followed the professor. This second watcher had a still better position, which commanded both the hiding-place of the man before him and the path down the river bank.

Both sat there and waited, waited from the early morning until the shadows of the sinking sun lay long and black on the white sand between the ruins. The watchers grew uneasy, but neither left his place.

At last steps sounded below—the rolling of a little stone beneath a careless foot. The professor was coming up the bank, after nearly twelve hours underground. He was very pale, but a strange light shone in his eyes, a light as of a great contentment. He climbed up the bank and took the way towards the camp. As he passed the hidden watcher behind the window opening, the other raised his revolver, covering the man behind the wall; but no shot followed, and Clusius reached the camp without anything to interest or alarm him.

When he had passed their hiding-places, one of the watchers rose and disappeared in the opposite direction. The other remained where he was until he heard the hoofbeats of a galloping horse. Then he too departed.

Sleiding reached the camp before the professor, and when the latter arrived he found the party in a bustle of pleasurable excitement. Tannemore came towards him, waving letters from home.

"What's the matter, Richard?" asked Clusius; "you look so happy."

"I am indeed happy. I have news from my wife. Look at this."

"But this is the wrong letter," exclaimed the professor. "These are ancient Hebraic characters."

"It's from Evelyn, though," insisted Tannemore. "She has learned to write ancient Hebraic, and is now learning the Arabic tongue to be with me in my work. Oh, my friend, I have done her a great wrong—I thought her superficial and pleasure-loving! And now I realise how little I have been what I ought to have been to her. I have neglected her shamefully for my studies. I feel as if I could not hurry home quick enough to tell her so."

Clusius nodded. "Surely," he replied. "Shall we start after supper?"

Tannemore laughed. "Oh, no," he said, "I can write. Of course I shan't go until you are ready. If you have any idea when that will be, I'll telegraph Evelyn tonight."

"Wire her that she may expect you in

about two weeks," said the professor. "The last and decisive experiment will take place to-morrow morning. I am as anxious as you are to get away. What is Davud coming to say?" The professor turned to meet the Bedouin, who just then came up to them with a face more serious than usual.

"Lord and Protector," said the Arab, "Allah has deserted thy servant. My hand to-day was too weak to hold back this Musa, this son of a dog. He fled from the camp. Early in the morning he made an attempt, but Duhamil, the faithful, prevented it. They bound him and laid him in a corner of the ruins, but when an hour ago Duhamil went to bring him food and drink he was gone. He had bitten through the thongs that held him. I sent out those riders who had returned from the town, but none could find him. O Effendi, do not doubt the fidelity of thy servant."

"Have no care, Davud my friend," said the professor kindly. "Those who wish us evil will have little time in which to work it. When the sun throws shadows from this wall to-morrow we shall start on the westward journey. Send men to Hilleh this evening, to purchase what we need for the return journey."

They sat long at the supper table that evening, and when the meal was over the professor invited the party to gather in a comfortable place, under a high wall, to hear the results he had to announce to them. They sat closely, to lose no syllable. Three of the party, anxious to have a wider view of their surroundings than the sheltered corner permitted, sat a little apart from the circle. Bridgeport took up his place at some distance from the group. Beyond him sat Schmidgruber, watching him intently. Still further away sat Sleiding, whose place commanded a view of the entire camp, and of a good piece of the ruins beyond. His eyes wandered unceasingly over the prospect before him.

The professor, in the centre of his knot of interested hearers, began to speak.

"This ancient field of ruins which once was Babylon offers much of interest to the archaeologist, as well as to the tourist. But so much that is unpleasant has happened to us on this journey that we think it better to cut short our stay here, and to leave all these interesting things behind. I have, however, today found the most interesting thing of all that Babylon offers us. I suspected it for some time. I will show you to-morrow morning. I invite you all, including the ladies, to follow me to-morrow to an excavation on the river bank, north of the city. My last preparations will then have been made."

THERE was a pause of some few minutes after the professor ceased speaking.

"Will you not tell us, sir, what we are to see?" asked Lund, at last.

"What can it be? What would you call the most interesting thing in all Babylon?" added Erna timidly.

Clusius looked at her with a gentle smile. "If I should ask Hjalmar that, he would undoubtedly say, 'Erna.' No, my dear young lady, you must forgive me if I keep my surprise until to-morrow."

"Have you found the golden statue of Baal?" asked Mr. Lengdale. "I read somewhere that it weighed a thousand Babylonian talents. I suppose it is very valuable."

"No; what I have found is something still more valuable to me."

"Then I suppose a Babylonian talent isn't very much?"

The professor smiled and turned to Tannemore. "You tell our friends the value of that statue," he said. "You have the figures handier than I."

Tannemore calculated a moment, then answered, "In round numbers the golden statue of Baal, if its weight be as reported, should be worth about one hundred thousand pounds sterling."

"Good gracious! And this thing the professor has found is still more valuable?" asked the Danish merchant, surprised.

"Yes," said Clusius, with decision. "What I have found lies under a heap of débris, the condition of which leads me to think it has never been disturbed. There are no traces of diggings on it anywhere, and yet on my former visit I found reason to believe that below this débris there might be chambers hitherto unexplored. I found a little opening when I was here last time, but unfortunately just as I was obliged to set out on my return, having joined a caravan commanded by others.

"To-day I sought the rose bush there again, and passed through the door. It led me into the interior of this mound of ruins. And I found there a labyrinth of corridors, great chambers half filled with débris, and a mighty hall, the low ceiling upheld by hundreds of massive columns. The outlines of the corridors prove to me that the hall must have had a height of several stories. Now the sand and the débris lie piled up there to a height of

twenty yards. Many of the roofs and the walls are destroyed, but the arched ceiling of the great hall has been spared. Within it, lies the blackness of undisturbed millenniums. It is into this hall that I wish to lead you to-morrow to show you my last experiment."

The professor rose, nodded to his friends and turned towards his tent.

"May I not stay with you?" asked Tannemore.

"Oh. master, let me," begged Lund.

"No, friends, I do not need you now. I have much to do to-night, and prefer to remain alone until morning."

Tannemore took up a comfortable position near the entrance to the professor's tent and lighted a cigar. Lund was about to settle down beside him, but the Englishman would not permit it. "One of us is enough," he said. "You have other duties now. I'd rather stay here and think about home," he added, his voice dropping to a soft note. Lund joined the Lengdales and led them for a walk through the ruins.

Klaus remained behind, strolling about in the vicinity of his master's tent, and presently an odd little thing happened. He passed Tannemore in one of his turns and noticed that the Englishman was feeling in his pockets for a match, upon which he pulled out a box of his own. As he did so a little shining object rolled out of his pocket and fell in the sand in front of Tannemore. The Englishman, picking it up, saw a gilt button with the word, "Nordenskjöld," on it in raised letters. "This is something of yours?" he asked, handing the button back to Klaus.

"No, it isn't mine. I found it in the oasis by the Tomb of Ezekiel."

"That's queer. Looks like a navy button," said Tannemore, slipping it into his pocket.

For the last twenty-four hours Schmidgruber had scarcely left Bridgeport's side. The others, if they noticed the matter at all, found nothing to remark in it. Bridgeport was evidently ill, and the close attention paid him by the jovial little Austrian could easily be explained as sheer human kindness. He had even persuaded Bridgeport to share his tent with him. And before the latter retired that evening Schmidgruber brought him a glass of wine with his own hands. Now he stood and watched his patient as the latter lay sleeping soundly. The smile was gone from the little man's keen grey eyes and he murmured to himself:

"This sleep will do you good, my friend. My powders are quite harmless. At all events they are less harmful for you than your nightly promenades are likely to be for the rest of us. Whatever happens it's just as well that you should be out of it. One is enough for us to handle."

NO ONE slept well that night. They were too much oppressed by the mystery that was to be revealed to them on the morrow. The setting of ancient ruins and vanished glory added to the strangeness of it all. Even for those who did not know of the actual danger threatening there was a certain tenseness in the air that kept the nerves vibrating.

The sun had scarcely risen above the horizon next morning when the whole camp was awake and ready for action. The professor was the calmest of them all as he came among them, cautioning each of them to eat a hearty breakfast, as they might be late getting back for lunch.

"Do you think you had better come with us, Bridgeport?" he asked as he saw the other's pale face.

"I must—unless you give it up. Did you know that Musa, who is in Redfowles' pay, fled from the camp yesterday?"

"Yes; I knew it."

"And you know that Redfowles is still alive? I left the camp night before last. I went to Hilleh—to find out if he had been heard from."

"But why did you so tax your strength? You are much too ill."

"I would go to the end of the world if I could help you," was the reply; "but there is no more strength in me. It took me nearly six hours to make even that short distance."

"Did you discover anything when you got there?"

"Yes. Redfowles has been seen in Hilleh. He has plenty of money and men paid to serve him. I wanted to warn you yesterday, but I couldn't find you alone, and then I fell asleep and slept until morning. But I come to ask you now, do not make this expedition! Do not part yourself from your escort, for this man is sure to be planning some harm against you, here where his money can buy assistance for him in the town. Remember, I know him better than you, and I know that he will never forget his defeat at your hands in the hut by the river bank. The strength of our party now is a protection to you—but do not let any of them leave you."

"I thank you for your well-meant warn-

ing," answered the professor, "but I do not believe the danger is as serious as you think. Duhamil was on duty all night, and he saw nothing suspicious. Once, he tells me, he heard a sound as of a large body of cavalry in the distance. But it came from the direction opposite to the town, and the riders you fear would come from Hilleh. Our faithful scout believes that all is safe, and so do I. But you're a sick man, Bridgeport. Why don't you stay in the camp and let Mrs. Henning take care of you? She's a little afraid of this underground expedition, and prefers to remain here anyway. As soon as we return and have had our midday meal, we'll set out again for Damascus."

"It shall be arranged as you wish, Professor," replied Bridgeport, "except that I do not leave your side to-day."

Shortly after breakfast the exploring party started. Lund, assisted by Klaus and Knute, carried the parts of the photographic apparatus. All of the party, including Erna, had lamps at their belts, and several of the Arabs carried bundles of torches to light the darkness of the underground passageway. The men of the party were all armed. They followed the professor, who led them along the river bank up the stream. Immediately behind him walked Tannemore and Sleiding. Behind them came Mr. Lengdale and his daughter, followed by Lund and the two servants. Schmidgruber and Bridgeport and four Arabs were the rear guard.

Schmidgruber chatted to his companion, but found time to throw keen glances about the ruins as they passed. Sleiding did the same, and Tannemore, noticing it, whispered to him, "Have you seen anything suspicious? I notice that you watch every corner that we pass."

"I'm looking for crocodiles," answered Sleiding in a casual tone. But his eyes were fixed keenly on a ridge on the opposite side of the stream, here shallow though broad. On this ridge was a thicket of shrubs close enough and high enough to hide an army. There was a sudden gleam of something bright behind the bushes, and from the hither side of the river rose a cry as of some waterfowl.

"Ah!" exclaimed Tannemore, who happened to get a glimpse of Sleiding's mouth at the moment the cry sounded.

"Yes," replied Sleiding, "it's one of my accomplishments, that— Oh, smell that! That must be the rose bush."

An exquisite odour filled the air about them, as they stood looking down on the great tree, stretching out its arms as if to uphold the falling walls to which it clung. Symbol of blooming life and nature's beauty, it made a strange picture amid the slow decay of centuries about it.

The professor pushed aside the branches and disappeared through the little door beneath. "Bend your heads going under here," he called; "the ceiling is low."

"Caution, my lord," whispered Sleidling; "if we pass throught large rooms in here, you look to the right, and I'll take the left side."

"You are afraid?" whispered Tannemore.

"Only of what may befall us in there. We can count on reenforcements outside."

Tannemore halted a moment and looked the other in the face, but Sleiding put his finger to his lips and shook his head. Then they stooped through the narrow entrance and followed the professor into the darkness beyond.

WHEN all were inside, the lanterns and torches were lit and a steady glare of light brightened the darkness which for centuries had brooded over these hidden halls. The passageway in which they stood was broad, and once undoubtedly had been high. Sand from the river and débris of falling houses outside, washed up by the waves, had filled it up to nearly half its height. At its further end six steps led down to a low doorway. Metal hinges still clung to the stone facing, but the door was gone.

They stood now in a room half ruined, its shape unrecognisable through mounds of débris. Sleiding bent over and swept the light of his lantern along the floor, but there were no footprints recognisable in the loose stones there.

"Now, please proceed with great caution," called the professor. "We are near a wall which separates this room from another. There must be a canal under these floors! You can hear the water if you listen."

"Yes, I can hear it," said Lund. "And I hear another noise behind us." He was about to add, "A noise as of many footsteps," but he did not say it for fear of alarming Erna. He felt a decided uneasiness taking possession of his mind.

Some of the others heard the noise behind them also.

"The echo of our own feet most likely," said Sleiding aloud. Then he whispered to

Tannemore, "Do not fear any noise behind us, my lord. Believe me, it is all right. But keep a sharp eye out for what may lie before us."

A few steps further on the explorers found themselves in an arch of the grey stone wall. Through this they passed, up two or three steps into a huge hall, remarkably well preserved. The room was a great square, divided throughout its length by massive columns into a center choir and two corridorlike side aisles. In the side walls were further openings leading into rooms beyond. At the further end of the choir a high raised platform reached from wall to wall. All this could be seen but dimly, for even the many electric lanterns and the flaring torches prevailed but little against the blackness that lay in these wide spaces.

"You are so pale, my darling," whispered Lund to the girl who stood beside him.

"But I am not afraid," she answered; "not while I am with you."

Sleiding bent down here too, sweeping the light of his lantern along the floor. On the firmer pavement, covered by fine dust, he saw the print of many sandalled feet, and followed them a little distance. They led towards one of the openings on the left side of the hall. Sleiding made a sign to Tannemore, who took up his position on the left side of the professor, standing near the platform. Then he whispered a word to Lund, who turned pale, but quite calmly and casually asked Mr. Lengdale to take his place with Erna by his side, at one of the columns on the right side of the platform.

Schmidgruber, standing close beside Bridgeport, noticed these movements and Sleiding's conduct. He had seen the footprints himself, and it was he who led Bridgeport towards the left side of the platform, where they stood with their backs against a broad column. A sense of excitement was in the air, a tense hint of impending danger, felt by all—except the professor. He alone of all those assembled in this scene of ancient civilization, was calm and unconcerned.

He took his lantern from his belt, and raising it high above his head stepped to the left side of the broad deep niche in the end of the hall to which the platform led up. Three rows of flower-garlands in stone ornamentation ran across the wall, and above them in high relief, human figures of colossal size—kings enthroned and warriors with high caps and long beards and trains of chained captives. Carved by some artist of long ago, they glared down on the human pigmies at their feet, the king with the cruel face smiling a ghastly smile from his royal throne of stone.

Lund put down the parts of the photographic apparatus which he had been carrying, and motioned to his helpers to do likewise. At a sign from the professor he put the apparatus together, and Clusius pointed to the spot where he wished it to stand.

"And now," said Clusius, turning to the others, "now you shall all see what it is that I found here yesterday. Now that we have the acid that was missing before, the pictures I shall show you will have colour as well as light and shadow. I worked here over this wall for many hours yesterday. I let the new gases of which I spoke to you throw their influence on the surface, revealing the pictures to me, until I came to the record of an event which took place in these halls twenty-five hundred years ago. Here, before this picture grew on the wall, I stopped. I wanted you all to see it; I wanted you all as witnesses. The pictures which you will see here will be very faint, however, in outline as well as in colour, so I must ask you to put out your lanterns. And you," he called to the Bedouins in Arabic, "retire to the far end of the hall with your torches."

When his orders had been carried out, the bend of the wall beyond the platform was again in darkness. A faint gleam only came from the torches at the far end of the hall.

"Now, please come nearer this wall," said the professor. "Is the apparatus ready?"

"Is is ready," answered Lund.

"I have a word or two to say first, friends," continued Clusius. "I spent many hours here yesterday, and was here last night again. I worked over these walls, and called up pictures on them of events that happened thousands of years ago. I alone saw. I saw records of imperial power; I witnessed scenes of despotic tryanny and wanton cruelty—murder after murder I saw, and homage paid to throned kings. The pictures were unrelated and sometimes unintelligible to me. But I knew that I was looking on at some of the great events of ancient Assyrian history. There were moments when it struck terror to my heart to realise that I stood here alone, the sole living witness of forms resurrected from the dead.

"Last night I saw Xerxes, Darius,

Cambyses, Cyrus, pass in review before me in this hall. Watch now and see what comes next, for I left it for to-day. Everything is ready. Lund, you will attend to the apparatus for me?"

A deep breath, almost a sigh, came from several members of the party; the tensity of their expectation could be felt in the darkness.

THE apparatus began its low whirring murmur. All present looked towards the wall before them. The men had their weapons ready in their hands. Lund's revolver lay before him on the platform, both his hands being busy at the apparatus. The professor only was unarmed, engrossed by the work before him.

From his pocket he took several small bottles, including that one which the faithful Klaus had come so far to bring him. He unscrewed their caps and placed them at the foot of the wall, then stepped back to where the others stood, about ten paces distant. They watched, expectant.

Presently a faint glimmering seemed to come from the wall. It grew brighter and brighter, flickering with the gleam of a hundred waving lights, while various shapes and forms, indeterminate in outline, appeared upon its surface.

And now the stones before them became a mirror, over which quickly moving shadow-shapes passed, entrancing them. Many figures in strange garb appeared there; the room must have been closely crowded with living forms when the picture they saw now was impressed upon the wall. Pale, indistinct outlines they seemed, but easily recognisable as the figures of ancient Assyria.

Some of them were fleeing from something—wildly, and in terrified haste. They still held gold goblets in their hands, but they had left their places at the richly spread board, and in every gesture, in the turn of a head, and wild outstretched arms, horror, unreasoning horror, was portrayed. Others stood beside the table, frozen by this same horror into stone.

On a high-backed chair sat one man with a towering head-dress, and armlets that shone as if of gold. One of his hands clasped the arm of his chair, so that the veins stood out like cords. Beside him stood a giant Ethiopian, open-mouthed, in one arm holding a skin of wine, the red stream from which fell unheeded to the floor at his feet.

Several richly clad figures lay at the feet of the black slave in drunken stupor, fallen there evidently before the terror came upon the company.

The lips of one were parted in a drunken smile; another yawned.

A high golden chair stood at the head of the table, but the man who sat there had risen and towered beside it. He was mighty in figure, wearing a great crown. King Belshazzar it was. He stood bending forward beside the wreck of his feast. His eyes, upturned, stared at the wall in front of him. On his lips froze a smile of wicked defiance. An old man with a long beard lay at his feet, the king's sword in his throat.

What was it that held the king's eyes upraised in terror? What had frozen the others into such attitudes of horror?

The eyes of the living company in this hall of the dead, in Belshazzar's royal seat, followed the eyes of the shadows there on the wall. And the living too shrank and shuddered at what they saw.

High up on the wall a bright gleam of light glowed for an instant, and a Great Hand came out of the darkness and wrote there, wrote—steadily.

"Mene," said a voice in the deep stillness. It was Clusius who spoke. His voice was steady, his eye calm.

Beside him Bridgeport sank to his knees.

"Tekel," he cried, pressed his hand to his heart and fell at full length on the stone.

"Upharsin!"

The word shrilled through the hall in a scream of terror. It was Redfowles, who suddenly was seen, standing there beside the professor. Madness shone in his eyes and quivered in his trembling lips. His revolver fell from his hand. The eyes of the company, detaching themselves from the strange picture on the wall, turned to the man who had appeared so abruptly in the midst of them. The professor's lamp flared up, and the picture on the wall faded. Then the other lamps were lit, and Tannemore, starting forward with his raised revolver, halted when he saw Sleiding standing beside Redfowles, his hand on the other's shoulder. With a voice that rang through the hall, the Australian spoke:

"James Redfowles, you are my prisoner. I arrest you in the name of Padischaah, and of His Majesty the King of England and Emperor of India. The charge is attempted murder, fraud and forgery."

There was a pause, into which fell Clusius' voice.

"Yes, he has been guilty of attempted murder, and of fraud, as was shown by this writing on the wall here. We did not need his confession, nor that of Bridgeport to prove it. You have all seen that the writing used here is hieratic, for only Daniel the Priest could interpret it for the King.

"No one else, not even the monarch himself, could read its meaning. Whether this sign be a divine miracle, or a trick of priestly intrigue, it matters not. The writing is hieratic and the inscriptions on the stones forged by Bridgeport are not like it. In the way that we have seen it done here, *thus* did men write in the Assyria of twenty-four hundred years ago. Bridgeport's stones are forgeries, and I have proved it."

Tannemore grasped both his friends' hands and pressed them warmly, his mouth quivering. Lund stood on the other side, looking at his master, his clear eyes full of emotion.

Schmidgruber came forward to the other side of Redfowles.

"Better put these on him," he said, holding out a pair of handcuffs.

Sleiding looked at him in astonishment. "Who are you?" he exclaimed.

"I am sent by the Imperial Austrian police, to protect Professor Clusius if necessary," replied the little man.

Then suddenly Redfowles awoke from the terror into which the writing on the wall had thrown him. With a scream and an oath, he wrenched himself from Sleiding's grasp.

"*Mene, Tekel, Upharsin!*" he cried; "the handwriting on the wall is for you—for you. Yes, I have deceived you all, and now you are in my power. It is your last moment. You shall die here at the feet of Belshazzar."

A sharp whistle rang through the hall, and from behind the columns, from the openings in the left side of the wall, poured a crowd of armed Arabs. Redfowles bent to take up his fallen revolver, but Sleiding's foot was on it. A shot rang out, and Redfowles sank to the ground with a shattered ankle.

Tannemore had aimed only to cripple, not to kill.

The little company of eight men stood facing a body many times their number, but they were brave. Again Tannemore fired, and Musa, springing forward to the attack, fell dead.

The travellers themselves stood in darkness; the light of their lanterns showed their positions. For the moment no one moved on the other side of the hall. The Arabs stood as if lamed, while a clatter arose from beyond the hall and a bright flare of light streamed through the further doorway. The rhythmic beat of many feet was heard and suddenly a company of English marines swept into Belshazzar's hall, followed by an equal number of Swedish sailors.

The Arabs were surrounded and taken captive before they realised what was happening. Then the two officers in command of the marines came over to the little group of Europeans.

"Which is Professor Clusius?" asked the English officer.

"I am Professor Clusius," said the scientist, stepping forward. "We are deeply in your debt for your valuable assistance. I fancy that you came not a moment too soon. Whom have we to thank for this timely rescue?"

"I am Lieutenant Kimberley, of H. M. S. *Falcon*," said the Englishman.

"I am Lieutenant Karlsen, of H. M. S. *Nordenskjöld*," said the Swedish officer beside him, saluting his famous countryman with respectful deference.

"And how did you both come here—so far from the sea?" began Clusius, shaking hands with the officers. A movement at the back of the group interrupted his further speech. He turned and saw the Austrian detective standing with his hand upraised for silence over the prostrate form of Bridgeport.

"He is dead."

Lund knelt down and raised one limp hand. "What—what shall we do with him?" he asked.

"Could he not be buried here?" said Clusius, kneeling down to lay his hand like a silent benediction of the dead man's forehead. "He was a scholar of repute. Let these monuments of an age he knew well cover his faults, and leave only his achievements to be remembered by the world."

CHAPTER XII

THE TRAIL OF THE SERPENT

"AND now, gentlemen," said Clusius to the officers, when they all had climbed out into the sunlight again, glad of its warmth and cheer, "now, gentlemen, we thank you once more

for your timely rescue, and we ask again how you happened to be, so fortunately for us, here in this inland spot?"

"That is not difficult to explain, Professor," answered Lieutenant Karlsen. "Sweden could not let her most famous son brave the dangers of the desert without proper protection. The *Nordenskjöld* has been lying at anchor off Beyrout for some time. My captain received telegraphic orders to watch for your coming, and to send a company of men to follow you through the desert. But our orders also stated that we were to remain at a respectful distance, as it was known you desired to be alone."

"That was considerate indeed," said the professor; "I recognised the thoughtfulness of my friend the prime minister in this last order."

"Then it was you who prevented the attack of the Rowali, and who took such good care of our faithful Klaus?" said Tannemore. "Permit me to restore your property"; he held out the button Klaus had found. "And now tell us how we come to be under English protection also."

"My orders were to go up the river to Babylon and wait for you there," replied Lieutenant Kimberley, walking beside Tannemore as the party moved back to the camp. "As our principal prisoner is an English subject, we will take him in charge until we return to the *Falcon*. Inspector Pitt of Scotland Yard has turned him over to me."

"Who?" asked Tannemore.

"I have," replied the man they had known as Sleiding, stepping forward. "I am Inspector Pitt of Scotland Yard."

"Oh, then, Sir Edward Ceaser sent you in answer to my telegram?—But no, you were on the steamer with us," exclaimed Tannemore, bewildered. "How did you come there? And who is at the back of all this—this very opportune assistance?"

"I was sent to accompany you at the request of Lady Evelyn Tannemore," answered the inspector.

"My wife!"

"Yes. As I understand it, Lady Evelyn asked for an audience with His Majesty as soon as she received your telegram from Stockholm. As a result of this interview the orders were sent to the *Falcon* lying before Beyrout, and I was detailed to accompany you without your knowing it."

"Then it is her care that has surrounded us from the beginning," said Tannemore in a low voice to Clusius. "How can I ever thank her?"

"Thank her in my name, too," returned the professor. "Her quick wit and resourceful energy have been of inestimable benefit to us. Then you joined us on the steamer, Inspector?" he added, turning to the detective.

"No, Professor; I was with you on the train from Berlin to Trieste. Do you remember the old sea-captain who shared the compartment with you?"

"Oh, yes—your disguise was excellent," said Lund, who had been listening with interest. "But no better than your later impersonation of the gentleman from Melbourne, the proprietor of a Thought and Idea Agency."

"That was a good idea in itself, wasn't it?" replied the detective. "It ought to bring an extra high price! But if I fooled you, I was fooled myself completely, and by a fellow craftsman too. Where is he? Here, friend—Schmidgruber! But that isn't your name, is it?"

"No; only one of those I use when occasion requires," replied the Austrian. "The name I am usually known by, my own, is Joseph Muller, member of the Secret Service of the Imperial Austrian Police."

"He took me in completely," said the English inspector; "and that doesn't happen often. I thought him a harmless crank, the best sort of companion to help me conceal my own identity. By the way, comrade, if your theory regarding hands is not merely a part of your disguise, it must be very useful to you in your work."

"It is," replied Muller with a twinkle in his eye. "But it left me in the lurch where you were concerned. I travelled with you for much the same reasons as those which have induced you to put up with my company."

"Then it was a joke on both of us. But I'd like to talk over the matter of hands with you some day."

"How did you come to follow us, Mr. Muller?" asked Clusius.

Muller explained that the Austrian government had received a request from London for a Secret Service man to follow Professor Clusius and his friends while on Austrian territory and an Austrian ship.

"As far as my official orders were concerned, I could have turned back home after we reached Beyrout," he continued. "But the affair began to prove interesting, and I have a passion for interesting cases. However, I've been little more than a passive spectator in this affair, so I shall look upon it as a pleasure jaunt merely. I have

seen something of the Orient at all events."

"And you have made some new friends —sincere friends, Mr. Muller," said Clusius, with a warm pressure of the hand.

"Friends I shall not forget soon," replied the detective, as Tannemore and Lund, gathering round him, followed the professor's example.

* * *

The return journey was made by boat down the Euphrates, in the comfortable steam pinnaces from the *Falcon*. The two warships lay at anchor at the mouth of the river to give the travellers a hearty welcome.

At Port Said a swarm of reporters surrounded the professor, for the story of the mysterious photographs on the *Pandora* had been spread abroad, and a curious world was waiting for the explanation of this last invention of the famous scientist.

But it waited in vain. Professor Clusius' great discovery was lost to the world forever, lost with all its possibilities for good or for evil. And this is how it happened:

About ten days after Clusius' return to Stockholm he sat in his drawing-room one evening in earnest conversation with a group of fellow scientists. In his study the lamp was still burning on the desk he had left when his visitors were announced. The big note-book in which he had written down all the calculations and formulae studied out during his journey concerning his new discovery, lay open within the circle of light thrown by the lamp. Beside it stood an ash tray on which lay a still lighted cigar. Clusius had put it there when he rose to greet his friends.

Beside the ash tray stood a high glass jar in which a small snake wriggled uneasily. The professor had caught the little animal in the garden that morning and put it in the jar to watch the process of skin-shedding. The glass was closed at the top by a bit of parchment with air-holes cut in it.

It had been a very warm day even for the spring season, and the air was mild during the evening. The window was open and the soft breeze floated in over the desk. It seemed to make the little snake uneasy. He moved more violently, and struck his head sharply against the paper covering of the jar. At the third blow the paper split and the adder's head rose out of it. The wicked eyes looked about the room as the snaky body wriggled itself free of the jar. It fell to the table, striking the cigar a sharp blow and throwing it with its lighted end directly upon the open book.

In the drawing-room further down the hall a little group of grey-haired scholars listened in respectful attention to what Clusius had told them of his new discovery, a discovery which he himself considered the greatest achievement of his remarkable career. When he had finished speaking, one of the others said:

"You are right, Professor. This is one of the greatest feats science has ever given to the world. Not a single line of what you have written, not a single formula that you have worked out, must be lost. The sincere interest taken by you in your friend's trouble produced an emotional intensity of thinking, a sharpening of intuition unusual even in a mind as great as yours. It might not be possible even for you to do this thing again."

"You are right, friend," agreed Clusius. "I know that should anything happen to my notes I could never put them together again. It was one of those times when some power beyond us, which we do not understand, even we scientists, moves and controls us. Why, Klaus, what is the matter?" He turned to the servant who stood in the doorway, pale and trembling.

Klaus made several unsuccessful attempts to speak, then finally stammered: "Your note-book, sir—your note-book—"

"Yes, it was on my desk—it hasn't run off, has it?"

"It's—it's burned, sir."

The professor rose, as pale now as his servant, and hurried from the room, followed by his alarmed friends. He stood in front of the desk, looking down at the blackened remains of his note-book, which the steady vein of smouldering fire from the cigar end had slowly turned to charcoal. Some of the leaves were only partly burned, curling up as if in protest at their fate. But the tiny red line of hungry flame crept over them relentlessly. Beyond the book lay the snake, its eyes fixed as if fascinated on the slowly uprising rings of smoke.

There was silence in the room for a moment, broken by unconcealed sobs from Klaus.

"Shall I call Mr. Lund?" stammered the faithful fellow.

"No, we need not tell him of this," said Clusius; "he starts for Copenhagen tomorrow. We must not cloud these happiest days of his life. The damage is done beyond repair— Well, possibly, it was not to

be. This thing may have had in it powers for evil as great as its power for good. Perhaps it is just as well that the world shall not know more of it."

* * *

And this was what Joseph Muller said when news came to him that the professor's memoranda had been destroyed. He had been watching the papers for some statement with regard to the great discovery, the astonishing workings of which he had witnessed with his own eyes. When the news was cabled of the unfortunate accident by which the great invention was lost for ever, Muller sighed deeply.

"And yet," he said, "perhaps it is just as well that the world should not know more of this thing. It would make man too near to God. It is not right that we should see the past or the future too clearly. The present should be enough and yet—it is too bad."

AN EPILOGUE IN THE DESERT

AHMAR, THE SAGE, stood alone on the sun-bathed roof of the temple in Palmyra. Below him in the huts of Tadmor arose a noise as of many voices. Ahmar's pupil, the young keeper of the lions, climbed the stone stair to tell the Sage that a stranger had come who would speak with him.

Ahmar descended to the door of his study, his heart beating high, his eyes shining. Then they grew dim again when he saw that the waiting stranger was a Bedouin of the desert.

"What would'st thou with me, my son?" asked the Sheik in gentle kindliness, as the man bowed low before him.

"Glad are my eyes that they may behold Mahmud Ahmar, the great Chief and Sage, the friend of Mischoel, of whose kin I am. Davud ibm Masr brings greetings, O wise one. I am but a messenger to thee from one whom thy soul loves, whom thou hast honoured as a prince honours princes."

"Then thou comest from him, the great one who is in the thoughts of both of us," cried Ahmar.

"I come from him whom I was permitted to serve, whom I guided through the desert to Babylon. For long now has he been in his own land. But when the moon was last full a letter came from him to Abu Hark in Damascus, a letter enfolding another which Abu Hark entrusted to me. 'Bring it safely to Sheik Ahmar,' said Abu Hark; 'lay it in his hands yourself, for it is great news that his wonderful friend sends him.' And now Davud stands before thee, O wise one, and lays the precious writing in thy hands."

Davud handed the Sheik a large letter carefully sealed. On the envelope were written the words:

To Mahmud Ahmar, Sheik and Astronomer, in the temple in Tadmor, Syria.

Carefully, reverently, the old man opened the letter and read its precious contents.

Honored brother:

The book which thou hast written and given to me, I have shown to the learned ones of the University of Stockholm. When they had read it, my brother, they bestowed upon thee the degree and title of Doctor of Science of this University. Dr. Mahmud Ahmar, greetings to thee from thy comrades in learning at the University, and from thy brother who loves thee well.

Clusius

When the Sheik had read the letter, Davud handed him a second package, the richly engraved and illumined diploma of the University.

The Sage stood looking long and silently at the parchment, while about him there gathered a crowd of people from the huts, staring in respectful admiration and wonder.

The Sheik raised his head proudly and said aloud: "They have made me a Doctor of Science in the great University of the North."

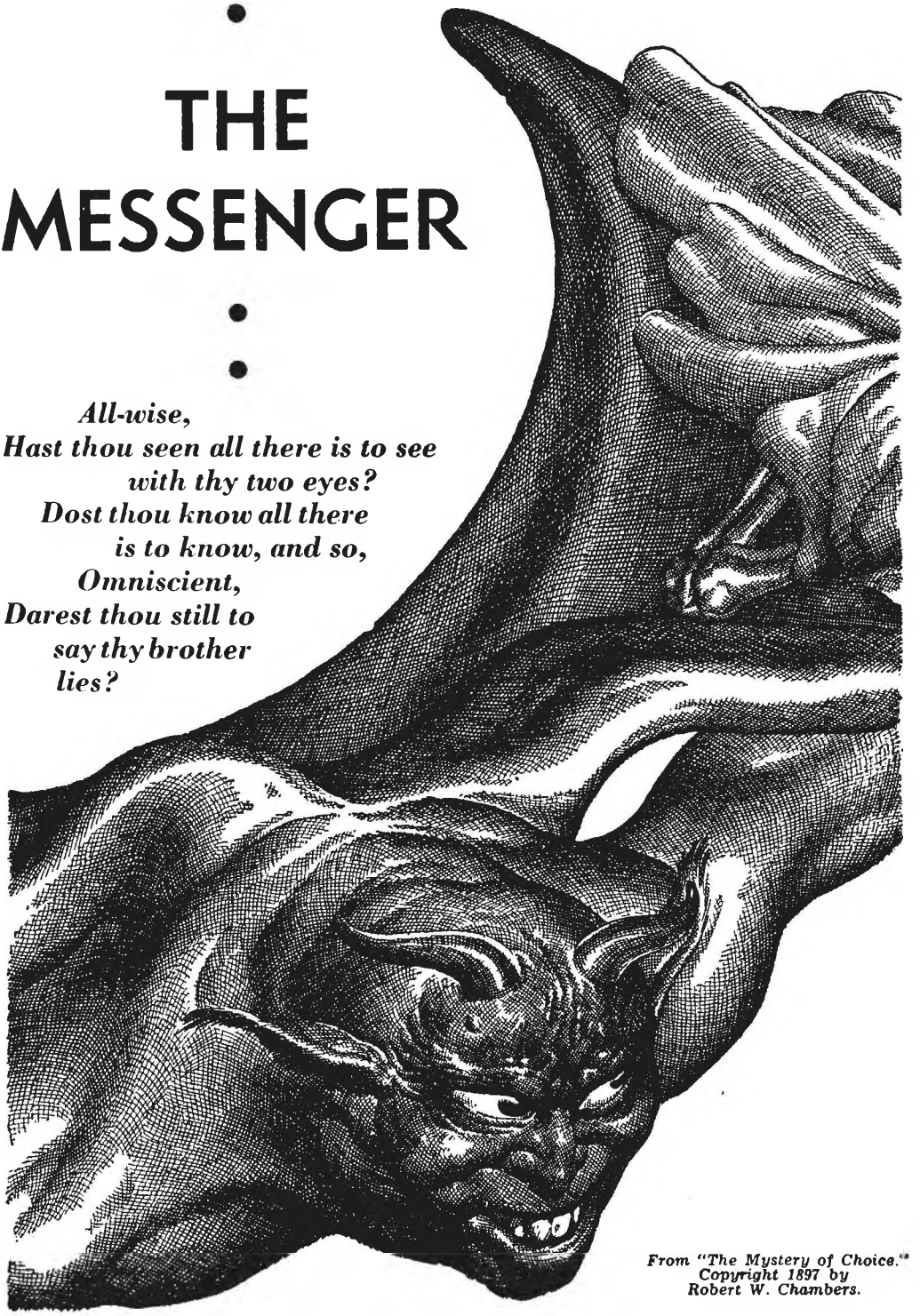
Then the exaltation passed, for all about him he saw only wonder and childlike reverence, but no intelligent understanding. He bowed his head again and mounted slowly to the platform of the temple. Here he sat down, the open parchment on his lap.

"Doctor of Science they have made me," he murmured low. "And yet I am but an Arab, a poor man among other poor men, one who sees among many who are blind, one who hears among those who are deaf —the barren desert is my home and will be my last resting-place." Then his old eyes lit up again. "But my book will be in the libraries of the North, and towards the sunset learned men will read what I have written, I Mahmud Ahmar."

The old man raised the parchment reverently and pressed a kiss on it with lips that trembled.

THE MESSENGER

All-wise,
Hast thou seen all there is to see
with thy two eyes?
Dost thou know all there
is to know, and so,
Omniscient,
Darest thou still to
say thy brother
lies?



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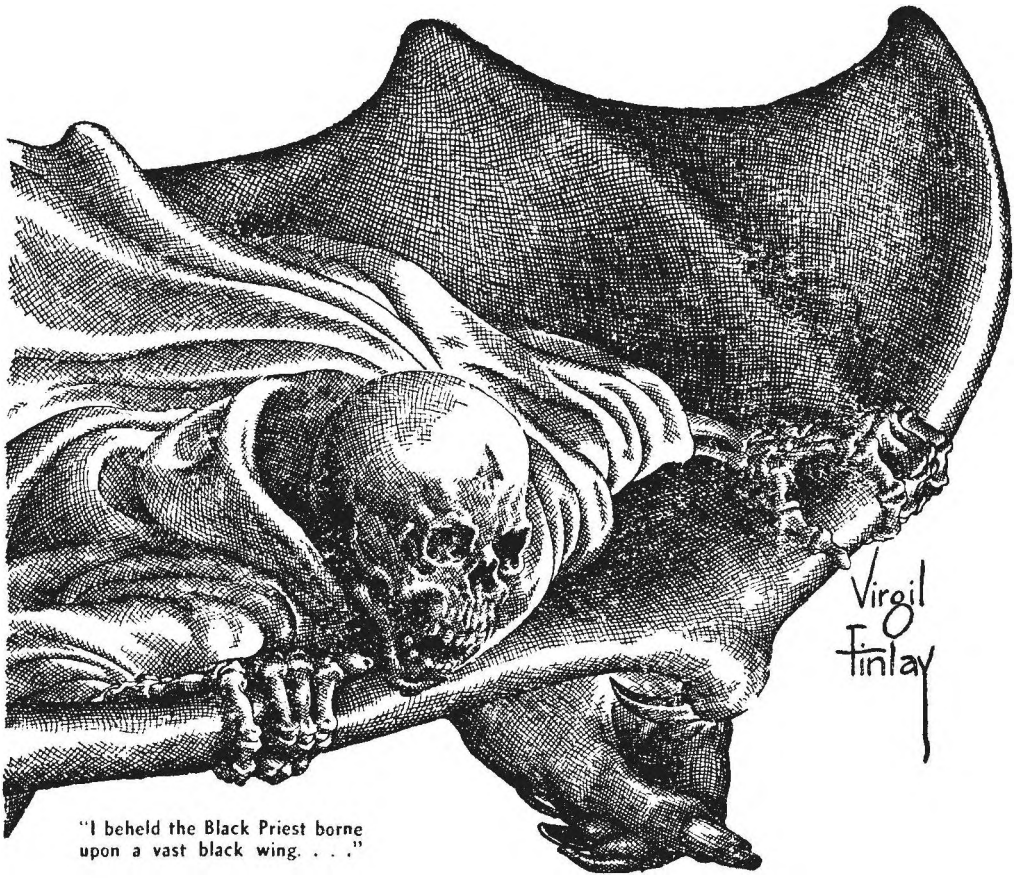


"I beheld the Black Priest borne upon a vast black wing. . . ."

"THE bullet entered here," said Max Fortin, and he placed his middle finger over a smooth hole exactly in the center of the forehead.

I sat down upon a mound of dry seaweed and unslung my fowling piece.

The little chemist cautiously felt the edges of the shot-hole, first with his middle finger, then with his thumb.

"Let me see the skull again," said I.

Max Fortin picked it up from the sod.

"It's like all the others," he observed. I nodded, without offering to take it from him. After a moment he thoughtfully replaced it upon the grass at my feet.

"It's like all the others," he repeated, wiping his glasses on his handkerchief. "I thought you might care to see one of the skulls, so I brought this over from the gravel pit. The men from Bannalec are digging yet. They ought to stop."

"How many skulls are there altogether?" I inquired.

"They found thirty-eight skulls; there are thirty-nine noted in the list. They lie piled up in the gravel pit on the edge of Le Bihan's wheat field. The men are at work yet. Le Bihan is going to stop them."

"Let's go over," said I; and I picked up my gun and started across the cliffs, Fortin on one side, Mome on the other.

"Who has the list?" I asked, lighting my pipe. "You say there is a list?"

"The list was found rolled up in a brass cylinder," said the little chemist. He added, "You should not smoke here. You know that if a single spark drifted into the wheat—"

"Ah, but I have a cover to my pipe," said I, smiling.

Fortin watched me as I closed the pepper-box arrangement over the glowing

By Robert W. Chambers

bowl of the pipe. And then he continued:

"The list was made out of thick yellow paper; the brass tube has preserved it. It is as fresh today as it was in 1760. You shall see it."

"Is that the date?"

"The list is dated 'April, 1760.' The Brigadier Durand has it. It is not written in French."

"Not written in French!" I exclaimed.

"No," replied Fortin solemnly, "it is written in Breton."

"But," I protested, "the Breton language was never written or printed in 1760."

"Except by priests," said the chemist.

"I have heard of but one priest who ever wrote the Breton language," I began.

Fortin stole a glance at my face.

"You mean—the Black Priest?" he asked.

I nodded.

Fortin opened his mouth to speak again, hesitated, and finally shut his teeth obstinately over the wheat stem that he was chewing.

"And the Black Priest?" I suggested encouragingly. But I knew it was useless; for it is easier to move the stars from their courses than to make an obstinate Breton talk. We walked on for minute or two in silence.

"Where is the Brigadier Durand?" I asked, motioning Mome to come out of the wheat, which he was trampling as though it was heather. As I spoke we came in sight of the farther edge of the wheat field and the dark, wet mass of cliffs beyond.

"Durand is down there—you can see him; he stands just behind the Mayor of St. Gildas."

"I see," said I; and we struck straight down, following a sun-baked cattle path across the heather.

When we reached the edge of the wheat field, Le Bihan, the Mayor of St. Gildas, called to me, and I tucked my gun under my arm and skirted the wheat to where he stood.

"Thirty-eight skulls," he said in his thin, high-pitched voice; "there is but one more, and I am opposed to further search. I suppose Fortin told you?"

I shook hands with him, and returned the salute of the Brigadier Durand.

"I am opposed to further search," repeated Le Bihan, nervously picking at the mass of silver buttons which covered the front of his velvet and broadcloth jacket like a breastplate of scale armour.

Durand pursed up his lips, twisted his tremendous mustache, and hooked his thumbs in his sabre belt.

"As for me," he said, "I am in favor of further search."

"Further search for what—for the thirty-ninth skull?" I asked.

Le Bihan nodded. Durand frowned at the sunlit sea, rocking like a bowl of molten gold from the cliffs to the horizon. I followed his eyes. On the dark glistening cliffs, silhouetted against the glare of the sea, sat a cormorant, black, motionless, its horrible head raised toward heaven.

"Where is that list, Durand?" I asked.

The gendarme rummaged in his despatch pouch and produced a brass cylinder about a foot long. Very gravely he unscrewed the head and dumped out a scroll of thick yellow paper closely covered with writing on both sides. At a nod from Le Bihan he handed me the scroll. But I could make nothing of the coarse writing, now faded to a dull brown.

"Come, come, Le Bihan," I said impatiently, "translate it, won't you? You and Max Fortin make a lot of mystery out of nothing, it seems."

LE BIHAN went to the edge of the pit where the three Bannalec men were digging, gave an order or two in Breton, and turned to me.

As I came to the edge of the pit the Bannalec men were removing a square piece of sail-cloth from what appeared to be a pile of cobblestones.

"Look!" said Le Bihan shrilly. I looked. The pile below was a heap of skulls. After a moment I clambered down the gravel sides of the pit and walked over to the men of Bannalec. They saluted me gravely, leaning on their picks and shovels, and wiping their sweating faces with sunburned hands.

"How many?" said I in Breton.

"Thirty-eight," they replied.

I glanced around. Beyond the heap of skulls lay two piles of human bones. Beside these was a mound of broken, rusted bits of iron and steel. Looking closer, I saw that this mound was composed of rusty bayonets, sabre blades, scythe blades, with here and there a tarnished buckle attached to a bit of leather hard as iron.

I picked up a couple of buttons and a belt plate. The buttons bore the royal arms of England; the belt plate was emblazoned with the English arms, and also with the number "27."

"I have heard my grandfather speak of

the terrible English regiment, the 27th Foot, which landed and stormed the fort up there," said one of the Bannalec men.

"Oh!" said I; "then these are the bones of English soldiers?"

"Yes." said the men of Bannalec.

Le Bihan was calling to me from the edge of the pit above, and I handed the belt plate and buttons to the men and climbed the side of the excavation.

"Well," said I, trying to prevent Mome from leaping up and licking my face as I emerged from the pit, "I suppose you know what these bones are. What are you going to do with them?"

"There was a man," said Le Bihan angrily, "an Englishman, who passed here in a dogcart on his way to Quimper about an hour ago, and what do you suppose he wished to do?"

"Buy the relics?" I asked, smiling.

"Exactly—the pig!" piped the Mayor of St. Gildas. "Jean Marie Tregunc, who found the bones, was standing there where Max Fortin stands, and do you know what he answered? He spat upon the ground, and said, 'Pig of an Englishman, do you take me for a desecrator of graves?'"

I knew Tregunc, a sober, blue-eyed Breton, who lived from one year's end to the other without being able to afford a single bit of meat for a meal.

"How much did the Englishman offer Tregunc?" I asked.

"Two hundred francs for the skulls alone."

I thought of the relic hunters and the relic buyers on the battlefields of our civil war.

"Seventeen hundred and sixty is long ago," I said.

"Respect for the dead can never die," said Fortin.

"And the English soldiers came here to kill your fathers and burn your homes," I continued.

"They were murderers and thieves, but —they are dead," said Tregunc, coming up from the beach below, his long sea rake balanced on his dripping jersey.

"How much do you earn every year, Jean Marie?" I asked, turning to shake hands with him.

"Two hundred and twenty francs, monsieur."

"Forty-five dollars a year," I said. "Bah! You are worth more, Jean. Will you take care of my garden for me? My wife wished me to ask you. I think it would be worth one hundred francs a month to you and to me. Come on, Le Bihan—come along, Fortin—and you, Durand. I want somebody to translate that list into French for me."

Tregunc stood gazing at me, his blue eyes dilated.

"You may begin at once," I said, smiling, "if the salary suits you?"

"It suits," said Tregunc, fumbling for his pipe in a silly way that annoyed Le Bihan.

"Then go and begin your work," cried the mayor impatiently; and Tregunc started across the moors toward St. Gildas, taking off his velvet-ribboned cap to me and gripping his sea rake very hard.

"You offer him more than my salary," said the mayor, after a moment's contemplation of his silver buttons.

"Pooh!" said I, "what do you do for your salary except play dominoes with Max Fortin at the Groix Inn?"

Le Bihan turned red, but Durand rattled his sabre and winked at Max Fortin, and I slipped my arm through the arm of the sulky magistrate, laughing.

"There's a shady spot under the cliff," I said; "come on, Le Bihan, and read me what is in the scroll."

IN A few moments we reached the shadow of the cliff, and I threw myself upon the turf, chin on hand, to listen.

The gendarme, Durand, also sat down, twisting his mustache into needlelike points. Fortin leaned against the cliff, polishing his glasses and examining us with vague, near-sighted eyes; and Le Bihan, the mayor, planted himself in our midst, rolling up the scroll and tucking it under his arm.

"First of all," he began in a shrill voice, "I am going to light my pipe, and while lighting it I shall tell you what I have heard about the attack on the fort yonder. My father told me; his father told him."

He jerked his head in the direction of the ruined fort, a small, square stone structure on the sea cliff, now nothing but crumbling walls. Then he slowly produced a tobacco pouch, a bit of flint and tinder, and a long-stemmed pipe fitted with a microscopial bowl of baked clay. To fill such a pipe requires ten minutes' close attention. To smoke it to a finish takes but four puffs. It is very Breton, this Breton pipe. It is the crystallization of everything Breton.

"Go on," said I, lighting a cigarette.

"The fort," said the mayor, "was built by Louis XIV, and was dismantled twice by

the English. Louis XV restored it in 1739. In 1760 it was carried by assault by the English. They came across from the island of Groix—three shiploads—and they stormed the fort and sacked St. Julien yonder, and they started to burn St. Gildas —you can see the marks of their bullets on my house yet; but the men of Bannalec and the men of Lorient fell upon them with pike and scythe and blunderbuss, and those who did not run away lie there below in the gravel pit now—thirty-eight of them."

"And the thirty-ninth skull?" I asked, finishing my cigarette.

The mayor succeeded in filling his pipe, and now he began to put his tobacco pouch away.

"The thirty-ninth skull," he mumbled, holding the pipestem between his defective teeth—"the thirty-ninth skull is no business of mine. I have told the Bannalec men to cease digging."

But what is—whose is the missing skull?" I persisted curiously.

The mayor was busy trying to strike a spark to his tinder. Presently he set it aglow, applied it to his pipe, took the prescribed four puffs, knocked the ashes out of the bowl, and gravely replaced the pipe in his pocket.

"The missing skull?" he asked.

"Yes," said I impatiently.

The mayor slowly unrolled the scroll and began to translate the Breton into French. And this is what he read:

"On the Cliffs of St. Gildas,
"April 13, 1760.

"On this day, by order of the Count of Soisic, general in chief of the Breton forces now lying in Kerselec Forest, the bodies of thirty-eight English soldiers of the 27th, 50th, and 72d regiments of Foot were buried in this spot, together with their arms and equipments."

The mayor paused and glanced at me reflectively.

"Go on, Le Bihan," I said.

"With them," continued the mayor, turning the scroll and reading on the other side,

"was buried the body of that vile traitor who betrayed the fort to the English. The manner of his death was as follows: By order of the most noble Count of Soisic, the traitor was first branded upon the forehead with the brand of the arrowhead. The iron burned through the flesh, and was pressed heavily so that the brand should even burn into the bone of the skull. The traitor was then led out and bidden to kneel. He admitted having guided the English from the island of Groix. Although a priest and a Frenchman, he had violated his priestly office to aid him in discovering the password to the fort. This password he extorted during confession from a young Breton girl who was in the habit of rowing across from the island of Groix to visit her husband in the fort. When the fort fell, this young girl, crazed by the death of her husband, sought the Count of Soisic and told how the priest had forced her to confess to him all she knew about the fort. The priest was arrested at St. Gildas as he was about to cross the river to Lorient. When arrested he cursed the girl, Marie Trevec—"

"What!" I exclaimed, "Marie Trevec!"

"Marie Trevec," repeated Le Bihan;

"the priest cursed Marie Trevec, and all her family and descendants. He was shot as he knelt, having a mask of leather over his face, because the Bretons who composed the squad of execution refused to fire at a priest unless his face was concealed. The priest was l'Abbé Sorgue, commonly known as the Black Priest on account of his dark face and swarthy eyebrows. He was buried with a stake through his heart."

Le Bihan paused, hesitated, look at me, and handed the manuscript back to Durand. The gendarme took it and slipped it into the brass cylinder.

"So," I said, "the thirty-ninth skull is the skull of the Black Priest."

"Yes," said Fortin. "I hope they won't find it."

"I have forbidden them to proceed," said the mayor querulously. "You heard me, Max Fortin."

I rose and picked up my gun. Mome came and pushed his head into my hand.

"That's a fine dog," observed Durand, also rising.

"Why don't you wish to find his skull?" I asked Le Bihan. "It would be curious to see whether the arrow brand really burned into the bone."

"There is something in that scroll that I didn't read to you," said the mayor grimly. "Do you wish to know what it is?"

"Of course," I replied in surprise.

"Give me the scroll again, Durand," he said; then he read from the bottom:

"I, l'Abbé Sorgue, forced to write the above by my executioners, have written it in my own blood; and with it I leave my curse. My curse on St. Gildas, on Marie Trevec, and on her descendants. I will come back to St. Gildas when my remains are disturbed. Woe to that Englishman whom my branded skull shall touch!"

"What rot!" I said. "Do you believe it

was really written in his own blood?"

"I am going to test it," said Fortin, "at the request of Monsieur le Maire. I am not anxious for the job, however."

"See," said Le Bihan, holding out the scroll to me, "it is signed, 'l'Abbé Sorgue.'"

I glanced curiously over the paper.

"It must be the Black Priest," I said. "He was the only man who wrote in the Breton language. This is a wonderfully interesting discovery, for now, at last, the mystery of the Black Priest's disappearance is cleared up. You will, of course, send this scroll to Paris, Le Bihan?"

"No," said the mayor obstinately, "it shall be buried in the pit below where the rest of the Black Priest lies."

I looked at him and recognized that argument would be useless. But still I said, "It will be a loss to history, Monsieur Le Bihan."

"All the worse for history, then," said the enlightened Mayor of St. Gildas.

WE HAD sauntered back to the gravel pit while speaking. The men of Bannalec were carrying the bones of the English soldiers toward the St. Gildas cemetery, on the cliffs to the east, where already a knot of white-coiffed women stood in attitudes of prayer; and I saw the sombre robe of a priest among the crosses of the little graveyard.

"They were thieves and assassins; they are dead now," muttered Max Fortin.

"Respect the dead," repeated the Mayor of St. Gildas, looking after the Bannalec men.

"It was written in that scroll that Marie Trevec, of Groix Island, was cursed by the priest—she and her descendants," I said, touching Le Bihan on the arm. "There was a Marie Trevec who married an Yves Trevec of St. Gildas—"

"It is the same," said Le Bihan, looking at me obliquely.

"Oh!" said I; "then they were ancestors of my wife."

"Do you fear the curse?" asked Le Bihan.

"What?" I laughed.

"There was the case of the Purple Emperor," said Max Fortin timidly.

Startled for a moment, I faced him, then shrugged my shoulders and kicked at a smooth bit of rock which lay near the edge of the pit, almost embedded in gravel.

"Do you suppose the Purple Emperor drank himself crazy because he was descended from Marie Trevec?" I asked contemptuously.

"Of course not," said Max Fortin hastily.

"Of course not," piped the mayor. "I only— Hello! what's that you're kicking?"

"What?" said I, glancing down, at the same time involuntarily giving another kick. The smooth bit of rock dislodged itself and rolled out of the loosened gravel at my feet.

"The thirty-ninth skull!" I exclaimed. "By jingo, it's the noddle of the Black Priest! See! There is the arrowhead branded on the front!"

The mayor stepped back. Max Fortin also retreated. There was a pause, during which I looked at them, and they looked anywhere but at me.

"I don't like it," said the mayor at last, in a husky, high voice. "I don't like it! The scroll says he will come back to St. Gildas when his remains are disturbed. I— I don't like it, Monsieur Darrel—"

"Bosh!" said I; "the poor wicked devil is where he can't get out. For Heaven's sake, Le Bihan, what is this stuff you are talking in the year of grace 1896?"

The mayor gave me a look.

"And he says 'Englishman.' You are an Englishman, Monsieur Darrel," he announced.

"You know better. You know I'm an American."

"It's all the same," said the Mayor of St. Gildas, obstinately.

"No, it isn't!" I answered, much exasperated, and deliberately pushed the skull till it rolled into the bottom of the gravel pit below.

"Cover it up," said I; "bury the scroll with it too, if you insist, but I think you ought to send it to Paris. Don't look so gloomy, Fortin, unless you believe in werewolves and ghosts. Hey! what the—what the devil's the matter with you, anyway? What are you staring at, Le Bihan?"

"Come, come," muttered the mayor in a low, tremulous voice, "it's time we got out of this. Did you see? Did you see, Fortin?"

"I saw," whispered Max Fortin, pallid with fright.

The two men were almost running across the sunny pasture now, and I hastened after them, demanding to know what was the matter.

"Matter!" chattered the mayor, gasping with exasperation and terror. "The skull is rolling uphill again!" and he burst into a terrific gallop, Max Fortin followed close behind.

I watched them stampeding across the pasture, then turned toward the gravel

pit, mystified, incredulous. The skull was lying on the edge of the pit, exactly where it had been before I pushed it over the edge. For a second I stared at it; a singular chilly feeling crept up my spinal column, and I turned and walked away, sweat starting from the root of every hair on my head. Before I had gone twenty paces the absurdity of the whole thing struck me. I halted, hot with shame and annoyance, and retraced my steps.

There lay the skull.

"I rolled a stone down instead of the skull," I muttered to myself. Then with the butt of my gun I pushed the skull over the edge of the pit and watched it roll to the bottom; and as it struck the bottom of the pit, Mome, my dog, suddenly whipped his tail between his legs, whimpered, and made off across the moor.

"Mome!" I shouted, angry and astonished; but the dog only fled the faster, and I ceased calling from sheer surprise.

"What the mischief is the matter with that dog?" I thought. He had never before played me such a trick.

Mechanically I glanced into the pit, but I could not see the skull. I looked down. The skull lay at my feet again, touching them.

"Good heavens!" I stammered, and struck at it blindly with my gunstock. The ghastly thing flew into the air, whirling over and over, and rolled down the sides of the pit to the bottom. Breathlessly I stared at it, then confused and scarcely comprehending, I stepped back from the pit, still facing it, one, ten, twenty paces, my eyes almost starting from my head, as though I expected to see the thing roll up from the bottom of the pit under my very gaze. At last I turned my back to the pit and strode out across the gorse-covered moorland toward my home. As I reached the road that winds from St. Gildas to St. Julien I gave one hasty glance at the pit over my shoulder. The sun shone hot on the sod about the excavation. There was something white and bare and round on the turf at the edge of the pit. It might have been a stone; there were plenty of them lying about.

CHAPTER II

WHEN I entered my garden I saw Mome sprawling on the stone doorstep. He eyed me sideways and flopped his tail.

"Are you not mortified, you idiot dog?" I said, looking about the upper windows for Lys.

Mome rolled over on his back and raised one deprecating forepaw, as though to ward off calamity.

"Don't act as though I was in the habit of beating you to death," I said, disgusted. I had never in my life raised whip to the brute. "But you are a fool dog," I continued. "No, you needn't come to be babied and wept over; Lys can do that, if she insists, but I am ashamed of you, and you can go to the devil."

Mome slunk off into the house, and I followed, mounting directly to my wife's boudoir. It was empty.

"Where has she gone?" I said, looking hard at Mome, who had followed me. "Oh! I see you don't know. Don't pretend you do. Come off that lounge! Do you think Lys wants tan-coloured hairs all over her lounge?"

I rang the bell for Catherine and 'Fine, but they didn't know where "madame" had gone; so I went into my room, bathed, exchanged my somewhat grimy shooting clothes for a suit of warm, soft knickerbockers, and, after lingering some extra moments over my toilet—for I was particular, now that I had married Lys—I went down to the garden and took a chair out under the fig-trees.

"Where can she be?" I wondered. Mome came sneaking out to be comforted, and I forgave him for Lys's sake, whereupon he frisked.

"You bounding cur," said I, "now what on earth started you off across the moor? If you do it again I'll push you along with a charge of dust shot."

As yet I had scarcely dared think about the ghastly hallucination of which I had been a victim, but now I faced it squarely, flushing a little with mortification at the thought of my hasty retreat from the gravel pit.

"To think," I said aloud, "that those old woman's tales of Max Fortin and Le Bihan should have actually made me see what didn't exist at all! I lost my nerve like a schoolboy in a dark bedroom." For I knew now that I had mistaken a round stone for a skull each time, and had pushed a couple of big pebbles into the pit instead of the skull itself.

"By jingo!" said I, "I'm nervous; my liver must be in a devil of a condition if I see such things when I'm awake! Lys will know what to give me."

I felt mortified and irritated and sulky,

and thought disgustedly of Le Bihan and Max Fortin.

But after a while I ceased speculating, dismissed the mayor, the chemist, and the skull from my mind, and smoked pensively, watching the sun low dipping in the western ocean and moorland; a wistful, restless happiness filled my heart, the happiness that all men know—all men who have loved.

Slowly the purple mist crept out over the sea; the cliffs darkened; the forest was shrouded.

Suddenly the sky above burned with the afterglow, and the world was alight again.

Cloud after cloud caught the rose dye; the cliffs were tinted with it; moor and pasture, heather and forest burned and pulsated with the gentle flush. I saw the gulls turning and tossing above the sand bar, their snowy wings tipped with pink; I saw the sea swallows sheering the surface of the still river, stained to its placid depths with warm reflections of the clouds. The twitter of drowsy hedge birds broke out in the stillness; a salmon rolled its shining side above tide-water.

The interminable monotone of the ocean intensified the silence. I sat motionless, holding my breath as one who listens to the first low rumble of an organ. All at once the pure whistle of a nightingale cut the silence, and the first moonbeam silvered the wastes of mist-hung waters.

I raised my head.

Lys stood before me in the garden.

When we had kissed each other, we linked arms and moved up and down the gravel walks, watching the moonbeams sparkle on the sand bar as the tide ebbed and ebbed. The broad beds of white pinks about us were atremble with hovering white moths; the October roses hung all abloom, perfuming the salt wind.

"Sweetheart," I said, "where is Yvonne? Has she promsied to spend Christmas with us?"

"Yes, Dick; she drove me down from Plougat this afternoon. She sent her love to you. I am not jealous. What did you shoot?"

"A hare and four partridges. They are in the gun room. I told Catherine not to touch them until you had seen them."

Now I suppose I knew that Lys could not be particularly enthusiastic over game or guns; but she pretended she was, and always scornfully denied that it was for my sake and not for the pure love of sport. So she dragged me off to inspect the rather meager game bag, and she paid me pretty compliments and gave a little cry of delight and pity as I lifted the enormous hare out of the sack by his ears.

"He'll eat no more of our lettuce," I said, attempting to justify the assassination.

"Unhappy little bunny—and what a beauty! O Dick, you are a splendid shot, are you not?"

I evaded the question and hauled out a partridge.

"Poor little dead things!" said Lys in a whisper; "it seems a pity—doesn't it, Dick? But then you are so clever—"

"We'll have them broiled," I said guardedly; "tell Catherine."

Catherine came in to take away the game, and presently 'Fine Lelocard, Lys's maid, announced dinner, and Lys tripped away to her boudoir.

I stood an instant contemplating her blissfully, thinking, "My boy, you're the happiest fellow in the world—you're in love with your wife!"

I WALKED into the dining room, beamed at the plates, walked out again; met Tregunc in the hallawy, beamed on him; glanced into the kitchen, beamed at Catherine, and went upstairs, still beaming.

Before I could knock at Lys's door it opened, and Lys came hastily out. When she saw me she gave a little cry of relief, and nestled close to my breast.

"There is something peering in at my window," she said.

"What!" I cried angrily.

"A man, I think, disguised as a priest, and he has a mask on. He must have climbed up by the bay tree."

I was down the stairs and out of doors in no time. The moonlit garden was absolutely deserted. Tregunc came up, and together we searched the hedge and shrubbery around the house and out to the road.

"Jean Marie," said I at length, "loose my bulldog—he knows you—and take your supper on the porch where you can watch. My wife says the fellow is disguised as a priest, and wears a mask."

Tregunc showed his white teeth in a smile. "He will not care to venture in here again, I think, Monsieur Darrel."

I went back and found Lys seated quietly at the table.

"The soup is ready, dear," she said. "Don't worry; it was only some foolish lout from Bannalec. No one in St. Gildas or St. Julien would do such a thing."

I was too exasperated to reply at first, but Lys treated it as a stupid joke, and after a while I began to look at it in that light.

Lys told me about Yvonne, and reminded me of my promise to have Herbert Stuart down to meet her.

"You wicked diplomat!" I protested. "Herbert is in Paris, and hard at work for the Salon."

"Don't you think he might spare a week to flirt with the prettiest girl in Finisterre?" inquired Lys innocently.

"Prettiest girl! Not much!" I said.

"Who is, then?" urged Lys.

I laughed a trifle sheepishly.

"I suppose you mean me, Dick," said Lys, coloring up.

"Now I bore you, don't I?"

"Bore me? Ah, no, Dick."

After coffee and cigarettes were served I spoke about Tregunc, and Lys approved.

"Poor Jean! He will be glad, won't he? What a dear fellow you are!"

"Nonsense," said I; "we need a gardener; you said so yourself, Lys."

But Lys leaned over and kissed me, and then bent down and hugged Mome, who whistled through his nose in sentimental appreciation.

"I am a very happy woman," said Lys.

"Mome was a very bad dog today," I observed.

"Poor Mome!" said Lys, smiling.

When dinner was over and Mome lay snoring before the blaze—for the October nights are often chilly in Finisterre—Lys curled up in the chimney corner with her embroidery, and gave me a swift glance from under her drooping lashes.

"You look like a schoolgirl, Lys," I said teasingly. "I don't believe you are sixteen yet."

She pushed back her heavy burnished hair thoughtfully. Her wrist was as white as surf foam.

"Have you been married four years? I don't believe it," I said.

She gave me another swift glance and touched the embroidery on her knee, smiling faintly.

"I see," said I, also smiling at the embroidered garment. "Do you think it will fit?"

"Fit?" repeated Lys. Then she laughed.

"And," I persisted, "are you perfectly sure that you—er—we shall need it?"

"Perfectly," said Lys. A delicate color touched her cheeks and neck. She held up the little garment, all fluffy with misty lace and wrought with quaint embroidery.

"It is very gorgeous," said I; "don't use your eyes too much, dearest. May I smoke a pipe?"

"Of course," she said, selecting a skein of pale blue silk.

For a while I sat and smoked in silence, watching her slender fingers among the tinted silks and thread of gold.

Presently she spoke. "What did you say your crest is, Dick?"

"My crest? Oh, something or other rampant on a something or other—"

"Dick!"

"Dearest?"

"Don't be flippant."

"But I really forget. It's an ordinary crest; everybody in New York has them. No family should be without 'em."

"You are disagreeable, Dick. Send Josephine upstairs for my album."

"Are you going to put that crest on the—the—whatever it is?"

"I am; and my own crest, too."

I thought of the Purple Emperor and wondered a little.

"You didn't know I had one, did you?" she smiled.

"What is it?" I replied evasively.

"You shall see. Ring for Josephine."

I rang, and, when Fine appeared, Lys gave her some orders in a low voice, and Josephine trotted away, bobbing her white-coiffed head with a *"Bien, madame!"*

AFTER a few minutes she returned, bearing a tattered, musty volume, from which the gold and blue had mostly disappeared.

I took the book in my hands and examined the ancient emblazoned covers.

"Lilies!" I exclaimed.

"Fleur-de-lis," said my wife demurely.

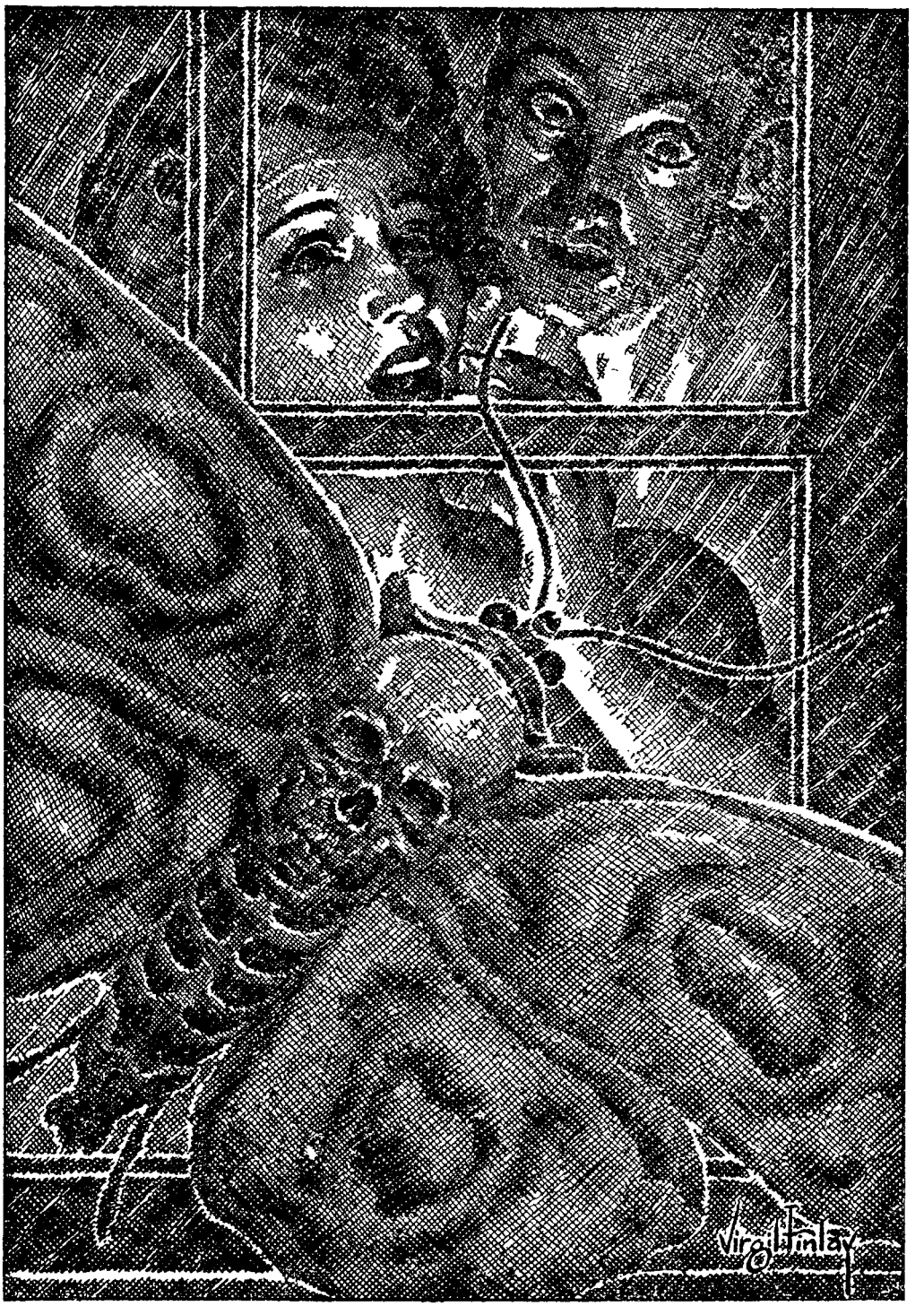
"Oh," said I, astonished, and opened the book.

"You have never before seen this book?" asked Lys, with a touch of malice in her eyes.

"You know I haven't. Hello! what's this? Oho! So there should be a *de* before Trevec? Lys de Trevec? Then why in the world did the Purple Emporer—"

"Dick!" cried Lys.

"All right," said I. "Shall I read about the Sieur de Trevec who rode to Saladin's tent alone to seek for medicine for St. Louis? Or shall I read about—what is it? Oh, here it is, all down in black and white—about the Marquis de Trevec who



"Will you be still?" she said.
"Still as death," I said.

drowned himself before Alva's eyes rather than surrender the banner of the fleur-de-lis to Spain? It's all written here. But, dear, how about that soldier named Trevec, who was killed in the old fort on the cliff yonder?"

"He dropped the *de*, and the Trevecs since then have been Republicans," said Lys—"all except me."

"That's quite right," said I; "it is time that we Republicans should agree upon some feudal system. My dear, I drink to the king!" and I raised my wine-glass and looked at Lys.

"To the king," said Lys, flushing. She smoothed out the tiny garment on her knees; she touched the glass with her lips; her eyes were very sweet. I drained the glass to the king.

After a silence, I said, "I will tell the king stories. His Majesty shall be amused."

"His Majesty," repeated Lys softly.

"Or hers," I laughed. "Who knows?"

"Who knows?" murmured Lys, with a gentle sigh.

"I know some stories about Jack the Giant-Killer," I announced. "Do you, Lys?"

"I? No, not about a giant-killer, but I know all about the were-wolf, and Jeanne-la-Flamme, and the Man in Purple Tatters, and—O dear me! I know lots more."

"You are very wise," said I. "I shall teach his Majesty English."

"And I Breton," cried Lys jealously.

"I shall bring playthings to the king," said I—"big green lizards from the gorge, little gray mullets to swim in glass globes, baby rabbits from the forest of Kerselec—"

"And I," said Lys, "will bring the first primrose, the first branch of aubepine, the first jonquil, to the king—my king."

"Our king," said I; and there was peace in Finisterre.

I lay back, idly turning the leaves of the curious old volume.

"I am looking," said I, "for the crest."

"The crest, dear? It is a priest's head with an arrow-shaped mark on the forehead, on a field—"

I sat up and stared at my wife.

"Dick, whatever is the matter?" she smiled. "The story is there in that book. Do you care to read it? No? Shall I tell it to you? Well, then: It happened in the third crusade. There was a monk whom men called the Black Priest. He turned apostate, and sold himself to the enemies of Christ. A Sieur de Trevec burst into the Saracen camp, at the head of only one hundred lances, and carried the Black Priest away out of the very midst of their army."

"So that is how you come by the crest," I said quietly; but I thought of the branded skull in the gravel pit, and wondered.

"Yes," said Lys. "The Sieur de Trevec cut the Black Priest's head off, but first he branded him with an arrow mark on the forehead. The book says it was a pious action, and the Sieur de Trevec got great merit by it. But I think it was cruel, the branding," she sighed.

"Did you ever hear of any other Black Priest?"

"Yes. There was one in the last century, here in St. Gildas. He cast a white shadow in the sun. He wrote in the Breton language. Chronicles, too, I believe. I never saw them. His name was the same as that of the old chronicler, and of the other priest, Jacques Sorgue. Some said he was a lineal descendant of the traitor. Of course the first Black Priest was bad enough for anything. But if he did have a child, it need not have been the ancestor of the last Jacques Sorgue. They say this one was a holy man. They say he was so good he was not allowed to die, but was caught up to heaven one day," added Lys, with believing eyes.

I smiled.

"But he disappeared," persisted Lys.

"I'm afraid his journey was in another direction," I said jestingly, and thoughtlessly told her the story of the morning. I had utterly forgotten the masked man at her window, but before I finished I remembered him fast enough, and realized what I had done as I saw her face whiten.

"Lys," I urged tenderly, "that was only some clumsy clown's trick. You said so yourself. You are not superstitious, my dear?"

Her eyes were on mine. She slowly drew the little gold cross from her bosom and kissed it. But her lips trembled as they pressed the symbol of faith.

CHAPTER III

ABOUT nine o'clock the next morning, I walked into the Groix Inn and sat down at the long discolored oaken table, nodding good-day to Marianne Brupère, who in turn bobbed her white coiffe at me.

"My clever Bannalec maid," said I, "what is good for a stirrup-cup at the Groix Inn?"

"*Schist?*" she inquired in Breton.

"With a dash of red wine, then," I replied.

She brought the delicious Quimperle cider, and I poured a little Bordeaux into it. Marianne watched me with laughing black eyes.

"What makes your cheeks so red, Marianne?" I asked. "Has Jean Marie been here?"

"We are to be married, Monsieur Darrel." She laughed.

"Ah! Since when has Jean Marie Tregunc lost his head?"

"His head? Oh, Monsieur Darrel—his heart, you mean!"

"So I do," said I. "Jean Marie is a practical fellow."

"It is all due to your kindness—" began the girl, but I raised my hand and held up the glass.

"It's due to himself. To your happiness, Marianne"; and I took a hearty draught of the *schist*. "Now," said I, "tell me where I can find Le Bihan and Max Fortin."

"Monsieur Le Bihan and Monsieur Fortin are above in the broad room. I believe they are examining the Red Admiral's effects."

"To send them to Paris? Oh, I know. May I go up, Marianne?"

"And God go with you." The girl smiled.

When I knocked at the door of the broad room above little Max Fortin opened it. Dust covered his spectacles and nose; his hat, with the tiny velvet ribbons fluttering, was all awry.

"Come in, Monsieur Darrel," he said; "the mayor and I are packing up the effects of the Purple Emperor and of the poor Red Admiral."

"The collections?" I asked, entering the room. "You must be very careful in packing those butterfly cases; the slightest jar might break wings and antennae, you know."

Le Bihan shook hands with me and pointed to the great pile of boxes.

"They're all cork lined," he said, "but Fortin and I are putting felt around each box. The Entomological Society of Paris pays the freight."

The combined collections of the Red Admiral and the Purple Emperor made a magnificent display.

I lifted and inspected case after case set with gorgeous butterflies and moths, each specimen carefully labelled with the name in Latin. There were cases filled with crimson tiger moths all aflame with color; cases devoted to the common yellow butterflies; symphonies in orange and pale yellow; cases of soft gray and dun-colored sphinx moths; and cases of garish nettle-bred butterflies of the numerous family of *Vanessa*.

All alone in a great case by itself was pinned the purple emperor, the Apatura Iris, that fatal specimen that had given the Purple Emperor his name and quietus.

I remembered the butterfly, and stood looking at it with bent eyebrows.

Le Bihan glanced up from the floor where he was nailing down the lid of a box full of cases.

"It is settled then," said he, "that madame, your wife, gives the Purple Emperor's entire collection to the city of Paris?"

I nodded.

"Without accepting anything for it?"

"It is a gift," I said.

"Including the purple emperor therein the case? That butterfly is worth a great deal of money," persisted Le Bihan.

"You don't suppose that we would wish to sell that specimen, do you?" I answered a trifle sharply.

"If I were you I should destroy it," said the mayor in his high-pitched voice.

"That would be nonsense," said I—"like your burying the brass cylinder and scroll yesterday."

I looked at Max Fortin, who immediately avoided my eyes.

"You are a pair of superstitious old women," said I, digging my hands into my pockets; "you swallow every nursery tale that is invented."

"What of it?" said Le Bihan sulkily; "there's more truth than lies in most of 'em."

"Oh!" I sneered. "Does the Mayor of St. Gildas and St. Julien believe in the Loup-garou?"

"No, not in the Loup-garou."

"In what, then—Jeanne-la-Flamme?"

"That," said Le Blahn with conviction, "is history."

"The devil it is!" said I; "and perhaps, monsieur the mayor, your faith in giants is unimpaired?"

"There were giants—everybody knows it," growled Max Fortin.

"And you a chemist!" I observed scornfully.

"Listen, Monsieur Darrel," squeaked Le Bihan; you know yourself that the Purple Emperor was a scientific man. Now suppose I should tell you that he always re-

fused to include in his collection a Death's Messenger?"

"A what?" I exclaimed.

"You know what I mean—that moth that flies by night; some call it the Death's Head, but in St. Gildas we call it 'Death's Messenger.'"

"Oh!" said I "you mean that big sphinx moth that is commonly called the 'death's-head moth.' Why the mischief should the people here call it death's messenger?"

"For hundreds of years it has been known as death's messenger in St. Gildas," said Max Fortin. "Even Froissart speaks of it in his commentaries on Jacques Sorgue's Chronicles. The book is in your library."

"Sorgue? And who is Jacques Sorgue? I never read his book."

"Jacques Sorgue was the son of some unfrocked priest—I forget. It was during the crusades."

"Good Heavens!" I burst out, "I've been hearing of nothing but crusades and priests and death and sorcery ever since I kicked that skull into the gravel pit, and I am tired of it, I tell you frankly. One would think we lived in the dark ages. Do you know what year of our Lord it is, Le Bihan?"

"Eighteen hundred and ninety-six," replied the mayor.

"And yet you two hulking men are afraid of a death's-head moth."

"I don't care to have one fly into the window," said Max Fortin; "it means evil to the house and the people in it."

"God alone knows why he marked one of His creatures with a yellow death's head on the back," observed Le Bihan piously, "but I take it that He meant it as a warning; and I propose to profit by it," he added triumphantly.

"See here, Le Bihan," I said; "by a stretch of imagination one can make out a skull on the thorax of a certain big sphinx moth. What of it?"

"It is a bad thing to touch," said the mayor, wagging his head.

"It squeaks when handled," added Max Fortin.

"Some creatures squeak all the time," I observed, looking hard at Le Bihan.

"Pigs," added the mayor.

"Yes, and asses," I replied. "Listen, Le Bihan; do you mean to tell me that you saw that skull roll uphill yesterday?"

The mayor shut his mouth tightly and picked up his hammer.

"Don't be obstinate," I said; "I asked you a question."

"And I refuse to answer," snapped Le Bihan. "Fortin saw what I saw; let him talk about it."

I LOOKED searchingly at the little chemist.

"I don't say that I saw it actually roll up out of the pit, all by itself," said Fortin with a shiver, "but—but then, how did it come up out of the pit, if it didn't roll up all by itself?"

"It didn't come up at all; that was a yellow cobblestone that you mistook for the skull again," I replied. "You are nervous, Max."

"A—a very curious cobblestone, Monsieur Darrel," said Fortin.

"I also was a victim of the same hallucination," I continued, "and I regret to say that I took the trouble to roll two innocent cobblestones into the gravel pit, imagining each time that it was the skull I was rolling."

"It was," observed Le Bihan with a morose shrug.

"It just shows," said I, ignoring the mayor's remark, "how easy it is to fix up a train of coincidences so that the result seems to savour of the supernatural. Now, last night my wife imagined that she saw a priest in a mask peer in at her window—"

Fortin and Le Bihan scrambled hastily from their knees, dropping hammer and nails.

"W-h-a-t—what's that?" demanded the mayor.

I repeated what I had said. Max Fortin turned livid.

"My God!" muttered Le Bihan, "the Black Priest is in St. Gildas!"

"D-don't you—you know the old prophecy?" stammered Fortin; "Froissart quotes it from Jacques Sorgue:

'When the Black Priest rises from the dead,
St. Gildas folk shall shriek in bed;
When the Black Priest rises from his grave,
May the good God St. Gildas save!'"

"Aristide Le Bihan," I said angrily, "and you, Max Fortin, I've got enough of this nonsense! Some foolish lout from Bannalec has been in St. Gildas playing tricks to frighten old fools like you. If you have nothing better to talk about than nursery

legends I'll wait until you come to your senses. Good morning." And I walked out, more disturbed than I cared to acknowledge to myself.

The day had become misty and overcast. Heavy, wet clouds hung in the east. I heard the surf thundering against the cliffs, and the gray gulls squealed as they tossed and turned high in the sky. The tide was creeping across the river sands, higher, higher, and I saw the seaweed floating on the beach, and the *lançons* springing from the foam, silvery thread-like flashes in the gloom. Curlew were flying up the river in twos and threes; the timid sea swallows skimmed across the moors toward some quiet, lonely pool, safe from the coming tempest. In every hedge field birds were gathering, huddling together, twittering restlessly.

When I reached the cliffs I sat down, resting my chin on my clenched hands. Already a vast curtain of rain, sweeping across the ocean miles away, hid the island of Groix. To the east, behind the white semaphore on the hills, black clouds crowded up over the horizon. After a little thunder boomed, dull, distant, and slender skeins of lightning unravelled across the crest of the coming storm. Under the cliff at my feet the surf rushed foaming over the shore, and the *lançons* jumped and skipped and quivered until they seemed to be but the reflections of the meshed lightning.

I turned to the east. It was raining over Groix, it was raining at Sainte Barbe, it was raining now at the semaphore. High in the storm whirl a few gulls pitched; a nearer cloud trailed veils of rain in its wake; the sky was spattered with lightning; the thunder boomed.

As I rose to go, a cold raindrop fell upon the back of my hand, and another, and yet another on my face. I gave a last glance at the sea, where the waves were bursting into strange white shapes that seemed to fling out menacing arms toward me. Then something moved on the cliff, something black as the black rock it clutched—a filthy cormorant, craning its hideous head at the sky.

Slowly I plodded homeward across the sombre moorland, where the gorse stems glimmered with a dull metallic green, and the heather, no longer violet and purple, hung drenched and dun-colored among the dreary rocks. The wet turf creaked under my heavy boots,, the black-thorn scraped and grated against my knee and elbow. Over all lay a strange light, pallid, ghastly, where the sea spray whirled across the landscape and drove into my face until it grew numb with the cold. In broad bands, rank after rank, billow on billow, the rain burst out across the endless moors, and yet there was no wind to drive it at such a pace.

Lys stood at the door as I turned into the garden, motioning me to hasten; and then for the first time I became conscious that I was soaked to the skin.

"How ever in the world did you come to stay out when such a storm threatened?" she said. "Oh, you are dripping! Go quickly and change; I have laid your warm underwear on the bed, Dick."

I kissed my wife, and went upstairs to change my dripping clothes for something more comfortable.

When I returned to the morning room there was a driftwood fire on the hearth, and Lys sat in the chimney corner embroidering.

"Catherine tells me that the fishing fleet from Lorient is out. Do you think they are in danger, dear?" asked Lys, raising her blue eyes to mine as I entered.

"There is no wind, and there will be no sea," said I, looking out of the window. Far across the moor I could see the black cliffs looming in the mist.

"How it rains!" murmured Lys; "come to the fire, Dick."

I threw myself on the fur rug, my hands in my pockets, my head on Lys's knees.

"Tell me a story," I said. "I feel like a boy of ten."

Lys raised a finger to her scarlet lips. I always waited for her to do that.

"Will you be very still, then?" she said.

"Still as death."

"Death," echoed a voice, very softly.

"Did you speak, Lys?" I asked, turning so that I could see her face.

"No; did you, Dick?"

"Who said 'death'?" I asked, startled.

"Death," echoed a voice, softly.

I sprang up and looked around. Lys, rose too, her needles and embroidery falling to the floor. She seemed about to faint, leaning heavily on me, and I led her to the window and opened it a little way to give her air. As I did so the chain lightning split the zenith, the thunder crashed, and a sheet of rain swept into the room, driving with it something that fluttered—something that flapped, and squeaked and beat upon the rug with soft, moist wings.

We bent over it together, Lys clinging to

me, and we saw that it was a death's-head moth drenched with rain.

THE dark day passed slowly as we sat beside the fire, hand in hand, her head against my breast, speaking of sorrow and mystery and death. For Lys believed that there were things on earth that none might understand, things that must be nameless forever and ever, until God rolls up the scroll of life and all is ended. We spoke of hope and fear and faith, and the mystery of the saints; we spoke of the beginning and the end, of the shadow of sin, of omens, and of love. The moth still lay on the floor, quivering its sombre wings in the warmth of the fire, the skull and the ribs clearly etched upon its neck and body.

"If it is a messenger of death to this house," I said, "why should we fear, Lys?"

"Death should be welcome to those who love God," murmured Lys, and she drew the cross from her breast and kissed it.

"The moth might die if I threw it out into the storm," I said after a silence.

"Let it remain," sighed Lys.

Late that night my wife lay sleeping, and I sat beside her bed and read in the Chronicle of Jacques Sorgue. I shaded the candle, but Lys grew restless, and finally I took the book down into the morning room, where the ashes of the fire rustled and whitened on the hearth.

The death's-head moth lay on the rug before the fire where I had left it. At first I thought it was dead, but, when I looked closer I saw a lambent fire in its amber eyes. The straight white shadow it cast across the floor wavered as the candle flickered.

The pages of the Chronicle of Jacques Sorgue were damp and sticky; the illuminated gold and blue initials left flakes of azure and gilt where my hand brushed them.

"It is not paper at all; it is thin parchment," I said to myself; and I held the discolored page close to the candle flame and read, translating laboriously:

"I, Jacques Sorgue, saw all these things. And I saw the Black Mass celebrated in the chapel of St. Gildas-on-the-Cliff. And it was said by the Abbé Sorgue, my kinsman: for which deadly sin the apostate priest was seized by the most noble Marquis of Plougastel and by him condemned to be burned with hot irons, until his seared soul quit its body and fly to its master the devil. But when the Black Priest lay in the crypt of Plougastel, his master Satan came at night and set him free, and carried him across land and sea to Mahmoud, which is Soldan or Saladin. And I, Jacques Sorgue, travelling afterward by sea, beheld with my own eyes my kinsman, the Black Priest of St. Gildas, borne along in the air upon a vast black wing, which was the wing of his master Satan. And this was seen also by two men of the crew."

I turned the page. The wings of the moth on the floor began to quiver. I read on and on, my eyes blurring under the shifting candle flame. I read of battles and of saints, and I learned how the great Soldan made his pact with Satan, and then I came to the Sieur de Trevec, and read how he seized the Black Priest in the midst of Saladin's tents and carried him away and cut off his head, first branding him on the forehead. "And before he suffered," said the Chronicle, "he cursed the Sieur de Trevec and his descendants, and he said he would surely return to St. Gildas. 'For the violence you do to me, I will do violence to you. For the evil I suffer at your hands, I will work evil on you and your descendants. Woe to your children, Sieur de Trevec!'" There was a whirr, a beating of strong wings, and my candle flashed up as in a sudden breeze. A humming filled the room; the great moth darted hither and thither, beating, buzzing, on ceiling and wall. I flung down my book and stepped forward. Now it lay fluttering upon the window sill, and for a moment I had it under my hand, but the thing squeaked and I shrank back. Then suddenly it darted across the candle flame; the light flared and went out, and at the same moment a shadow moved in the darkness outside. I raised my eyes to the window. A masked face was peering in at me.

Quick as thought I whipped out my revolver and fired every cartridge, but the face advanced beyond the window, the glass melting away before it like mist, and through the smoke of my revolver I saw something creep swiftly into the room. Then I tried to cry out, but the thing was at my throat, and I fell backward among the ashes of the hearth.

* * *

When my eyes unclosed I was lying on the hearth, my head among the cold ashes. Slowly I got on my knees, rose painfully, and groped my way to a chair. On the floor lay my revolver, shining in the pale light of early morning. My mind clearing by degrees, I looked, shuddering.

at the window. The glass was unbroken. I stooped stiffly, picked up my revolver and opened the cylinder. Every cartridge had been fired. Mechanically I closed the cylinder and placed the revolver in my pocket. The book, the Chronicles of Jacques Sorgue, lay on the table beside me, and as I started to close it I glanced at the page. It was all splashed with rain, and the lettering had run, so that the page was merely a confused blur of gold and red and black. As I stumbled toward the door I cast a fearful glance over my shoulder. The death's-head moth crawled shivering on the rug.

CHAPTER IV

THE sun was about three hours high. I must have slept, for I was aroused by the sudden gallop of horses under our window. People were shouting and calling in the road. I sprang up and opened the sash. Le Bihan was there, an image of helplessness, and Max Fortin stood beside him, polishing his glasses. Some gendarmes had just arrived from Quimperle, and I could hear them around the corner of the house, stamping, and rattling their sabres and carbines, as they led their horses into my stable.

Lys sat up, murmuring half-sleepy, half-anxious questions.

"I don't know," I answered. "I am going out to see what it means."

"It is like the day they came to arrest you," Lys said, giving me a troubled look. But I kissed her, and laughed at her until she smiled too. Then I flung on coat and cap, and hurried down the stairs.

The first person I saw standing in the road was the Brigadier Durand.

"Hello!" said I, "have you come to arrest me again? What the devil is all this fuss about, anyway?"

"We were telegraphed for an hour ago," said Durand briskly, "and for a sufficient reason, I think. Look here, Monsieur Darrel!"

He pointed to the ground almost under my feet.

"Good heavens!" I cried, "where did that puddle of blood come from?"

"That's what I want to know, Monsieur Darrel. Max Fortin found it at daybreak. See, it's splashed all over the grass, too. A trail of it leads into your garden, across the flower beds to your very window, the one that opens from the morning room. There is another trail leading from this spot across the road to the cliffs, then to the gravel pit, and thence across the moor to the forest of Kerselec. We are going to mount in a minute and search the bosquets. Will you join us? *Bon Dieu!* but the fellow bled like an ox. Max Fortin says it's human blood, or I should not have believed it."

The little chemist of Quimperle came up at that moment, rubbing his glasses with a colored handkerchief.

"Yes, it is human blood," he said, "but one thing puzzles me: the corpuscles are yellow. I never saw any human blood before with yellow corpuscles. But your English Doctor Thompson asserts that he has—"

"Well, it's human blood, anyway—isn't it?" insisted Durand impatiently.

"Ye-es," admitted Max Fortin.

"Then it's my business to trail it," said the big gendarme, and he called his men and gave the order to mount.

"Did you hear anything last night?" asked Durand of me.

"I heard the rain. I wonder the rain did not wash away these traces."

"They must have come after the rain ceased. See this thick splash, how it lies over and weighs down the west grass blades. Pah!"

It was a heavy, evil-looking clot, and I stepped back from it, my throat closing in disgust.

"My theory," said the brigadier, "is this: Some of those Biribi fishermen, probably the Icelanders, got an extra glass of cognac into their hides and quarreled on the road. Some of them were slashed, and staggered to your house. But there is only one trail—and yet, and yet, how could all that blood come from only one person? Well, the wounded man, let us say, staggered first to your house and then back here, and he wandered off, drunk and dying, God knows where. That's my theory."

"A very good one," said I calmly. "And you are going to trail him?"

"Yes."

"When?"

"At once. Will you come?"

"Not now. I'll gallop over by-and-bye. You are going to the edge of the Kerselec forest?"

"Yes; you will hear us calling. Are you coming, Max Fortin? And you, Le Bihan? Good; take the dog-cart."

The big gendarme tramped around the corner to the stable and presently returned mounted on a strong gray horse;

his sabre shone on his saddle; his pale yellow and white facings were spotless. The little crowd of white-coiffed women with their children fell back, as Durand touched spurs and clattered away followed by his two troopers. Soon after Le Bihan and Max Fortin also departed in the mayor's dingy dog-cart.

"Are you coming?" piped Le Bihan shrilly.

"In a quarter of an hour," I replied, and went back to the house.

When I opened the door of the morning room the death's-head moth was beating its strong wings against the window. For a second I hesitated, then walked over and opened the sash. The creature fluttered out, whirred over the flower beds a moment, then darted across the moorland toward the sea. I called the servants together and questioned them. Josephine, Catherine, Jean Marie Tregunc, not one of them had heard the slightest disturbance during the night. Then I told Jean Marie to saddle my horse, and while I was speaking Lys came down.

"Dearest," I began, going to her.

"You must tell me everything you know, Dick," she interrupted, looking me earnestly in the face.

"But there is nothing to tell—only a drunken brawl, and someone wounded."

"And you are going to ride—where, Dick?"

"Well, over the edge of Kerselec forest. Durand and the mayor, and Max Fortin, have gone on, following a—a trail."

"What trail?"

"Some blood."

"Where did they find it?"

"Out in the road there."

Lys crossed herself.

"Does it come near our house?"

"Yes."

"How near?"

"It comes up to the morning-room window," said I, giving in.

Her hand on my arm grew heavy. "I dreamed last night—"

"So did I—" but I thought of the empty cartridges in my revolver, and stopped suddenly.

"I dreamed that you were in great danger, and I could not move hand or foot to save you; but you had your revolver, and I called out to you to fire—"

"I did fire!" I cried excitedly.

"You—you fired?"

I took her in my arms. "My darling," I said, "something strange has happened—something that I can not understand as yet. But, of course, there is an explanation. Last night I thought I fired at the Black Priest."

"Ah!" gasped Lys.

"Is that what you dreamed?"

"Yes, yes that was it! I begged you to fire—"

"And I did."

Her heart was beating against my breast. I held her close in silence.

"DICK," she said at length, "perhaps you killed the—the thing."

"If it was human I did not miss," I answered grimly. "And it was human," I went on, pulling myself together, ashamed of having so nearly gone to pieces. "Of course, it was human! The whole affair is plain enough. Not a drunken brawl, as Durand thinks; it was a drunken lout's practical joke, for which he has suffered. I suppose I must have filled him pretty full of bullets, and he has crawled away to die in Kerselec forest. It's a terrible affair; I'm sorry I fired so hastily; but that idiot Le Bihan and Max Fortin have been working on my nerves till I am as hysterical as a schoolgirl," I ended angrily.

"You fired—but the window glass was not shattered," said Lys in a low voice.

"Well, the window was open, then. And as for the—the rest—I've got nervous indigestion, and a doctor will settle the Black Priest for me, Lys."

I glanced out of the window at Tregunc waiting with my horse at the gate.

"Dearest, I think I had better go to join Durand and the others."

"I will go too."

"Oh, no!"

"Yes, Dick."

"Don't, Lys."

"I shall suffer every moment you are away."

"The ride is too fatiguing, and we can't tell what unpleasant sight you may come upon. Lys, you don't really think there is anything supernatural in this affair?"

"Dick," she answered gently, "I am a Bretonne." With both arms around my neck, my wife said, "Death is the gift of God. I do not fear it when we are together. But alone—oh, my husband, I should fear a God who could take you away from me!"

We kissed each other soberly, simply, like two children. Then Lys hurried away to change her gown, and I paced up and down the garden waiting for her.

She came, drawing her slender gaunt-

lets on. I swung her into the saddle, gave a hasty order to Jean Marie, and mounted.

Now, to quail under thoughts of terror on a morning like this, with Lys in the saddle beside me, no matter what had happened or might happen, was impossible. Moreover, Mome came sneaking after us. I asked Tregunc to catch him, for I was afraid he might be brained by our horses' hoofs if he followed, but the wily puppy dodged and bolted after Lys, who was trotting along the high-road. "Never mind," I thought; "if he's hit he'll live, for he has no brains to lose."

Lys was waiting for me in the road beside the Shrine of Our Lady of St. Gildas when I joined her. She crossed herself, I doffed my cap, then we shook out our bridles and galloped toward the forest of Kerselec.

We said very little as we rode. I always loved to watch Lys in the saddle. Her exquisite figure and lovely face were the incarnation of youth and grace; her curling hair glistened like threaded gold.

Out of the corner of my eye I saw the spoiled puppy Mome come bounding cheerfully alongside, oblivious of our horses' heels. Our road swung close to the cliffs. A filthy cormorant rose from the black rocks and flapped heavily across our path. Lys's horse reared, but she pulled him down, and pointed at the bird with her riding crop.

"I see," said I; "it seems to be going our way. Curious to see a cormorant in a forest, isn't it?"

"It is a bad sign," said Lys. "You know the Morbihan proverb: 'When the cormorant turns from the sea, Death laughs in the forest, and wise woodsmen build boats.'"

"I wish," said I sincerely, "that there were fewer proverbs in Brittany."

We were in sight of the forest now; across the gorse I could see the sparkle of the gendarmes' trappings, and the glitter of Le Bihan's silver-buttoned jacket. The hedge was low and we took it without difficulty, and trotted across the moor to where Le Bihan and Durand stood gesticulating.

They bowed ceremoniously to Lys as we rode up.

"The trail is horrible—it is a river," said the mayor in his squeaky voice. "Monsieur Darrel, I think perhaps madame would scarcely care to come any nearer."

Lys drew bridle and looked at me.

"It is horrible!" said Durand, walking up beside me; "it looks as though a bleeding regiment had passed this way. The trail winds about there in the thickets; we lose it at times, but we always find it again. I can't understand how one man—no, nor twenty—could bleed like that!"

A halloo, answered by another, sounded from the depths of the forest.

"It's my men; they are following the trail," muttered the brigadier. "God alone knows what is at the end!"

"Shall we gallop back, Lys?" I asked.

"No; let us ride along the western edge of the woods and dismount. The sun is so hot now, and I should like to rest for a moment," she said.

"The western forest is clear of anything disagreeable," said Durand.

"Very well," I answered; "call me, Le Bihan, if you find anything."

Lys wheeled her mare, and I followed across the springy heather, Mome trotting cheerfully in the rear.

WE ENTERED the sunny woods about a quarter of a kilometre from where we left Durand. I took Lys from her horse, flung both bridles over a limb, and giving my wife my arm, aided her to a flat mossy rock which overhung a shallow brook gurgling among the beech trees. Lys sat down and drew off her gauntlets. Mome pushed his head into her lap, received an undeserved caress, and came doubtfully toward me. I was weak enough to condone his offense, but I made him lie down at my feet, greatly to his disgust.

I rested my head on Ly's knees looking up at the sky through the crossed branches of the trees.

"I suppose I have killed him," I said. "It shocks me terribly, Lys."

"You could not have known, dear. He may have been a robber, and—if—not—Did—have you ever fired your revolver since that day four years ago, when the Red Admiral's son tried to kill you? But I know you have not."

"No," said I, wondering. "It's a fact, I have not. Why?"

"And don't you remember that I asked you to let me load it for you the day when Yves went away, swearing to kill you and his father?"

"Yes, I do remember. Well?"

"Well, I—I took the cartridges first to St. Gildas chapel and dipped them in holy water. You must not laugh, Dick," said Lys gently, laying her cool hands on my lips.

"Laugh, my darling!"

Overhead the October sky was pale amethyst, and the sunlight burned like orange flame through the yellow leaves of beech and oak. Gnats and midges danced and wavered overhead; a spider dropped from a twig halfway to the ground and hung suspended on the end of his gossamer thread.

"Are you sleepy, dear?" asked Lys, bending over me.

"I am—a little; I scarcely slept two hours last night," I answered.

"You may sleep, if you wish," said Lys, and touched my eyes caressingly.

"Is my head heavy on your knees?" she asked.

"No, Dick."

I was already in a half doze; still I heard the brook babbling under the beeches and the humming of forest flies overhead. Presently even these were stilled.

The next thing I knew I was sitting bolt upright, my ears ringing with a scream, and I saw Lys cowering beside me, covering her white, set face with both hands.

As I sprang to my feet she cried again and clung to my knees. I saw my dog rush growling into the thicket, then I heard him whimper, and he came backing out, whining, ears flat, tail down. I stooped and disengaged Lys's hand.

"Don't go, Dick!" she cried. "O God, it's the Black Priest!"

In a moment I had leaped across the brook and pushed my way into the thicket. It was empty. I stared about me; I scanned every tree trunk, every bush. Suddenly I saw him. He was seated on a fallen log, his head resting in his hands, his rusty black robe gathered around him. For a moment my hair stirred under my cap; sweat started on forehead and cheekbone; then I recovered my reason, and understood that the man was human and was probably wounded to death. Ay, to death; for there, at my feet, lay the wet trail of blood, over leaves and stones, down into the little hollow, across to the figure in black resting silently under the dark trees.

I saw that he could not escape even if he had the strength, for before him, almost at his very feet, lay a deep, shining swamp.

As I stepped onward my foot broke a twig.

At the sound the figure started a little, then its head fell forward again. Its face was masked. Walking up to the man, I bade him tell where he was wounded.

Durand and the others broke through the thicket at the same moment and hurried to my side.

"Who are you who hide a masked face in a priest's robe?" said the gendarme loudly.

There was no answer.

"See—see the stiff blood all over his robe!" muttered Le Bihan to Fortin.

"He will not speak," said I.

"He may be too badly wounded," whispered Le Bihan.

"I saw him raise his head," I said; "my wife saw him creep up here."

Durand stepped forward and touched the figure.

"Speak!" he said.

"Speak!" quavered Fortin.

Durand waited a moment, then with a sudden upward movement he stripped off the mask and threw the man's head back. We were looking into the eye sockets of a skull.

Durand stood rigid and the mayor shrieked. The skeleton burst out from its rotting robes and collapsed on the ground before us. From between the staring ribs and the grinning teeth spurted a torrent of black blood, showering and shrinking grasses; then the thing shuddered, and fell over into the black ooze of the bog. Little bubbles of iridescent air appeared from the mud; the bones were slowly engulfed, and, as the last fragments sank out of sight, up from the depths and along the bank crept a creature, shiny, shivering, quivering its wings.

It was a death's-head moth.

I wish I had time to tell you how Lys outgrew superstitions—for she never knew the truth about the affair, and she never will know, since she has promised not to read this book. I wish I might tell you about the king and his coronation, and how the coronation robe fitted. I wish that I were able to write how Yvonne and Herbert Stuart rode to a boar hunt in Quimperle, and how the hounds raced the quarry right through the town, overturning three gendarmes, the notary, and an old woman.

But I am becoming very garrulous, and Lys is calling me to come and hear the king say that he is sleepy.

And his highness shall not be kept waiting.

MASTERS OF FANTASY

Algernon Blackwood—"Pan's Gardener"—Born 1869

Pantheistic mysticism is the keynote of the work of this, one of the greatest of living Masters of Fantasy. The oft-reprinted English author did not begin writing until he was 36, after which he produced his two most famous stories, the atmospheric "The Willows" and "The Wendigo", both of which have been featured in *Famous Fantastic Mysteries.*

Among his outstanding titles are "Pan's Garden", "John Silence", "The Extra Day", "The Promise of Air", "A Prisoner in Fairyland", "The Centaur", "The Bright Messenger" and "The Garden of Survival".

The name of Algernon Blackwood must inevitably enhance any conversation conducted by connoisseurs of supernatural literature.

(Continued from page 6)

Went Back" is indicative of his general merit, then he's darn good! The plot was excellent, though not as much fantasy as I'd like . . . good, strong characterization . . . smooth, realistic plot development . . . keep yarns like this coming at appropriate intervals!

And, what's even more surprising, the shorts were good. I've noticed that whenever you have a really top-rank novel, your accompanying shorts are not so hot, but not this ish!

"Atlantis's Exile" was a beautiful thing, poignant and sad. Finlay's pic expressed the atmosphere adequately. And Doyle's story has been one of my favorites since I first read it back in 1940. Very, very good.

"Masters of Fantasy" could be better if Austin would tell a bit more of the authors' lives, and not so much of their works. If they rate the "Masters of Fantasy" spotlight, the chances are we already know a good deal of their works. Would like to see Weinbaum, Stapledon and Wells in some future ish.

I'd like very much to see Fowler Wright's "The World Below," "The Scarlet Empire" and Shiel's, "The Purple Cloud" in the future.

LIN CARTER.

1734 Newark St., So.,
St. Petersburg 7, Fla.

LIKED DEC. SHORT STORIES

The current December issue of F.F.M. is a very satisfactory number, in many ways the best of the year. What impressed me most was the return of Finlay to the style of painting and drawing that made him so popular with F.F.M. fans in the past. The cover was excellent, and the inside pics were all that could be desired. Glad to see you back in stride, Virgil.

It is hard to say definitely why I pick "Atlantis's Exile" over the novel, this time. Perhaps it is because I am getting a little weary of the type of story TMWWB represents, perhaps the reason is that it is such a thoroughly engrossing and startlingly different tale on a subject which has always interested me. The author weaved a truly brilliant atmosphere about his little gem and Finlay's fine cover illustration aided no end in improving it.

"The Horror of the Heights" was also a refreshing change from the brand of short stories we have been getting of late. This is the first I've read by Conan Doyle other than his "Sherlock Holmes," and I would like to read others of his if any are suitable for F.F.M.

I need the following copies of F.F.M. to complete my files: August & December, 1940, June October, 1941, and the March, 1941 *Fantastic Novels*. For these I will trade a copy each of Merritt's "Moon Pool" and Lovecraft's "Magnolia" or, if preferred, two books by H. Rider Haggard. "Lysbeth," and "Montezuma's Daughter." Will trade all of the above for a copy of "The King in Yellow." I would prefer the mags, or book, in reasonably good condition. The books I have listed are in very good shape.

JAMES D. ELLIS.

604 10th St., S. W.
Washington 4, D. C.

ALL DECEMBER STORIES GOOD

I enjoyed very much reading the novel in the December issue of your magazine. It was well written and contained much historical data of that period written of to lend an air of authenticity to the idea of the tale itself and the circumstances of the hero's finding himself in such a period in time. Altogether enjoyable, but I noticed that—as in another time-traveling story which I believe I read in your pages—at just the time of the hero's return to his own period in time, he is left dangling between two times with a sword in his throat.

In both cases the story of this historical period the hero traveled to, was left unfinished or, at least, had a finish only to be guessed at by the reader. This is probably all right, however, since the story was more about the hero than about the historical period he visited. I really enjoyed reading it.

"Atlantis's Exile" by Cyril Hume was another good story and gave a clear description of what one author's opinion of what the legendary city of Atlantis might be like. I liked this best in the issue.

"The Horror of the Heights" by A. Conan Doyle was interesting. The descriptive passages of airplane flight were very entertaining and the tale itself a well presented fantasy.

Although the novel rated last with me, it was still good reading.

Finlay's cover looked a little as if it might have been done by Paul, and is was good. Finlay is really an excellent artist for fantasy stories. Lawrence's illustrations on the interior were good and the two by Finlay were really something to decorate the title pages of the two short stories. Lawrence has a style which seems to be catching on with each new illustration presented.

The Readers' Viewpoint was also very good this issue. It usually is.

Good luck in 1948.

EUGENE LOUIS CALEWAERT.

3138 East Congress,
Detroit 7, Michigan.

AUGUST DERLETH REPLIES

Apropos the letters from Messrs. Moskowitz and Bence—with all due respect for their opinions, it should have been obvious that I wrote out of a far wider knowledge of the subject than they apparently have. It should be remembered that I have gone through millions of words of Lovecraft's letters, that I was for 12 years a correspondent of Lovecraft's, and that this is a subject we would naturally have discussed. Neither list of "best" short stories in the genre was ever compiled in any order by Lovecraft; that is to say, it was not Lovecraft's intention to list the stories in the order of his preference. That fact is attested to in a good many Lovecraft letters, and Mr. Moskowitz's assumption to the contrary is merely an assumption unsupported by any facts.

The quotation by Mr. Bence from the Lovecraft autobiographical fragment unfortunately can be matched by other similar quotations; in

short, Lovecraft's opinion of the "best" was a momentary opinion; it varied according to his mood. Just as we find Lovecraft on record as saying at one time that his greatest story is undoubtedly *The Music of Erich Zann*, so on another do we find him maintaining that his greatest is *The Colour Out of Space;* these differences are irrespective of the time of writing; that is to say, he expressed these preferences at a time both stories were already in print, and not chronologically; so we find Lovecraft on record as singling out various different tales at different times as the "best" or the "greatest". But what he set down in his lists can be regarded as comprising all his various selections, but not in any order.

There is therefore no warranty for offering as indisputable fact that Lovecraft regarded Blackwood's *The Willows* as the greatest weird tale ever written. His quotation in Bence's letter can be matched with other quotations in which he says significantly "probably" the greatest weird tale ever written is Machen's *The Novel of the White Powder*, or *The Novel of the Black Seal*, and others. As a matter of fact, only two general facts can be set down about Lovecraft's preferences without fear of contradiction—in his early period of writing, he was most impressed by the work of Lord Dunsany; in his later period, he was most impressed by that of the late Arthur Machen. One other fact that most of his correspondents will attest is this—Lovecraft's greatest enthusiasm for the novel-length fantasy was expressed for Machen's *The Hill of Dreams*, thus again refuting another assumption of Moskowitz's, that Lovecraft had novels as well as short stories in mind when compiling his list of "bests". Moskowitz offers the flimsiest of negative evidence for his unwarranted assumption; actually, since Lovecraft underscored the novelette version of *The Moon Pool*, it should have been obvious that he had no reference to novels in his list.

AUGUST DERLETH.

Arkham House: Publishers,
Sauk City, Wisconsin.

RE DERLETH'S LETTER TO US

Re: August Derleth's December contradiction of Arthur Cox's statement that Lovecraft's "favorite piece of fantasy" was Blackwood's "The Willows"—here is what HPL himself says: "The greatest weird tale ever written is probably Algernon Blackwood's 'The Willows'." (See "Beyond the Wall of Sleep," page xiv. Arkham House, 1943.)

WALTER A. CARRITHERS, JR.

463 North 2nd,
Fresno 2, California.

FOR COLLECTORS

I have some exciting new titles in the book line for lovers of fantastic mysteries. "Out of the Unknown," a strange collection by A. E. van Vogt and E. Mayne Hull, is one; "The Sunken World," a glamorous Atlantean novel by Stanton A. Coblentz, is another. Also, from Australia, "The Missing Angel" by Erle Cox, and from England "The Flames" by Olaf Stapledon and "The Shadow Girl" by Ray Cummings. For admirers of Edgar Rice Burroughs, "Llana of Gathol" and "Tarzan and 'the Hidden Legion'." Fans seeking copies of the early F.F.M.'s, I have some of these too, as well as a few New Worlds, Fantasy, Fantasy Book, Unknown Worlds, and Tales of Wonder. Please accompany inquiries with stamped-addressed envelope.

WEAVER WRIGHT.

Box 6151 Metro Stn.,
Los Angeles 55, Cal.

WANTS YOU TO WRITE

This is my first letter to your fine magazine. I have been an ardent admirer of F.F.M. for nearly eight years. Of the many outstanding points in favor of the mag, the first, at least to me, is your choice of older and rarer manuscripts. Hard to find and still harder on the pocketbook.

Had two purposes in writing this letter. The one above and the following. I am 21 years old and have been confined to bed with paralysis from the waist down for nearly three years. Letter writing to me is what the movies, social gatherings and traveling are to others. I would sincerely like to exchange letters with anyone who has the time, also the patience.

So please, editor, print this.

LOIS TURNER.

1809 North Market,
Wichita, Kansas.

LIKED DEEPING STORY

I have just finished reading "The Man Who Went Back" and I want to congratulate you for publishing it. It was really good. The short stories were fair but "The Horror of the Heights" was best. The cover was good but it didn't seem quite like Finlay. Different, somehow. The illustrations on pages 21, 41, and 87 were pretty good. Hold onto Lawrence and Finlay.

I agree with Lin Carter when he suggests that you answer fully each letter you publish. I think most readers feel that way.

In the August issue "Minimum Man" was fair and "Boomerang" was the best short I've read for quite a while. That was a wonderful picture of Lovecraft on page 113. He and Merritt are my favorites and I would certainly like to see some of their works in F.F.M.

I would like to obtain copies of F.F.M. with the stories "Minos of Sardanes" and "Polaris and the Goddess Glorian." If anyone has the issues mentioned above in good condition, I would be willing to buy them.

Thanks for many hours of reading pleasure.

DONALD L. FOX.

208 W. 7 St.,
Bicknell, Ind.

Editor's Note: You will be finding Merritt, Giesy, and Stilson in our revived Fantastic Novels, from now on. "Jason, Son of Jason" and "The Moon Pool" Novelette will be in the May issue. All the other old favorites will be coming along, too.

CRITICISM AND PRAISE

Thank you very much for printing my request for back issues of fantastic and weird magazines in the December issue of F.F.M. The result has been more favorable than I had hoped it could be. I have become the happy owner of many out-of-print and unobtainable items.

I have been reading your magazine for about five years, and during that time the selection of stories has, as a whole, been above the average run in the fantasy field. However, you *have* slipped several times and are therefore at my mercy. I shall go into detail.

First, there was that prehistoric epic, "Three Go Back," by Mitchell. Tell me, just what element, with the exception of the transition from present to past, made you class the story as fantasy—or even science fiction? Well, you are wrong; it was adventure.

Then came John Taine with three one-million word masterpieces. Guffaw! "Before the Dawn" had absolutely no interest at all. "The Greatest Adventure" had even less. "The Iron Star" came almost up to the readable level, because it held an off-trail quality; but it was ruined by the old, worn-out cave-man and prehistoric bunk Of the three, it alone was suitable for a fantasy magazine. But at best, Taine is monotonous. I won't ask you not to print his works; for he is trying to please us readers, or he wouldn't bother to waste his time on us: but tell him to leave those pre-human creations in history classes and give us something enjoyable.

Leaving Mr. Taine's battered and bleeding carcass lying where it fell, we move on to the "Day of the Brown Horde," by one Richard Tooker. I'll say this much: Tooker can write! But he could write until Doomsday about cavemen, and I wouldn't give a ruble for all he accomplished. His novel was nothing more than pure adventure. I have buried my copy in six feet of concrete.

Two issues after Tooker came Wayland Smith's "The Machine Stops." Now if I do not count "The Twenty-Fifth Hour," by Herbert Best, Smith's tale is the dullest I have ever read. But fortunately, I do count "The Twenty-Fifth Hour." and Smith's tale become only the second dullest. Besides being uninteresting, both were of the reversion-to-the-stone-age type, thus being rendered completely hopeless as entertainment.

"The People of the Ruins," by Shanks. I am still tearing my hair. How *could* you print this?

You have probably gathered by now that I detest, hate, abhor, and loathe stories about the stone age, the cave man, and prehistoric monsters. Why, I do not know. I have tried to psychoanalyze myself, so to speak, and find the reason; but I haven't had one molecule of success. Maybe it's because they are all so much alike. Each story is more or less a repitition of its predecessor; there can be no variation. And each story is fantastic only in the sense that it is ridiculous and stupid. There is no room for the elements of wonder, weird, mystery, suspense, and marvel. I have never read a prehistoric or reversion-from-future-to-cave-man story that really extended into the field of fantasy. When I think of all the really good fantastic literature in existence, I cannot understand why you bother with tales of this sort at all. However, I suppose your reasons for printing them are as sound as mine for disliking them, so I will not condemn you too strongly.

All of which brings us to William Hope Hodgson's much praised, but little read story, "Boats of the 'Glen Carrig'." I say little read because I don't see how one could praise it after reading it. The style makes it so monotonous that only the most tenacious would take the trouble of finishing it. Hodgson, to my knowledge, wrote only two really good stories of the supernatural, namely: "The House on the Borderland," which rates with Henry James' "The Turn of the Screw," and "The Ghost Pirates." You have printed the latter; why not print the former? I would like to see it in F.F.M., with a profusion of Virgil Finlay illustrations.

And last, and not far from worst, is Jack London's "The Star Rover." London's stories are mostly dragging and depressing, and written in a style that does not fit the atmosphere of fantasy. "The Star Rover" is a shining example of what I mean. Your magazine is foremost a place of entertainment, and this was *not* entertainment.

Now that I have named all the things I don't want in F.F.M., I could go on and give you the titles of all the stories I want printed; then you would be certain of selling at least one copy of each issue. But for the most part, your selection has been pretty good. To prove it, there are: "The Yellow Sign," "The Mask," by Robert Chambers; "The Man Who Was Thursday," by G. K. Chesterton; "The Wendigo," "The Willows," by Blackwood; "Novel of the White Powder," "Novel of the Black Seal," by Arthur Machen; "Doorway into Time," "Daemon," by Catharine Moore (Kuttner's wife); Lord Dunsany's shorts; "The Undying Monster," Jessie Kerruish; "Roderick's Story" (a most amazingly beautiful fantasy), "At the Farmhouse," by E. F. Benson; "Minimum Man," by Andrew Marvell; "The City of Wonder," Charles Vivian; and the two H. Rider Haggard novels. These tales are of the very best. Give us many, many more in the same vein.

Here is a random thought: Revive your two deceased companion magazines *Super Science* and *Astonishing Stories*. And give them trimmed edges and a large format (I bow my head in shame for even mentioning anything so old-fashioned as trimmed edges).

Here is another: Revive *Fantastic Novels*, and print these Arthur Machen classics in it before even looking at anything else—"The Hill of Dreams," "The Red Hand," "Inmost Light," "The Shining Pyramid," "The Three Impostors." Then begin a systematic republication of all the Munsey classics, covering the years in chonological order. You could reprint all the best and not out-dated material, and give a short review of all the stuff not suitable for reprinting.

CORDELL MAHANEY.

1252 Magazine St.,
Vallejo, Calif.

SUGGESTIONS

I have read the comments of the readers of F.F.M. with great interest for several years, and am now prompted to put in my two cents worth. Your mag is by long odds the best of its type on the newsstands, but I believe you could make it a bit better by a minor change or two. For what they are worth, here are my suggestions for improvements.

1. First and foremost, by any means required, get your artists away from the ghastly skeletons, bony fingers, and gruesome ghosts they love for some reason to put on the front covers, which have no connection with the stories in that issue. Even the half clothed women are easier to look at than the monstrosities we have been afflicted with in the name of art.

2. You have set your editorial policy as against using any story that has ever appeared in magazine form in America, and that is a very good idea—within reason. Nothing is more disgusting than to pay out your good money for a magazine, settle yourself for a couple of hours' entertainment, and find that you've read all or part of the stories a year before in another magazine. However, I believe that if you would put a time limit—say fifteen years—you could do Fantasy fans a real favor. The finest Fantasies ever published in America, in my opinion, were in the old *Argosy*, back before 1930. Very few of your readers remember them, and we old timers would enjoy them again, after all the years. How about it?

3. And last of all, how about a Scientific Discussion corner, where you could run articles of interest on various scientific subjects, written in a manner that most of us could understand? Could be very interesting. Also, readers could air their scientific theories, and argue out their beliefs.

Of course, it goes without saying that more Haggards will do more than anything else to pep up the magazine. The lesser known Quatermain stories are not any too common, and some of his others are tops, too. By the way, I always want to hear from Haggard fans. Drop me a line.

Now one request. My Fantasy and Science Fiction collection was destroyed by fire, and I am starting from scratch to rebuild. I have several thousand fine books of all kinds but Fantasy; including, fiction, technical, travel, history, biography, etc., that I should like to trade for any Fantasy or Science Fiction books or magazines. Also I can get most anything you might want besides books. Won't everyone having anything in this line to dispose of write me? I'll answer all, and give some very good swaps for things I can use.

A faithful reader,
AUSTIN WINDSOR.

619 Elfgen St.,
Alton, Ill.

SWAP OFFER

Although I am an old-timer among fantasy fans, since my interest in this type of fiction dates back to about 1910, when I read Charles Lotin Hildreth's "The Mysterious City of Oo," I am not in the habit of writing letters to editors, and except for one to the old *Argosy* back in 1930, this is my first offense.

I note that many, especially the younger readers, criticize almost everything about any magazine they write to, but I have no intention of following their example. Instead, I will say that I like the size, paper, type (especially the type), and general make-up, and that I am not much interested in illustrations but think yours are as good as those in any pulp fiction magazine.

As for the stories, I think F.F.M. is doing a great service, especially for the younger fans, in publishing classics that they would not be able to obtain in book form, although the policy of printing only stories that have never appeared in any other magazine bars many fine stories from its pages, stories such as Arthur Train's "The Man Who Rocked the Earth," and its sequel, "The Moon Makers," and many others.

As the now defunct Munsey organization (and not you) is responsible for the title, *Famous Fantasic Mysteries*, I will not criticize it, except to say that in my opinion the other title, *Fantastic Novels*, (which they dropped after five issues) was much better, and the word "Mysteries" means the same as "Detective" to many people, and your stories are not detective or crime stories. *Fantasy Classics* would also be a good title.

Suggestions for future printing (even though I have read them myself), include "Out of the Darkness," and "Out of the Silence," by Erle Cox, the third story of the Haggard trilogy of which you have published two, "The Vicarion," by Gardner Hunting, "The Bridge of Time," by Warner, "Lepidus the Centurion," by Arnold (author of "Phra, the Phoenician"), "The Gay Hunter," (sequel to "Three Go Back," which appeared in your Dec. 1943 issue) by J. L. Mitchell.

I note that many of your readers are in need of fantasy books and back number magazines, and I will appreciate it if you will let them know that I have many for sale or trade, including F.F.M. back to volume 1 #1, *Amazing Stories* back to first year (1926), *Wonder Stories* back to 1929, *Weird Tales* back to 1927, *Argosy* back to 1897, many old *All Story* magazines, etc., and books by Burroughs, Merritt, Cummings, Serviss, Kline, Taine, and others.

CARL W. SWANSON.

Box 141,
Velva, N. D.

DEEPING STORY GOOD

I enjoyed reading Warwick Deeping's somewhat idyllic tale of the latter days of Roman Britain. Perhaps stories or the historic or prehistoric past, when men were red-blooded men and so on and living was less complex and hectic and people had fewer neuroses, offer to readers a refreshing escape for a while from present troubles. Even now, however, "The Man Who Went Back" seemed to me a bit dated. Deeping was apparently writing an inspiration-

al document for the people of wartime Britain—as well as an entertaining adventure yarn—and now, read out of context, his heroic attitudes and challenges ring a bit hollow.

The supply of stories about moderns who Go Back via a knock on the head, a Machine, a Mysterious Force, or who simply go back because the author wants them back, seems inexhaustible. It appears too that readers' interest in them isn't exhausted either; but you might spread them thinner; say one Going Back story—this includes all stories with prehistoric, primitive, and similar settings—a year. It might also include stories of a similar theme but laid in the present or near future in which civilization breaks down or blows up; such stories also usually deal nostalgically with the simple life and the relief of getting rid of all this old machinery. Don't misunderstand me; I like 'em too—now and then.

There are two stories I should like to get hold of: Taine's "The Iron Star" and "The Greatest Adventure." I'd like to know what issues of F.F.M. these appeared in, and whether or not they were at all abridged from the book versions. Perhaps you can help me out. And can I obtain those issues from your circulation department? If not probably some of your readers have them.

RALPH C. HAMILTON.

Lime Rock, Conn.

Editors Note: We have no back issues. "The Iron Star" and "The Greatest Adventure" may have been cut very slightly (it is some time since we worked on them) but they were not "abridged."

THANKS TO F.F.M.

Although I have been a devoted reader and collector of fantasy and science-fiction for years, this is the first time I've ever written a letter to any magazine.

I have always devoted enough time to my library so as to amass quite a large collection of fantasy and Stf and I am willing to trade many of these magazines and books (and, if possible, the entire collection) to any collectors or readers of fantasy and Stf. I am particularly interested in all copies of F.N. and F.F.M. before '46, and back numbers of fantasy and S.T.F. magazines and publications of every type.

Among the books I have on hand are several works of Abe Merritt, 2 books of "Burn, Witch, Burn!", 2 of "Ship of Ishtar," one only of "Face in the Abyss," "The Moon Pool," "Seven Footprints to Satan," and "Dwellers in the Mirage"; I have also "Food of the Gods" by H. G. Wells; "The Lost World" by A. Conan Doyle; "The Eye and the Finger" by Donald Wandrei; "The Werewolf of Paris" by Guy Endore; "King Solomon's Mines," "The Witch's Head," "Allan's Wife" by H. Rider Haggard; "Dracula" by Bram Stoker; "The Babyons" by Clemence Dane; and in magazine form I have *Captain Future*, 3 *Comet* science-fiction, and 3 *Future Fantasy* and about 300 other magazines and books for trading.

At the moment the magazines and books that

I just mentioned are the ones I am most interested in trading but any fellow collector can specify in a letter if he would be interested in any other anthologies or mags.

Before I finish I would like to express thanks to F.F.M. and its publishers for their discriminating taste in selecting classics of Stf and fantasy (excluding "Unthinkable") for their publication.

THOMAS BECK.

116 West 45th St.,
New York City, N. Y.

WANTS CHECKLIST OF F.F.M.

I first came across F.F.M. back in '42, and, had I immediately scoured the second-hand bookstores and sent in a ten-year subscription, I would not now, with Lamb, cry that "Fruitless, late remorse doth trace . . . a backward pace . . . her irrecoverable pace. . . ." Several years in the Army, and then a return to college left me with little time, however, and it is only now that I am able to send my appeal out to those gleeful misers, chuckling with mindless glee, 'tween stacks of yellowing F.F.M. and F.N.

I come a penitent, a humble and yet aspiring man, to beg your generosity. Be kind, you lords of fabled and uncounted volumes. You masters of towering bookshelves, guardians of legendary pulp, rulers of a thousand muted tongues, look with magnaminity towards a sciolist who would aspire to your lofty station. Discard those duplicate copies and extra copies of ancient F.F.M. and F.N. Deign to inform me of their existence, let me know if ever I may aspire to call them mine.

I do possess a copy of "The Land of Mist" by A. Conan Doyle that I would be glad to dispose of for some old F.F.M. or F.N.

Your latest, "The Man Who Went Back," was very good, but the philosophy that was inserted into the last page was rather rancid. Not that it is unfeasible, but rather because of the blatant way in which it was stated. Doyle was good, but Hume could be improved upon.

Is there anyone who can give me a checklist for back copies of F.F.M.?

THOMAS P. CURRAN.

1005 E. 60th St.,
Chicago 37, Ill.

ENGLISH ADMIRER

During the recent war I was unable to obtain my favorite reading matter, i.e., Science fiction, apart from an occasional British reprint of one of the American mags. (usually in an abridged edition) and it was only recently that I contacted the British Fantasy Library from which I have been able to borrow quite a number of wartime American issues. I am now receiving copies of F.F.M. as published and deeply regret the fact that I have missed a considerable number of its issues.

Your magazine, to my mind, is a very good publication; the novels being well selected and really worth reading, even if one has already read the stories before. I have so far read your issues containing "The Star Rover," "Minimum Man," and "Allan and the Ice-Gods," and have

just borrowed the issue containing "Unthinkable," which I have not yet got down to reading, as I like to read the long story at one sitting—that way is the best to read novels, I find. "Star Rover" was a thought-provoking story, but although it was worth reading, it was not my type of fantasy. "Allan and the Ice-Gods" was very readable and easily came up to the general standard of Haggard's work. "Minimum Man" I very much appreciated.

You say that suggestions as to future stories are very acceptable—well, what about "Doctor Fogg" by Norman Matson, which I think from my memory to be well worth printing? Then there are two stories, the authors of whom escape me—"Red Snow" and "And a New Earth," both of which have long stayed in my memory.

And now to another point, that of old issues of F.F.M. (which seems to be the general cry of many of your correspondents). I have for disposal a considerable number of books, including a number by Rider Haggard, such as "People of the Mist," "Child of Storm" and "The Wizard." H. G. Wells' "Croquet Player" (a rather scarce volume although it was published in 1938), and nine others of his; London's "Before Adam"; a Collection of Horror Stories, including stories by Lovecraft, Wandrei, and F. B. Long, etc., and many other books. These I should be pleased to swap for old issues of F.F.M., or if none of your readers are willing to part with their copies (I should think they are often too precious to let go) for wartime issues of other American S.F. mags. As a last resort these books would be sold, but I prefer to obtain in exchange those magazines that I missed through circumstances caused by the war. If any of your readers are interested, I should be pleased to send them a list of what is going.

In closing, may I wish that F.F.M. never grows less Famous, less Fantastic, nor less Mysterious!

S. G. N. ASHFIELD.

27 Woodland Road,
Thornton Heath,
Surrey, England.

FINLAY AND LAWRENCE THE BEST

Would you please print this small list? I need:

A.S.F.: July, '47; Sept. and Oct., '45.

S.S.: Win., '45; Fall, '45; Sum., '45; Win., Spring, Fall, '44.

Amazing: May, '47; June, '47; April, '47; Aug., Oct., Nov., Dec., '46.

P.S.: Any of 'em that are cheap or just free for the asking (or trading, Pos.).

Not many, eh?

You've got a fine mag, and I think the best feature is the letter section. Finlay and Lawrence are the best artists you can get, for my money, and the quantity of them is also swell. Think you could get a new story? By Bradbury mebbe?

CONRAD PEDERSON.

705 W. Kelso,
Inglewood, Cal.

(P.S.—If Don Adams in Louisiana sees this, he's got a pen pal.)

THE READERS' VIEWPOINT

CAN YOU HELP HIM?

I am about halfway through my first post-war subscription to F.F.M. and find the magazine as good as ever.

Since the peace was declared I have spent much time and money in my search for those back numbers of F.F.M. and *Fantastic Novels* which eluded me during the war years, and have managed to obtain quite a lot of issues, though I still lack a number of copies for 1940 and after. A friend and fellow-collector informs me that there was no issue of F.F.M. between the March and September, 1943, issues. Can someone verify this for me? If in some future edition you could devote a page, or part of a page, to listing the issues of F.F.M. and F.N. (year, month and volume) since the inception of these two magazines, it would be a great help to such as myself.

Anyway, I have enjoyed most of the F.F.M.'s since the much-debated change of policy, though I cannot enthuse over the use of Haggard and Wells, whose stories are fairly easily obtainable in book form. The excellent standard of the illustrations constitutes one of the factors in maintaining the magazine's high place.

If this letter reaches the readers' department I would like to take this opportunity of informing those publishers of fantasy books who send me advance notices of new volumes that I have not lived at the address they are using (apparently culled from some pre-war magazine) since 1939. Please note correct address herewith.

In closing I must apologize for the paper used for this letter, but this commodity is still in short supply, as is everything else that makes life worth living. (Would any wealthy Amer-

ican like to provide a nice home for a hard-working, heart-broken refugee from this socialist utopia?—advert.)

Seriously, though, I want to thank you for F.F.M. and offer you my best wishes for the future.

5 Lennox Gate, TOM MOULTON.
South Shore,
Blackpool, Lancashire, England.

FINLAY'S DEC. COVER

Just bought the Dec. issue of F.F.M. and turned first (as usual) to the letters section. F.F.M. is one magazine of the fantasy type which realizes how much the letters section means to its readers.

I was amused by Lin Carter's letter in this issue. He started off by stating that he didn't read F.F.M., then criticized five or six stories, the artists, departments, and the letters section. For a non-reader he seems quite familiar with the magazine, don't you think?

Finlay has done a nice cover for this month. I well remember the furore that his first illustrations caused when they appeared in *Weird Tales* back in 1936. His then revolutionary style prompted both fans and authors to write to the magazine in praise of his work. Other artists have made their appearances since then, but none has equalled the *outré* horror of his early weird drawings.

Speaking of the past, I have a number of back issues of the various fantasy and stf magazines to trade, also a few books. I am chiefly interested in securing copies of *Astounding, Unknown,* and certain F.F.M.'s.

RICHARD H. JAMISON.

8600 Mathilda Ave.,
St. Louis 23, Mo.

NO SCIENCE FICTION

Regarding the letter from Mr. O. G. Estes, Jr., and his comments on the Finlay cover of Fredric March and Norma Shearer for "People of the Ruins": There is no reason for Finlay's professional pride to keep him from using movie stills or photos as inspiration for the figures he draws. Many of the world's leading artists and illustrators use photos.

Many of the illustrators for the slick mags copy from photos, also; in fact, a very well known Saturday Evepost artist has done so often. And as for Mr. Estes having never expected to see Freddy March on the cover of F.F.M.—perhaps he missed the Lawrence cover for "Phra the Phoenician" which not only pictured Freddy March, but Preston Foster and John Carradine.

All of your artists are tops, but I would like to see some of Bok's work on the cover. He can really do some beautiful color jobs. While I am writing of Bok I would like to suggest your using some of his stories. In fact, now that "The Fox Woman" by Merritt and Bok is out of print, why don't you use it in F.F.M.?

Please, no Stf in F.F.M. The market is loaded with it now. Keep Famous *Fantastic* Mysteries fantastic.

VERNELL CORIELL.

Box 78,
Manito, Illinois.

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ROOKIE HUNT

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