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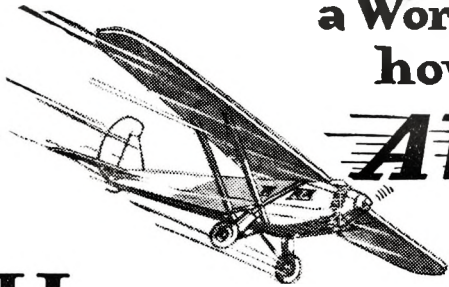
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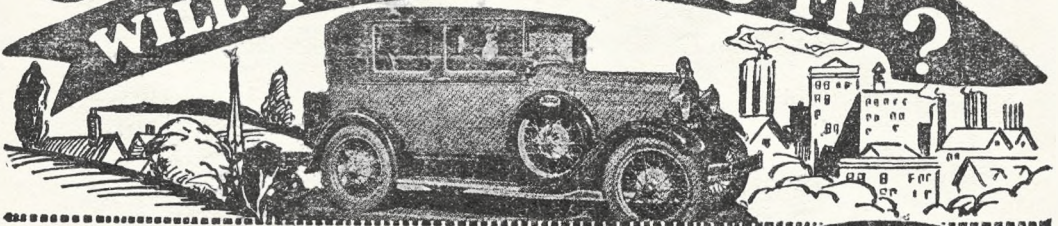
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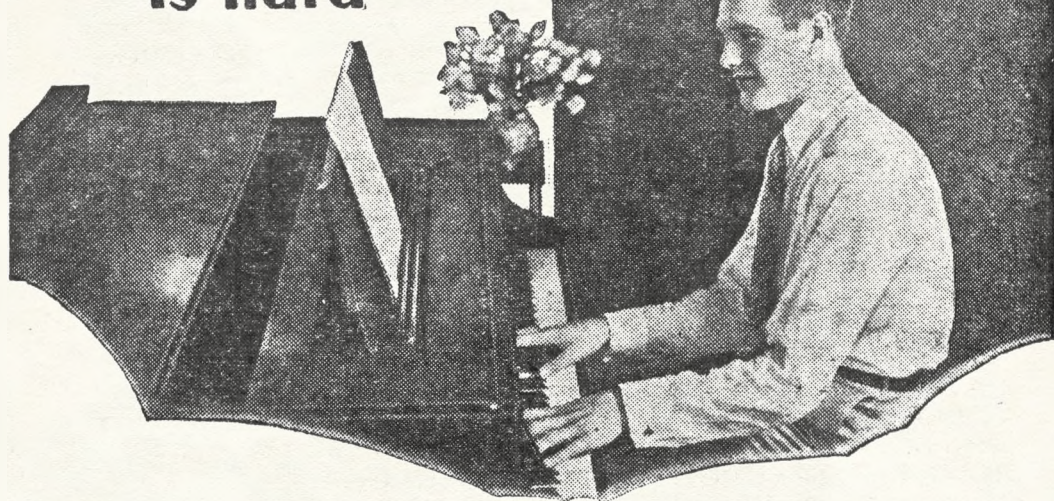
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80x24	2.35	80x24	2.05
80x24	2.45	80x24	2.15
80x24	2.55	80x24	2.25
80x24	2.65	80x24	2.35
80x24	2.75	80x24	2.45
80x24	2.85	80x24	2.55
80x24	2.95	80x24	2.65
80x24	3.05	80x24	2.75
80x24	3.15	80x24	2.85
80x24	3.25	80x24	2.95
80x24	3.35	80x24	3.05
80x24	3.45	80x24	3.15
80x24	3.55	80x24	3.25
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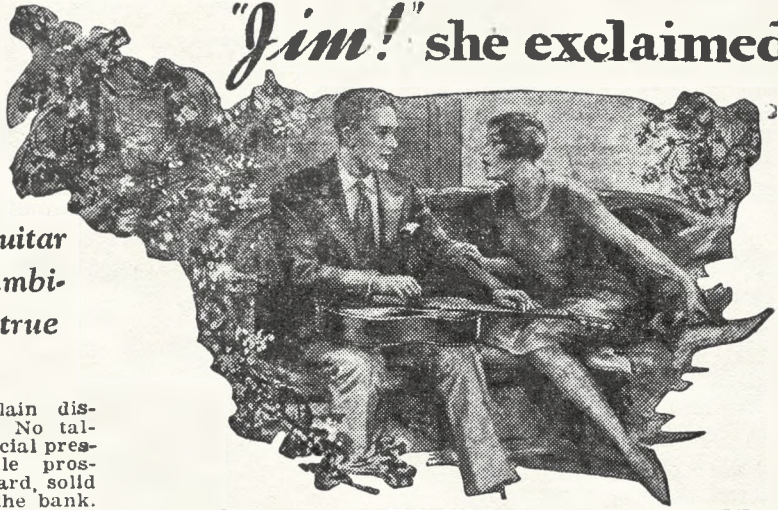
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I played to her. Dreamy "Aloha"; throbbing "Carolina Moon"; all the blues of "Moan-in' Low"—and two others. When I stopped, Marge didn't say a word for a full minute.

Then she exclaimed excitedly, "Jim! Why didn't you tell me before?"

I swallowed hard. "Because—" I began, "because, Marge—well, I guess there wasn't so very much to tell—before."

"But now," I rushed on—"I'm started for the biggest things that ever were opened up to me! Listen, Marge! I've done it at home, without a teacher, by a wonderful new method.

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Marge was quiet again. Then looking at me with level eyes, she said—"Jim, you've found yourself. I didn't know it was in you. I'm so happy."

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I flung Orne at the Professor—they went down in a heap.

## Valley of Sin

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#### CHAPTER I

##### THE PASSING OF "WINGS" POINTS

**A** WET wind sighed and moaned out of the side streets driving before it hissing sheets of sleet that bit and slashed at my face. My coat leaked; I was lonely and depressed; miserable both in body and mind and feeling like a gnat in infinity.

From the river, foghorns tooted and moaned dismally. From beyond the pall of sleet-filled dark came the

dull sounds of explosions. I wondered if it was a bursting tire or a back-firing carburetor. As the shot-like reports were repeated but much nearer, I decided that it must be the latter.

What lunacy to drive a car at that rate of speed I thought but stopped and peered ahead. I could see no lights, yet just back of where invisibility ceased roared a wide open motor. Then the noise suddenly died and I, more mystified than ever, stared at the car which sped into sight.

It appeared a commonplace



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enough taxi that rushed along now something unrecognizable crouched  
silently and without lights. A small beside him.  
figure leaned over the wheel and Above the howling and shrieking

of the wind rose the dry, hot whine of brakes. I saw as through a glass darkly, the car skid, bump the curb, bound back, and once more ram the curb then turn completely over. It all occurred so quickly and silently, due no doubt to the storm's clamor that I had the curious sensation of it being an illusion.

I hurried across the street just as two cars passed on the avenue both going too fast for safety. I found a smashed, twisted wreck piled up against the brownstone stairs of a dark deserted looking house. The reek of low grade gasoline permeated the air then as I bent over to peer into the smashed taxi, a low growl immediately followed by a moan arose.

"Hello there," I called in a loud tone.

"Not so loud, bo—" croaked a voice under the car. It added: "You ain't on de force are yu?"

"No, I'm Doctor Anthony Penn—just the man for you."

The voice again spoke:

"Dat's on de level ain't it? If 'twasnt I'd set Violet on yu or strike a match and send us both to hell. De gasoline tank's got a hole in her bigger'n my fist."

I wondered who Violet was till leaning and peering I saw a dog's head wedged under one of the wheels.

"Did you see a couple o' cars passing on de avenoo after I done the humpty dumpty act?"

"Yes," I answered as I worked trying to free the idiot inside.

"Dat's good," said the man underneath. "I would'a shook 'em O. K. if dey hadn't got me wid a bullet."

"Can you crawl or wriggle out now?" I asked.

"Nope—I ain't able to do nuttin' 'cept talk. I'm shot through one shoulder and when de old bus turned over I tink it broke me back. I feel sort o' numb like."

I pulled and hauled until I had him

from under the menace of the toppling wreck. His back was broken and I felt that he had only a short time to live. He too, was aware of it.

Just as I was setting out to get help, he stopped me.

"It ain't no use, I'm goin' to croak, you know it and I know it. Wish I could smoke but dis gas ain't no lady when it comes to matches. You acted white, Doc and I ain't seen so many as would a done what you done. De bulls what was chasing me will be here soon."

He lay where I had propped him against the area door. At his direction I had torn up some papers taken from his pocket. With his uninjured arm he held a pocket flash, by its light he examined me and smiled.

"My name is Jim Points," he chuckled and by the flash I saw he was a weazened ferret-faced man whose ears were so large and so thin they caught one's immediate attention. "Dey call me 'Wings' 'count o' me ears." As he had been speaking he had been fondling the dog's head.

"Say, Doc," began the little man, he hesitated and his voice had grown weaker. "Could you sort o' keep an eye on Violet after I kick the bucket? He's a good mutt and smarter'n hell."

"I will take care of the dog," I said, knowing it was foolish, for in my little two-room apartment I had no place for a dog.

"Shake," said Points. "I guess the police'll let you have him. De stuff dey want is back in de bus. Violet and me's alone. Take dese keys, one's de front door, one's de room—first floor back to de left. Nobody won't ask you no questions.

"De address is F— East Fifty-second Street. What's dere is mine, it will help pay for keeping Violet. Violet, dis here gent is going to be your boss. He ain't no yegg like me, but he'll treat you right." The dog looked at me and whined.

FROM down the street came the sound of men's voices; a shout as they discovered the wrecked car.

"It's dem," chuckled the dying crook.

I shouted to the men a warning about lights.

"Here's the stuff," called one of the Police in a deep bass.

"I'm here too—dat is what youse—fellers left o' me. De Doc, here, gets the reward 'cause he captured me. I give him de mutt."

Three men, two in uniform stepped into the areaway and carefully scrutinized our curious group with their flashes. I explained rapidly and in a low tone, ending with:

"The man is dying, we'd better get him to some hospital."

"Youse ginks wouldn't a pinched me if my arm hadn't a been hurt."

I did get the reward later, thanks entirely to the little crook's own efforts before he died the next morning. The newspapers published far and wide lurid accounts of the capture "at the risk of my own life" of the celebrated crook "Wings" Points. This flattering overpraise—for which the Lord bless them—brought me many patients. I began to prosper at once. Never before had I realized how lonely I was until the sadly misnamed Violet took up his residence with me. For days he mourned his master, eating little. Already I loved the dog and I think he soon grew to love me.

Having a guilty feeling in regard to the keys and address which Points had given me, I waited four days before venturing to visit what had been his quarters, now a legacy for Violet and me.

I found the house a drab, unpretentious—brownstone replica of a thousand other New York homes. It stood quite near the East river. Violet rushed up the steps sniffing.

I had the sensation that half the block was staring at me, yet as I let

myself in with the door key I saw no one and walked through a dirty hall permeated by the odor of hamburg steak.

Finding the trunk keys was not an easy matter from the rather meager directions I had, but once opened, a tin dispatch box rewarded me. It contained several thousands in Liberty bonds with conclusive evidence that Points had bought and paid for them.

In the trunk I found a quantity of cocaine which clinched my suspicions that Points had been an addict.

## CHAPTER II

### THE SECRET IN GREEN

I CAUGHT sight of a Malay Kris sheathed in an ornamental Taphang wood sheath, I decided to take it with me. It lay back of an oblong greenish brick cut with hieroglyphics. This Egyptian brick looked too new to be the real thing though I knew little of such things.

In pulling the Kris from behind the brick I knocked the latter off the mantelpiece, it fell with a sharp splintering crash on the stone hearth. With annoyance I noted that it was broken in half. Violet sniffed at it interestedly as I unsheathed the blue wavy-edged Malay dagger. I packed the Kris, rolled and lit a cigarette, then walked about the apartment.

Near the hearth my foot accidentally struck the broken green brick. Something which looked like a white stick held the fragments together. Wondering I stooped and picked it up with mounting interest.

I noted that the white object in the middle was not a stick but a number of thin ivory tablets. These, after some difficulty I was able to pull out of their hiding place, shreds of their silk wrappings still clung to them and each tablet was chained to its fellow by thin gold links.

My curiosity grew in leaps and bounds when I found each tablet

thickly covered with Arabic characters which however I was unable to read. I wondered why Arabic writing on carved gold-linked, ivory tablets should have been hidden, and in a green brick inscribed with Egyptian hieroglyphics which were, if real, copied from something, or placed on the brick to mislead. It seemed to me that Arabic inside the Egyptian was putting the cart before the horse with a vengeance.

I got up and searched the mantel for further knowledge concerning the broken brick and the ivory secret. Oddly enough I was successful for behind a very poorly done water color of an elephant with the Taj Mahal as background was a letter. On the envelope was written:

"About Brick."

The letter inside read:

Hello Wing. Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year. Yours truly is here in Wady Halfa, dusty, hot hole. Don't let no guy tell you you can get away wit nuttin' in Africa. I had a "good lay in Cairo" but after I "pulled it off" I couldn't get away to Alexandria so had to come up here which ain't no place to die in even.

I am sending you a funny looking green brick. It ain't much on looks but there's nuts as tink a heap of it. I know you are nuts on stuff like it so I send it duty paid.

I was snooping around, there ain't nuttin to do in Wady Halfa except that and get stewed and sleep. You ought to see the mosquitoes and gnats and scorpions!

Well, I was snooping around late at night and I seen an old gink in a white night-gown, running, carrying a bag. I got behind a stone pillar and a bunch o' fellers with their faces covered and what looked like bandaged jaws came running after him.

He made no sound, neither did they only the pat plunk, pat plunk, of their feet in the dust. Believe me that gink's face looked scared when I seen it under the moonlight and he was a white man too. Then they got him. They croaked him so quick I couldn't help him. I never seen such knife work. Well when he fell the bag sort o' slid my way and I picks it up thinkin' anything a

bunch would knife a feller for would be worth lifting. Then I beat it out of the scenery.

Inside the bag was this brick. I was sort o' hot for I was wise they'd give me the knife too if they'd a caught me and 'twasn't no use gettin' carved for no brick. Well the old gink with the beard turns out to be some feller by name of Garnier—a great thug on mummies and ancient dope.

They say the fellers that got him was Touaregs—a kind of wild and woolly desert guy.

Here's hoping to see you soon back in old Noo York. A feller I know is taking the brick to Alexandria where I wish to Gawd I was, and he'll mail it there. So long . . .

A. L. M.

Clipped to the back of the letter I found a short notice. "A. L. Michels suspected of robbery which occurred on November last found dead of knife wounds in native bazaar." There was much more about the man who was evidently the author of the letter.

So the brick had caused the death of one, probably two white men. Had the Touaregs known of the ivory secret?

**S**OME days later having moved all of "Wing" Points amazing legacy to my two room apartment, I got a letter of introduction to Professor Adrian Vandeen, Egyptologist. Another was given me directed to Professor Virgil Sharp of the great museum.

I had little difficulty in interviewing Prof. Vandeen, who was a portly gentleman with a myopic squint and an evidently high blood pressure.

My brick fragments were pronounced by him of Moorish origin and not Egyptian. However, he went into raptures over the glazing and color telling me that the art of making such tiles was lost. I asked him if he could give me the approximate age of the brick.

"Certainly no less than six hundred years," he said, and then with a start asked, "What was in here?"

He looked curiously at the hollow



in the fragment which had so long sheathed the ivory tablets.

"Professor," I said, "this brick was not procured in Algiers or Morocco but from what information I have, came from Wady Halfa and was brought there from the south."

"Impossible," he answered, "I don't mean to doubt your veracity but you have been hoaxed. Oh, it is common, let me assure you—even we who study this kind of thing are often—what do you call it? taken in?"

I let the answer go and asked him if it was usual for Touaregs to visit Wady Halfa? He answered that he did not believe so but was not in any way an authority on such matters.

"Would it be possible to read those hieroglyphics on the brick?"

He smiled. "Oh, yes," he answered, "they are well known. The originals are even now in the British museum." Then he added with a frown: "They were found near an oasis to the southwest of Khartum. No one ever explained that—"

I had been much disappointed until he added the latter half of his statement.

"Then my brick too, may have come from back of Khartum," I said with a smile.

"Anything is possible in Africa," he said solemnly. "The hieroglyphics are ascribed to Migah Chirop one of the earliest Pharaohs. It is a terrible curse and is delivered against a tribe of black magicians which threatened the very power of the kingdom. He curses them mind, body and soul. Here is the literal translation."

I read the words wondering what my tablets contained and if they in any way related to this diabolical tribe of magicians.

"May I copy this?" I asked.

"Certainly," he replied. Adding: "These priests were a curious lot, they were far beyond their times in some ways but depraved and vicious.

It is stated that they were addicted to hemp and opium smoking.

"The curse as you notice speaks of them as 'Spawn of the Crocodile.' The tribe had a curious idea that all had descended from a crocodile. Pharaoh it seems believed it and banished them to the Vermilion Valley. Grim and grewsome, eh?"

"Did you ever hear of a man by the name of Garnier?" I asked.

At the question his hands which had been toying with the brick, fumbled, the fragment dropped and again broke. I stopped and was amazed to see bulging out of one piece of ill-fated brick a glittering, fiery point of quivering light.

I said nothing about it for the professor's manner had grown hostile and almost insulting. He turned on his swivel chair more quickly than I thought it possible for a man of his bulk, boring me with his eyes which had grown keen and hard he asked.

"Where were you in the fall of Nineteen Sixteen?" his voice was low and suppressed.

"In that year I was an interne at the post graduate hospital," I answered feeling mystified and just a little angry. The Prof. wrote this down.

"Were you ever in Africa?" he asked.

"No," I replied brusquely, adding, "What has this to do with Garnier?"

"This," he answered, glaring at me. "Garnier was a great man and my best friend. He was murdered somewhere on the upper Nile. Just where and how we do not know. Now do you understand?" He flung his words at me excitedly, he had lost his Dutch phlegm, his lazy lethargic manner was gone, his hands blotched with cloasmic spots dug into his fat legs as he leaned staring at me.

"I believe when you look back on your treatment of me, you will feel that your rudeness was unwarranted. It was because of this very brick that

Prof. Garnier was killed. I have here a letter which may explain how I happen to know what I do."

Silently with trembling fingers he took the letter I have already quoted. I saw that there were tears in his eyes as he read and my heart softened toward him. I knew he loved Garnier. I also began to understand why men might murder for the secret of the brick, for even now my hand touched the cut edges of the great jewel which protruded from the broken edge of the brick on whose brilliant facets I had seen the sun shining.

### CHAPTER III

#### THE CLASH OF WILLS

**T**HE professor spoke more to himself than to me.

"So, so Garnier was murdered in Wady Halfa and by Moslems," he sighed. "Another riddle of the desert. Sharp and Orne were right and Garnier, poor fellow, he was wrong!"

"What was Garnier wrong about?" I asked.

The professor jumped at my question and looked at me suspiciously, "You must excuse me, Dr. Penn. If you knew the facts—"

"It's all right," I hastened to say. "But won't you tell me more about it all? I have been frank with you."

"Have you?" he asked. "Then how long have you had this letter and the—er—brick as you call it?"

"Just five days, both the brick as I call it and the letter."

Irrelevantly he said, "I am sorry that I broke it again."

"Oh, I'm glad," I said.

"Eh? what's that—? Doctor, my friend Garnier was in the employ of Prof. Sharp of whom you have no doubt heard. Sharp is not only an Egyptologist but a student of Arabic. Moreover what little I know is really his affair and not mine to tell. If I were you I should seek an early inter-

view with him. I have no doubt but that you both will find it interesting."

As I left the Professor said, "If I were you I would take any offer for the—er—brick made me by Sharp; he is a man whom it is not wise to disappoint. I fancy this object you have and the information with it has been the link lost to him through Garnier's death."

**M**ORE mystified than ever I closed the door but was firmly decided on seeing Prof. Sharp at the first opportunity; also that I would not tell him where I had secured the brick. On my way home I arranged for a safety deposit box in a vault not far from my "diggins."

Once back I took from my pocket the fragment on whose surface I had seen the twinkling, gleaming lights. Cracking away the hard almost vitreous clay I was soon holding in my palm, a stone which I knew to be a valuable diamond. It was larger than my thumb nail and inlaid on one side with a small black head. It had been roughly polished and lay in my palm a living ball of fiery lights. The thoughts of what this stone might be worth made my heart gain a beat.

It moreover decided me not to delay putting my valuables which had increased mightily into the safety of the bank vault. Taking a bundle of the bonds I decided also to include all but one of the ivory tablets. After this was accomplished I felt easier and when Violet and I had had our supper and I had attended to quite a roomful of patients, I phoned Prof. Sharp of an interview.

**T**HE museum informed me that Prof. Sharp had gone home and when I called the house number I was answered by the sweetest voice I have ever heard; a girl's voice, young and vital.

"What is it?" floated to me over the wires.

"I am Dr. Anthony Penn and I would like to speak to Prof. Sharp if it is convenient." I answered saying just what I had intended not to say.

"I'm sorry," she said, "but father's not in. Is there any message?"

I was about to ask for an appointment when she cut in with,

"Here he is and so anxious to speak to you, Doctor."

"That you, Doctor Penn?"

"Yes," I answered.

"Vandeen sent me word about your extraordinary information concerning Garnier's murder. It is immensely important to me that I see you at once. Bring the tile and its contents. I must get them immediately."

"Professor Sharp," I interrupted, the man's voice was so peremptory and impolite that I got hot. "This afternoon I gave a considerable amount of information to Prof. Vandeen which from his manner must have been important, and I was treated in a very unsatisfactory manner."

"I own the tile, or whatever it is and everything it contains. However, I shall be only too pleased to tell what I can but in return I shall expect help or if you consider it expert advice, I shall be pleased to pay for it."

There was a roar at the end of the wire.

"It's my Stele. My employee took it from the Mosk of el Kuruba. He was killed for it." Here he paused.

"Yes," I said, "and he lost it and but for me you would have never heard of it again. It is not yours Professor. Take it or leave it on that basis. Tomorrow morning I shall call on you if you desire it, if not I shall get some other Arabic scholar to help me translate the ivory tablets."

I could hear the man breathing deeply and someone speaking to him. At last he said, "All right, tomorrow morning at my office in the museum, ten o'clock."

"THIS way Doctor, right in here." An old employee at the museum ushered me into the private office of Professor Sharp. The large room was in subdued light due to the tinted transparent photographs which hung all about giving to the place an oddly church-like effect.

The odor was much like that of Vandeen's office. On the floor was a deep-piled green carpet. Two men and a girl sat staring at me evidently having stopped some conversation at my entrance. Yet in their gaze was no hostility, only impersonal, well-bred interest.

In my turn I stared at the elderly man speaking. But for the difference in our ages we might have been doubles. I think he caught the resemblance at the same moment for he sat straighter and peered at me, smiling through the red-gray beard and mustache.

"So you have come for information?"

"Yes," I said, "for which I am willing to pay and also to acquaint you with your friend Garnier's manner of death."

"Sit down," he ordered.

"I'd rather stand—now," I said tersely walking over to the table behind which Prof. Sharp sat.

## CHAPTER IV

### SHADOWS

I HANDED him the letter from A. L. Michels. His knuckles grew white as he gripped the paper; on his face appeared an exultant light as he looked toward the big man who still stared at me out of his tawny eyes.

"Vandeen was right," explosively ejaculated the Professor. "This clinches it, it can't be a hoax. Garnier was on the track—it's to the southwest—I was right. This letter is genuine."

The big man said nothing but nodded slowly.

"Where did you get that letter and what happened to Michels?" asked the Professor suddenly turning to me, eyes bright as a bird's and burning with excitement.

"Michels was found dead of a knife wound in the bazaar some days after he wrote that letter. I found it and the green brick among the effects of a dead friend."

"Who was he?"

"I don't see what that has to do with the present business."

His face grew red till the freckles were almost invisible. In a mirror I saw that my eyes too, blazed; that my freckles were almost lost in the angry red which dyed my cheeks. I unwrapped the brick or what was left of it.

"I'm not here to be catechised. I came here to get, not to give information."

"Information about my brick, as you call it?" he said sarcastically.

"You mean MY brick," I snapped.

Professor Sharp bounded up and gazed at me, his fist crashing down on the desk top.

"You are interfering with my plans. Tell me, I say, tell me," he choked. "Where are the ivory tablets? There should be seven of them inscribed in Arabic—there should be a stone with a head of the River God."

I was amazed by the accuracy of his knowledge as to what the brick contained. I was also angry for his tone; it was insulting.

I choked back a quick retort and answered, "By chance I have honestly come into possession of certain information. The man, Garnier, gave his life for the brick which you say he stole, but for a chance I should never have discovered it. When I come to you with it, you bully and insult me and give me no satisfaction."

Out of my pocket I took one of the

seven tablets which I had laboriously copied. Professor Sharp reached a trembling hand for it and devoured the writing with his eyes. How I longed for his knowledge so that I, too, might understand the mystery. At first he was exultant, rumbling.

"It's off the White Nile, just as we suspected and there is no doubt that they existed as late as fourteen two A. D.—There's a map on one—"

"Careful!" said the big man, but it was too late. I had already seen and speculated as to the scrawled diagram which was on the seventh tablet. The Professor suddenly ceased and looked at me his beard bristling.

"Oh, I knew there was a map," I said bluffing shamelessly.

"I can make it disagreeable for you, Doctor Penn, better be careful. I have had your record looked up," came from the tall man speaking in a flat, unemotional tone. Angry as I was, the tempest aroused by my accidentally acquired information, seemed out of proportion to its importance.

"In looking up my record you've done a most impertinent thing. Who are you?"

"My name is Hubert Orne. I am Professor Sharp's assistant."

I was taken back. Hubert Orne was a very great explorer. I had read his work on the Troglodytes of Tunisia with interest. I knew Professor Sharp by reputation to be a millionaire and perhaps the world's greatest archeologist.

"Will you tell me, Professor Sharp, what was written on the tablet?"

"No," he shouted, "I will not, it's none of your business."

"I'll make it my business," I exploded, adding before I thought of what it entailed, "I'll go and find out for myself!"

"You stole my secret, the work of years."

"That's a lie," I snapped. Orne's voice interrupted:

"I'll give you ten thousand dollars for the remaining six tablets and any further information you may have."

"No use now," I said.

"Twenty-five thousand," snapped the professor grasping at the straw.

"If you offered me a million I should refuse. I don't change my mind and I'll find out what it's all about if I die for it," I said.

"You will die," said Orne in his flat inflectionless tone.

"Give me my tablet and I'll go."

As I leaned forward the Professor snatched at it and jumped away from the table. There was a slight sound, and I turned to see Orne standing behind me with a cane raised. He was a most silent man in his movements. He was smiling a little and I was struck at the time by the flashing beauty of his long sharp teeth.

I picked up the two brick fragments and jumped back; the Professor leaned forward holding the ivory tablet far behind him as if it alone were precious.

"So," I said, watching Orne. "You too, are a thief, Professor."

The Professor roared something but I had seen the soul of Hubert Orne wake as it stared out balefully at me from the twin dens of his eyes, as he struck.

Simultaneously I threw the brick fragments and leaped back. Orne crumpled; the cane fell with a clatter; Professor Sharp laid the ivory tablet down and charged.

Picking up Orne I flung him at the professor; they went down in a heap; the girl had risen. I jumped toward the desk, snapped the wire on the phone receiver, picked up my tablet and ran to the door. Inside was a key. I took it and opening the door, slipped out locking it just as the Professor jerked at the knob.

**O**N MY way home I bought a number of maps of the upper Nile and its sources; what books I

could find on the region, and secured an Arabic dictionary. After thirty-one years of what I felt was humdrum life I had been suddenly swept into mystery and adventure and I can't say with sincerity, that I liked it, for I had an uneasy feeling that Orne and Sharp were men hard to beat.

I had expected some legal action would be taken against me for my assault on the Professor and his assistant but in this direction they had made no move. I on my part had no wish to call in the police.

The existence I was leading was not comfortable. I was being shadowed day and night and my every move for knowledge was blocked.

**I**T WAS now my intention to start for Africa as soon as I could put my affairs in order. To let grass grow under my feet when pitted against such men as Sharp and Orne would be playing into their hands. I made all my actions as mysterious as possible hoping it would worry them and thus force their hands. But the day that I made inquiries at the steamship office, I was attacked.

As I say, Violet and I were attacked by three men, two of them escaped but I captured the third who proved to be the employee of a well-known private detective firm. I took his card and before I let him go, forced the confession from him that it was Orne who had made arrangements for my robbery and surveillance.

They had been ordered to take no money but all papers and most particularly were they to search for ivory tablets!

## CHAPTER V

### THE HOUSEBREAKERS

**O**N THE evening of the hold-up I bought two big trunks and a heavy steel and leather collar for Vio-

let. Going to the vault every time I wanted to look at the tablets was a bother yet my person was no safe place to keep them. Finally I hit on the plan of making minute tracings on glazed linen with waterproof ink. These, together with the maps of the region, I secreted inside Violet's collar which fastened with a small but very strong padlock. I knew that no one would be able to break the collar while the dog lived. So Violet became the carrier of the secret.

My preparations were evidently well known for on the evening on which I received my passport, I had a personal phone call from Professor Sharp in which he begged me to come to his house for a few minutes. I was surprised to find myself accepting the invitation. Really I wanted to look at Miss Sharp again and have her perhaps speak to me.

At his house I saw signs of packing and wondered idly who was leaving. He led me into a great shadowy library more than half museum, redolent of sandalwood and tobacco where he offered me a cigarette as he began to talk.

"Doctor, you don't realize what it is you are embarking on, nor would you treat me in the manner you are doing if you knew that you have virtually stolen—"

"I've stolen nothing," I interrupted angrily. "But that's more than you and Orne can say. I've been attacked by detectives in his and your employ; I have been harrassed in every way; my apartment has been rifled not once but three times and you talk of stealing!" Angry as I was I had to confess the Professor's face showed only furious amazement.

"You must be insane," he spluttered.

"I can prove that Orne had me held up and had I not been stronger than the average and accompanied by my dog I should most certainly have been robbed. Of course I took it

for granted you two worked together."

For a long time he looked at me, then said, "I had nothing to do with it, my methods are different. I asked you here to give you fifty thousand dollars for the ivory tablets."

"I refuse," I answered.

I really had no actual enmity against the Professor but hated Orne just as he did me, perhaps one of those innate instinctive hatreds that nearly everyone has. But now I was beginning to feel that the Professor would fight fair. Somewhere a phone rang. The Professor left the room to answer it but hurried back saying: "It's for you, Doctor."

"Hello, dis is Mike. Dat you Doc?" Mike was a penniless patient who cleaned my apartment and generally made himself useful. I had asked Mike to watch my apartment and told him where I was going so that he might call me if anything out of the usual took place.

"Yes, this is Dr. Penn at the phone."

"Listen, Doc, a swell car stops at de corner of Sixty-fifth, a tall gink wid a fur coat makes a sneak fer yur number, he opens yer door wid a key he had an' toins de light on. Den he goes out and calls de skirt wot was sittin' in de car, she comes in wid him and dere bot' in de waiting room now."

"What did the man look like?" I asked.

"De guy is bigger'n Dempsey and he'd eyes you could put yur fist between dey was dat far apart."

"And the girl?" I asked growing angrier and angrier.

"She is some jane wid about a million dollar fur coat on."

"Thanks, Mike," I said. "If he goes into the other room he'll get the surprise of his life for I left Violet guarding the fort. I'll be right around."

I thought fast as I rejoined the

Professor. Had he gotten me here to make this offer while his daughter and Orne gave my effects a personal search? Certainly they must have both been aware of my coming here.

I looked at the Professor somberly for in spite of what had happened I liked him, and we looked so much alike that I detested the idea of the man being dishonest.

"Professor," I said. "Did your daughter or Orne know that I was to be here at this hour?"

"What the devil? My daughter knew nothing about it but Orne suggested raising the stakes. I told him it would be no use." He added with a wry smile.

"I'm glad," I said.

"About what?"

"Glad that she didn't know that I was here." Then I told him the facts.

He jumped up, "This is impossible!"

"Come with me and see for yourself, it's only six blocks. If he's hurt my dog, by God, I'll wring his bull neck!"

**I**NSIDE my apartment we could hear Orne's flat high-pitched voice talking very loudly for him, now and then answered by the determined sharp tones of a woman.

In the dark hall Mike joined us. "All right, Mike." He turned and silently went downstairs.

I whispered to the Professor, "I left my door locked. Orne must have had keys made."

Occasionally the deep rumbling growls of Violet made the triologue complete.

"If you hurt that dog, Hubert, I shall tell Father—I'll never speak to you again!"

"But—" expostulated the voice of Orne, "if I don't disable the brute, Penn will find us in this ridiculous situation."

"I don't understand why you came here, how you got in or what led you

to intrude into Dr. Penn's bedroom," she spoke tartly.

"All's fair in love and war and I'll explain everything."

"Then suppose you do," I said opening the door.

"Yes, by all means," said the Professor whose eyes flickered over the scene.

What I saw was too much for my sense of the ridiculous. For a moment I did my best then burst into peal after peal of laughter in which I was joined by the Professor.

The girl stood on top of my sitting room table, the delicate sharp splendor of her face vividly etched against the shadowy walls. She turned her eyes on us but there was no laughter in their depths.

Standing in the open door his head turning slowly, guarding his two prisoners was Violet, his long white fangs bared, flashed in the gaslight. Perched on the bureau top was Orne looking more immense than ever.

A portion of his overcoat was torn away and one trouser leg was ripped; his face was positively fiendish as he stared unwinkingly at me; in his hand he held a heavy glass paper weight. It was easy to see that Violet had driven my two visitors to these ridiculous perches and held them there.

Having no humor in him, Orne would never forgive me for this affront to his dignity. Suddenly I stopped laughing.

"Come here, Violet," I ordered. "Good boy!" patting his big scarred head. As he looked up I could have sworn he grinned. Deliberately he walked over to his cushion and sat down.

"May I help you, Miss Sharp?" I asked meekly.

"No thank you," she said attempting to jump down, but her abominable French heels caught in the torn table cover and she tripped. I caught her in my arms and thus held her for

a moment I am never likely to forget, then set her down.

I knew that I blushed and it made me angry, the warm thrill of her firm, satiny, little hand seemed to linger where it had pressed my neck. In falling her hat pin had made a long scratch on my cheek. Her eyes blazed up into my face, the hard light died as she gasped and before I knew what was happening she was dabbing with a microscopic handkerchief at the bleeding scratch.

Never had I felt like such a fool!

"It's nothing," I stammered.

Eve Sharp ceased her dabbing; Orne had left his perch, the Professor faced him belligerently and I stood embarrassed, cutting a far from heroic figure. Violet was watchfully waiting.

"Well, sir?" rasped the Professor.

Orne's Adam's apple bobbed up and down excitedly, yet his face remained calm. "We—"

"Speak for yourself," interrupted Miss Sharp. "You asked me to come in while you got a prescription. It was too dark to read the sign and until you told me, I did not know whose quarters these were."

"I came here to see if I could discover anything that would throw light on this man's plans. To me," Orne added, "the end justifies the means. I had keys made; I was doing everything in the Professor's interest."

"You knew I should never countenance house-breaking and burglary," exploded the Professor.

"Yes, I knew that, therefore I, who hesitate at nothing when I want a thing, took the responsibility," said Orne.

"Did you find anything interesting? Any ray of sunlight to guide you?" I taunted.

"No," he said unemotionally, "I found nothing!"

"Then let's forget it," I said.

I rather pitied Orne. Being sensi-

tive I had the feeling that he must be suffering horribly. Eve Sharp's lips had lost their curves as she contemptuously measured him with her eyes.

"I understand everything so far as this matter goes," I said to the Professor, "and I think Violet has handled the situation."

"Good-bye Professor," I said as we shook hands. "You'll hear from me."

"Au revoir," he said. His firm hand-clasp remained a sensation after they were gone.

## CHAPTER VI

### THE SHARPS AGAIN

**N**EXT morning just before the steamer sailed I mailed a letter to the Professor in which I explained that he could find me at Khartum or el Obid.

I reasoned that I was selfish in keeping from him what I knew, yet I would have told him all had it not been for his own conduct. After I had posted the letter, I sat watching the passengers arrive.

I felt rather like a fool setting out on this adventure with little or no knowledge as to what I should find and only knowing one definite fact, the location. The ship I traveled on was the La Paloma whose first port was Marseilles where I intended disembarking and from there on my route was hazy.

No obstruction hindered my embarkation and so far as I could see no one was interested in me. I found Violet comfortably housed between decks and took him for a walk.

The lunch gong beaten frantically added its turmoil to the already noisy La Paloma's clamor. Upon strolling into the dining saloon the head steward asked me my name and then smiled obsequiously and to my amazement said "that my friends were already seated."

Thinking he must have made some



mistake, I followed him and found myself staring into the smiling faces of Professor Sharp and his daughter, both looking rather anxious despite their smiles. My face must have been easy reading for they burst into a relieved laugh.

"Welcome," said Eve Sharp, "you see the two bad pennies will turn up."

"This is a pleasure," I stammered as I sat down.

"You do the unexpected, my friend. Eve and I had visions of stern anger, the turning of a haughty back and something like this, 'Why have you followed me, your conduct is outrageous'."

"It is, too," said Eve.

"I mailed a letter to you, Professor, telling you where you could find me."

He smiled at this delightedly then frowned. I heard him mutter something about hoping Orne didn't fall foul of it.

That lunch changed everything for me. I felt like a kid thinking of the Christmas Holidays. I talked nonsense.

"Now," said the Professor, after we had lighted our smokes, "let's adjourn to my sitting-room." Eve was rather silent and I noticed that she shot oblique glances at us now and then.

"Professor," I began, "after I got to know you last night, I felt selfish and stupid and rather mean and I want to tell you the whole story of how I got into this and I want to show you the tablets."

"You haven't got them with you?" he asked.

"No but I have waterproof tracings."

"Do you think," he asked before I began my explanation, "that Violet would be allowed in here? I need him, he's one of the most important properties."

"Certainly," said the professor and sent for him.

They brought Violet in and I finally got her collar off, the key had to be turned twice, which fact was hard to remember and with some difficulty I extracted the oiled-silk package.

"Why, that's a splendid hiding place," said Eve.

There was a knock at the door and I put Violet's collar in my pocket as the Professor called "Come in."

"Open de doh please, I is encumbered," came a rich, deep voice. The Professor agilely sprung for the door and flung it open.

A small wrinkled negro stumbled into the cabin carrying a roll of what looked like maps. "Dah de is, Marse Virgil and I suh hopes you ain't gwine to make me tote 'em back from where I had to git 'em—"

"Hannibal," said the Professor, "Doctor Anthony Adam Penn is to be with us on this trip." I wondered how he knew the second A in my name stood for Adam, but turning to me, he continued, "Dr. Penn, Hannibal goes with me on all my little jaunts. He cooks and is a generally handy man to have about."

"Dat I is, ain't nuttin' I don't do."

Hannibal had a face canyoned and fissured by wrinkles, arms like a chimpanzee, wise, bright eyes set in a glistening black face and the shiniest gold teeth in his mouth that I ever saw. I learned after that he used metal polish on them.

"Yessuh, I has traveled. I been whar de Inkuses died, in Egypt, in China whar I ain't gwine no moh, to de Easter Island and to de Mesopotamia wha God lived while he writ de ole testament. I tell yu, Doctor Adam, de place I hasn't ben to, ain't!"

"Eve will leave us at Cairo," said the Professor, "and I believe, Doctor, that you will get all the adventure you want on this particular trip."

"I may go all the way with you," broke in Eve. "I'm twenty-one and over and if I want to go—"

"We'll settle that later," sighed the

father. "I assure you, Doctor, that the hardest portion of our adventure will be leaving her behind."

"Yes, I know it will," I said, not realizing how it sounded. But he spoke again.

"You know Orne's a determined chap. A valuable man, but I wish just the same that you hadn't written that letter to me, particularly since Eve and I had the row we did with him."

I did not answer but looked at her left hand where she had worn a huge solitaire emerald ring, catching the flash of her eyes as she followed my gaze.

## CHAPTER VII

### SECRET EGYPT

**I**HANDED the Professor the sheets of tracings with the map. His excitement was infectious.

Eve leaned forward staring at her father with breathless interest. It was easy to see they were of the same clay. She, too, was fond of difficult things. My heart dropped; for the moment, there was nothing difficult about me!

"My knowledge of this cursed country will help us vastly, for we shall go equipped or at least as prepared as mere humans can be, against such a land of Sheitan. It lies, by the way, not far from where the Egyptians mined much of their gold. In those days it was the hinterland of Ethiopia.

"I ran across the excerpt twelve years ago while studying the Papyri in Turin. Ptolemy Philadelphus seems to have been aware of the site and shunned it. Herodotus alludes to it under the name of 'There is a place where the dead live, a Valley of Sin.'"

I was intensely interested but dizzy with the Professor's quotations and asked him, "What is 'The Wall'?"

The Professor looked startled, then laughed.

For many years it has been my be-

lief that somewhere among the chaff of superstitious legends there existed the grain of a great secret which the centuries have kept. Yet here and there a student bent on its riddling, sees some small facet or clue.

"Garnier, whom I employed, stumbled on the answer from data given him by me. That it is still guarded by Islam, you know, for Garnier and Michels were murdered. If it was known that we hold the keys, we too would pay the price. That is why I so dislike Orne having any inkling. He hates you, Doctor Penn.

"Khufu Cheops, a powerful Pharaoh of the fourth dynasty, the builder of many pyramids, speaks of the growing power and wickedness of the Priests of Set on a Stele which I deciphered.

**"S**ET was the Devil of the nether world. Khufu complains that they had hidden the Mummy of Menes the earliest Pharaoh we know of. Ppy, the first of the fifth dynasty, a powerful monarch who fought with and conquered the Ethiopians, caused these Priests of Set to flee.

"With them they took their vast treasures, their women and their slaves. The Priests were magicians and growing proud and wicked, blaspheming against all but their Devil God Set and Osiris and Horus to whom they gave debased qualities.

"Ppy pursued the Priests of Set into the desert and far into the bowels of the earth. Here by their magic they loosed a great river which swallowed the warriors of Ppy, so the hieroglyphics have it. Here in some retreat the Priests of Set lived, yet they had spies in the land and won recruits.

"Flinders Petrie ran across their trail in Papyri found at Luxor and Thebes. Then we lose sight of them, that is, directly, until after the Hyksos were expelled. I am merely giving you a resumé. My data is more

voluminous. It has cost me thousands and the work of years."

"By Jove, Professor, I don't wonder you were ready to scalp me when I wouldn't turn over the tablets," I said.

He smiled as he resumed.

"Now we come to the new kingdom at Thebes. About 1550 to 1202 B. C. during the eighteenth to twentieth dynasty we hear again of the Priests of Set, this time in the shapes of animals, as having the power of invisibility.

"They descended, on a raid, and captured vast stores of Papyri; the Mummies of Pharaoh, treasure in gold and precious stones. It was Tutankhamen who pursued them. He discovered the entrance to their mountain lair and it was he who wrote the curse you have read; he who walled up their exit so securely.

"We hear nothing more directly until the Arab invasion. Under Omar the first in 640 A. D. now comes the most astounding news, later spoken of by Moizz Eddim Allah the founder of Cairo. It seems that Omar's forces fought the Touaregs.

"More than that he built a great dam across the Kor onto whose floor the valley exit opened. A 'Kor' as you know, is a dry river-bed which flows only during the times of flood, occurring in the rainy season. This wall or dam was inscribed with Pharaoh's curse and to it Omar added a potent one of his own.

"Slowly the valley filled with water and now the entrance to the 'Valley of Sin' is deep under the surface of the lake. To think of it," he said with a sigh, "we—you and I may live to talk with Egyptians of the ancient regime. Why, they are living Mummies! Think what secrets they can reveal; think of their Papyri; of their treasures; of their arts lost to us. Isn't the risk worth taking?"

"It is," I said.

"Omar, to show his trust in the re-

maining Touaregs, had given them the sacred tile, inside of which was written by Omar himself on tablets of ivory, the history and everything pertaining to the 'Valley of Sin' and its inhabitants so far as he knew it.

"There was also a map and instructions as to how this place could be reached. On the tile in which were hidden his tablets, Omar had inscribed the hieroglyphic curse of the Pharaoh. We had heard of a tile at el Kurana on which was inscribed pictures.

"Garnier stole it and was evidently pursued and killed. But for the presence of Michels, the crook, it would now be back from where it had been purloined. The lake is known as the 'Lake of the Red Moon.' The region is taboo.

"Do you still want to go?" asked Professor Sharp.

"More than ever," I answered.

"You may never come back. If these Priests of Set survive they may have powers we know nothing of. I don't believe in magic, yet there are many forces of which we are still ignorant. I know that we scientists are like men who stand looking in through the windows of the house of knowledge."

## CHAPTER VIII

### SIMBA SCREAMS

**I**T SEEMED as I lay in my bunk that night that our expedition was all but a ghost hunt, yet I knew Professor Sharp was no spook collector but a man whom the whole archeological world looked up to. I understood that he intended to penetrate into this "Valley of Sin" where he hoped to find survivors—men who lived and breathed; who spoke hieroglyphics, a language which had been dead thousands of years.

We arrived uneventfully in Marseilles, uneventfully I say, yet for me the greatest event of my life had

taken place. I was miserably, delightfully, deliriously in love with Eve Sharp. I had long since ceased pitying her husband to be, and longed with all the hope I had in me to be that man! Violet, too, had become her slave.

At Marseilles, Professor Sharp became a dynamo of energy.

Soon the expedition was ready to embark, a mountain of luggage all packed in fifty to sixty pound loads. As I hurried to the hotel from the dock I could have sworn I saw Vandeen's face peering at me from behind the door of a wineshop.

When I spoke of this to Eve and Professor Sharp, they looked at each other with frowns. Eve, it seems, had caught sight of a man resembling Orne. This, together with the fact that Professor Sharp had received no word from his assistant, made him feel sure something was up, yet he allowed nothing to block our plans. That very night we slowly steamed out of the harbor in a small tramp which was to be ours until we disembarked at Port Sudan.

**E**VE had insisted that she should come with us as far as Khartum or el Obid where she would possibly join her friend, Evelyin Millard, who was at Thebes. Professor Sharp was the best executive I have ever worked with, despite the fact we were in the tropics where we dealt only too often with venal officials and natives who hardly realize that time exists, yet Professor Sharp kept us on the move.

Eve made no objection to leaving us at Khartum and this made me deeply dejected, as I had the feeling she wanted to be out of my company.

Professor Sharp now piled work on my shoulders which kept me from being as unhappy as I might have been, for Eve had given me not one really kind word for several days before her departure and had skillfully

kept me from telling her what I felt she knew.

The heat had become terrific, yet I carried on my duties without letting out any squeals, for I knew I was being tested by the Professor of whom I was growing fonder day by day.

As we progressed, the country had grown into a succession of rocky ridges, bare, blistering summits where the horizon danced and trembled under the biting rays of the vertical sun.

In the valleys were streams to be forded, many swamp-bordered, the abiding place of crocodiles. Our little army continued to move on steadily, our bodies tortured by flies and mosquitoes which in the valleys were terrific.

I worked hard at acquiring a smattering of Swahili and Arabic terms. Professor Sharp was proficient in both tongues.

The majority of our men were tall, long-legged river "Shenzi" (wild savages) a number, however, were Sudanese and Mohammedan, yet these were illiterate, and the professor who had chosen them from tribes living far distant from our destination, hoped that they had never heard of the "Valley of Sin."

I had grown my beard and looked like a younger replica of Professor Sharp, the natives called us "Red Beard" and "Son of the Red Beard."

I believe my proficiency with a gun delighted the Professor as well as surprised him for I hadn't spoken of my marksmanship.

When I overcame the deceptiveness of the African atmosphere I was lucky enough to bring down three running hartebeest with my two twenty-six Mannlicher.

"Why didn't you tell me you were an expert shot?" he asked.

"By Jove, I'd hate to stand up against you!"

On that night, upon reaching the

Sivo, we built a boma of thorns for we heard the roar of many lions. Donkey meat to them is most delectable so our fires were kept high. Later I lay in my bunk thinking of Eve. I had visions of her in Luxor, Thebes or Cairo with men, handsome men, all paying her court—A bird hooted dismally and as regularly as a mechanical toy.

Outside the sentries clicked and chattered, it was so dismal that the air seemed pigmented with soot; far away yelping and howlings told of a jackal or hyena kill. Then amongst all other sounds I could have sworn I heard the high-pitched scream of a human being—the sound a man might make in an agony of terror.

I sat up, grasped my rifle, swung my feet over the edge of the cot—being careful of scorpions, I was learning Africa's way. The Shenzi sentries had ceased chattering and listened. Again the high wailing notes broke through the silence.

I jumped out by the fire and heard beyond the zeriba a mighty snarl. The donkeys made the night hideous with their terrified braying and squeals.

With eyes rolling the sentries chattered something about "simba" to me and began piling wood on the fires. A strong reek blew in through the piled acacia boughs which formed our zeriba upon whose long thorns the flames glinted. It was a familiar odor yet I did not immediately place it. Violet snuffled, then growled.

As I stepped forward with my rifle cocked, I was amazed to see the wall of thorns suddenly bulge as if at some tremendous impact. Almost simultaneously a man's head appeared over the top—how he climbed that terrific rampart of thorns I have never understood.

He was a very tall black Shenzi and seemed entirely oblivious of the thorns which tore at him as he clamored over the top and rolled down almost into the crackling fire.

A terrific wound in his shoulder spurting blood; he paid no attention to us but twisted his head back and stared behind him.

The zeriba walls cracked and there appeared over the top of the partially broken wall the huge head of a lion. He did not look at me but down at the wounded native who stared up at him, his green-yellow claws hooked at the branches as he hoisted his bulk higher, lips drawn out and up from his teeth, his eyes glared. The flames lit the tawny shoulders under whose skin the muscles rippled and bunched. I raised my rifle and put four shots into the lion's brain.

I had carried a full clip in my left hand and as rapidly as I could I reloaded the rifle but found the precaution unnecessary.

"That was good work, Adam," said the Professor, and for the first time I saw his striped pajama-clad figure holding a heavy double-barrelled cordite rifle just behind me. "That reloading was what I liked best of all! Now let's see to the Shenzi."

The natives began a great "chauri" (talking and singing). I was busy attending to the wounded man's shoulder, a similar injury to a white man would have certainly caused death for he was a pincushion of long needle-like spines. The Professor, who had been carrying on a conversation with him, rose suddenly.

"This boy was bringing a letter to us, he says our boats are being attacked by Arabs. This man's a 'Nyam Nyam,' he continued. "I wish I had their dialect better."

"Do you think he can be right? This is no Arab country, is it?"

"No," said the Professor thoughtfully. "But you can never tell in Africa. From what he says I think they are Touaregs—it's serious and we must relieve the situation. The most curious news the fellow has is that a white man is fighting to save our supplies and the boats. It was

this white man who wrote the letter which the boy lost when the lion stalked him."

I was even more perplexed, "Can it be Orne?"

"No, I thought of that, Mgongo says the white man is small!"

## CHAPTER IX

### SAFARI

**D**AWN found us speeding as fast as the nature of the land and the donkeys would allow. Mgongo asserted the boma where the fighting was going on was not over seven hours' march away.

Professor Sharp drove and cajoled the men on, now and then using the hippo-hide kiboko (whip) on some malingerer. Papyrus swamps lay about us and the Sivo coiled its way sluggishly between the swaying apple-green reeds; great flocks of Egyptian geese arose about us.

We had not found the letter which Mgongo had tied to his spear. Violet trotted by my side. I had made for him moccasins as his paws had become cracked from the hot sand; he also wore a spine pad.

Vultures wheeled in the tight-stretched, green blue sky. Professor Sharp was untiring, and in spite of the heat and the flies his temper remained steady, but his face wore a worried expression. I caught him listening and often he swept the horizon with his field glasses.

Who in the world could this white man be, I wondered, and why did he protect our property and jeopardize his life by so doing? I couldn't help feeling that in spite of Mgongo's words the stranger would prove to be Orne.

Soon after we resumed our march we heard distant reports, but as yet we could see nothing of friend or foe. We had entered a region of greyish-yellow grass in which grew a thorny vine which tore at our legs as we

waded through. Professor Sharp came back to me with orders relative to the coming fight.

He walked beside me, his eyes staring ahead.

As we reached the edge of the ridge the sound of firing grew louder.

In the background a loop of the river glittered like burnished brass, drawn up on a sand spit fringed on one side by fever-green sedge were our boats, anchored in midstream was our launch, another was tied close in to shore. Behind a rampart of crates and boxes knelt the figure of a small white man in riding breeches and light shooting coat, a huge topi hid his face.

He was deliberately covering an ant hill with his rifle behind which, we from our positions could see a number of hooded black burnoose-clad figures, others were fanned out in hiding about the landward end of the sandspit.

"Touaregs as I feared. Somewhere there has been a leak," said the Professor.

The desert tribesmen saw us as we streamed down the sides of the nulla, perhaps four hundred yards away. Without a shot, without a sound they slunk away. For a short distance only we followed them, for something about their black and blue burnouses, their bandaged jaws and faces hidden by "haiks" made my skin creep.

Our launch on the river began a frantic tooting and the besieged men flowed out toward us wildly jubilant. For the most part they were long-legged Shenzi but amongst them were a few giant-headed Nubians.

The white man did not come to meet us. We, however, hurried behind a rampart of boxes, crates and goods of all kinds, some of which contained dynamite and it made us shudder to think of the danger. Probably they had no idea that a stray bullet in one of the dynamite cases would have sent them to kingdom come. I was

thinking this when I heard Professor Sharp shout. His tone had in it anger and joy. Imagine my surprise when I saw him take the slight figure of the European into his arms and hug him!

"You little fool—" he was saying; even then I had no suspicions. "You disobedient little—"

I gasped with amazement, fear and joy for I looked into the face of Eve Sharp.

"Why did you do this, Eve? Didn't you know the danger you were in? Good Lord, Adam, what am I to do with this girl?"

"Aren't you glad to see me, Doctor?" she said.

"Of course," I began. "But—"

She broke in. "If it hadn't been for me those Arabs would have stolen everything. Your boys have the hearts of gazelles. I found them on the point of deserting the landed baggage."

"I give up," said the Professor. "How did you manage it?"

"It was easy enough. You men were too busy to notice my preparations. I bought a launch and here I am. Yesterday afternoon I sent Mgongo to you with a 'chit.' He knew the country and I told him I'd turn him into a jackal if he didn't find you. I kept the searchlight going all night and the enemy were wretched shots. I hope I didn't kill any."

## CHAPTER X

### THE SEVENTH KOR

**T**WO weeks passed, days of joy for me. My admiration for the Professor had grown into a real affection, while I loved Eve Sharp with all my heart and soul. During the days we puffed and panted up against the river's current as rapidly as we could as the water was falling, days of fierce heat and glaring light, insects tortured us at times but I was gloriously happy.

Stretches of forest now had to be crossed, then would come rocky rolling plains interspersed with tamarisk, tall grass which cut us cruelly, and many aloes and euphorbias, stunted doom palms fringed the banks. As the river dwindled it grew hotter and more like the inside of an oven.

We had passed six Kors or dry river beds and numberless minor gorges and crevices. The last portion of our journey had been gruelling work, yet Eve had been the best sport in the crowd, always bright and cheerful. We were all excited for we expected soon to enter the Seventh Kor and somewhere blocking its course was "The Wall."

Now we had to dig for water and often had difficulty in finding it and at best it was nasty alkaline stuff. Impalpable dust rose about us. A red hot twilight seemed to fill the Kor up which we wound our way looking like a line of driver ants. On each side towered cliffs, tilted and twisted, seamed with black and white but of a general ruddy brown.

Suddenly Eve interrupted my dismal foreboding thoughts.

"I know it opens up behind that obelisk."

I knew she meant the Seventh Kor, but she had made the same assertion before.

We reached the huge pillar of porphyritic rock which stood just beyond a reaching buttress. This time she was right for, rising up at nearly right angles ran a narrow but much smoother gorge. High up on its edges were hair-like patches of green; these I knew were trees. Three thousand feet of space separated us.

Back of us toiled the snake-like line of our safari. The men marched silently, which in their case was a bad sign. So for four long miles we hurried on. The Kor instead of narrowing grew broader, then it suddenly ceased. My heart sank.

The Professor's frown of anxiety broke into a twisted smile.

"Come on," he said. "This place is well hidden."

We found that the Kor did not cease but only appeared to. A buttress of rock jutted out and hid the angle at which the gorge turned. Beyond appearing through blood colored dust there rose "The Wall" utterly blocking the Kor. All doubt left my heart.

For a long moment we stood gasping as we stared up at the immense obstruction which loomed above us two hundred feet high and not less than three hundred yards wide.

## CHAPTER XI

### TOUAREGS

**B**ACK of us the cliffs hid the remainder of the safari; on either side, towering sheer and seeming to bend in on us, rose the Kor walls. For a moment, we forgot ourselves and shouted and danced.

"It's a fact, a bona fide fact!" rattled the Professor.

"See! the sand is damp by the wall," laughed Eve excitedly.

"I smell water," was my addition to the general babble.

"You see," almost sang the Professor, "this is man's work, note the hewn blocks. Took advantage of a natural dyke or dam and built on it."

Our position was dangerous in the extreme, for if the lake overflowed, we should be drowned like rats in a trap. There was no high place to take refuge on. For this same reason we could not blow our way through the wall for through the breach would rush the lake water which would drown us. Beyond the wall the cliffs drew back and the Kor became wider.

"It will take us some time," said the Professor slowly. "A dangerous, ticklish piece of work. It's lucky I've got the ropes, tackles and ladders."

Often I had wondered why he car-

ried so many sections of light strong ladder. Now I understood and admired his forethought.

The Professor talked on intently and concentrated on the task at hand.

"I fancy that once we reach the summit of that wall we shall be faced by another problem."

"What do you mean?" I asked.

"If I am correct in my deductions," stated the Professor, sweeping the upper edge of the wall with his binoculars, "there will be a lake with no banks but the cliff sides, as they are here, sheer. Before we can begin demolishing this dam we shall have to construct rafts which can be made from the trees which no doubt will be found growing at the far end of this lake. I hope I am not wrong on this point. In any case we have our collapsible boat, yet it's no small problem and the less time we waste over it the better."

"Dăd," asked Eve, "on what side of the cliff will the entrance to 'The Valley of Sin' be?"

"It's back of the southern wall." His voice grew happy and proud. "To think of success so near—so near—after years of ridicule—I've been called a fool for my belief in this very wall."

**F**ROM behind the shoulder of rock which jutted into the Kor there suddenly came cries and shouts. Subconsciously, I wondered why the first of our safari had not rounded the cliff buttress. The pandemonium made up of squealing donkeys, screaming, shouting men all amplified by the echoes, continued. I was already running down the Kor. I had expected some trouble for days.

Just as I appeared there came from above the report of a rifle sounding like a cannon. Below, the men's faces were raised toward the spot from which had come the shot. This was a fissure which ran into the gorge one



hundred and fifty yards above the Kor floor.

In this narrow black opening stood a figure which almost melted into the shadow which packed the crack. A patch of powder smoke floated in the reddish twilight air of the gorge. The distance separating us was over two hundred yards.

One of the donkeys which was bearing a pack of explosives had been hit. These were painted bright red. Luckily the little beast had fallen over and lay quiet amid his frightened companions.

"He's going to shoot again," called the professor.

His voice more than his words brought my rifle up. I held the sights on the figure who had raised his rifle. Then I squeezed the trigger. My first shot took no effect, my second caused him to look up and my third whirled him about. The figure above slowly bent forward, fell face down with one hand hanging limp over the brink.

"It's a Touareg," exploded the professor. "I feared something of this kind. You've settled him though, Adam. It was splendid shooting. Don't seem to be any more of them," he added. "I wonder if that brute was aiming at the dynamite—if he'd hit it, it would have played merry hell—"

My ears rang from the sounds of my own shots and I had a gone feeling at the pit of my stomach. It's one thing killing men in battle, quite another standing up, aiming and shooting a chap.

Eve came to me and said in a low voice,

"It's awful! But you saved us, Doctor. It just had to be, you couldn't help it!"

Up there in the cliffs the dead Touareg's hand protruded over the edge and seemed to point menacingly.

The vivid vermilion case containing the explosives was gingerly set on the back of Eve's Abyssinian mule and held there by the headman, Ka-

sami—At a word the loosely articulated line once more began its snail-like serpentine progress.

"See this rifle," growled the professor, frowning as he scrambled over to the northern cliff edge under the cleft where the dead man's gun had fallen.

I looked carefully at the broken twisted thing he carried. All the cartridges in the clip had exploded at the rifles' impact.

"It's a modern Springfield 303, isn't it?" I asked.

"Yes, a late model of American make! Where did he get it?"

"Couldn't he have bought it?" I queried.

"No, I don't think he bought this gun."

"Well then, how did he get it?" I asked.

"I'd wager it was given him for just this purpose. I would give a good deal to search that dead body up yonder." His tone was low and troubled. Both of us looked up, already a number of vultures were gathered over the corpse.

"One thing's sure," said the professor. "There aren't any more live ones up there or those scavengers wouldn't light in that way—I wish you hadn't written that letter." His tones were worried.

"You mean that you think Orne had something to do with that Touareg's presence?"

"Yes," almost whispered the professor, "he knows this Gehenna and the Touaregs; it was his idea to paint ammunition and explosive cases vermilion, a good idea too. The Touaregs waited till we were away, then shot at the box. There's too much coincidence in this, it can't be accidental!"

"I see," I said, "but where is Orne?"

"God only knows, but not far off I'm afraid. What we will have to do is watch and put on steam—"

## CHAPTER XII

## CROCODILES

**WE FOUND** the men sullen and fearful. The wall amazed and somehow filled them with premonitions and camp was pitched with none of the usual chatter and noise. This in spite of the fact that they had fresh donkey meat and good water. It looked bad! The Professor and I decided to stand watch that night.

Before dark, however, we unpacked ladders, drills, ropes, tackles and all paraphernalia with which we intended to scale the wall. Below the dam was a pit-like gully washed and eroded out of the solid rock, worn no doubt by the waterfall.

It was like a giant washbowl. The ascent of the rock wall was not so difficult as we had at first feared. The ladders almost reached the artificial portion composed of blocks. It was comparatively easy driving the long spikes into the cracks where the huge squared stones joined.

The night passed comparatively quietly, yet both the Professor and I heard the distant rubbing boom of drums. Each of us felt they held a message which menaced us. I felt that the Professor was expecting something, and I knew I was. God knows what Eve felt.

Ten of our men had deserted and for some reason the others were on the verge of a stampede. They would say nothing except that "this place was bad and the dwelling place of demons."

The Professor was taciturn, but he worked at the drilling and the ladder-placing himself. Again and again I marveled at his energy.

Soon it grew stifling, yet we worked on and before noon the Professor clambered over the upper edge of the dam and stood looking like a pigmy gazing over the western vista hidden to us.

Eve and I joined him as soon as the

heavy wooden-runged rope ladder was set securely and fastened at either end. The sight that met our eyes was stupendous.

The dam top was ten feet wide and lapping its very brim were the waters of a lake; it lay there like a mirror of coppery red; sickle shaped; twisting slightly so that we could not see its upper point. Fringing the further end as far as it was visible grew palms and thick bush.

I tested the water and found it potable but slightly saline. On either side the lake shore was formed by sheer cliffs with no foothold just as the Professor and I had feared. We would have to transport all our baggage over the lake to its further end before beginning operations on blowing away the dam on which we now stood.

"Isn't it beautiful?" said Eve. "Just look at those trees and the palms."

"And down there only a couple of hundred feet is the entrance to 'The Valley of Sin'," I said.

"Yes," said the Professor with his eyes glowing, "You'll have to confess the old timers hid it well."

I nodded my head.

**ALL** the stores were unloaded and piled against the dam wall in easy reach of the tackle hooks. The boat was found and with liberal use of tongue and a sparing thwack or two of the "kiboko" I was able to force a half dozen men to ascend the ladder, for they were needed to help in the hoisting.

Like an army of ants we worked, pack after pack was pulled creaking up to the top of the dam. Eve worked like a Trojan seeing the boxes properly stacked by the lake's edge.

At a shout from the professor I swarmed up the ladder.

"You look as if you had been working in the Inferno," said Eve.

"Yes, it's not far short of it. I see you've got the boat launched," I said.

It was a small canvas affair and lay tied by a light rope to one of the pack handles.

A slight breeze had arisen. Three of the six porters who had been hauling at the hoisting tackle began the descent of the ladder, from below the others watched. When they got half way down, the last of the three to begin the descent—the highest man—screamed, a wild terrified shriek that rocketed down the Kor.

I leaned over; saw him clutching at the rungs of the swaying rope ladder; hit the next man below; grasp him, tear him loose; saw with helpless horror the two crash onto the head of the third, who was scampering down like a terrified ape.

Then the three figures fell the remaining seventy odd feet. As they hit the dull crash was clearly audible, a cloud of deep red dust rose like a bloody fog. We, who crouched leaning over the edge, saw the wooden ladder slowly slide, then fall with a breaking, smashing sound.

From the porters rose a wailing scream, their eyes rolled up at us, beyond us, then to a man they turned and ran with hands over their ears. Below now only remained a portion of the luggage and the still black forms and over all was settling the dark red dust.

"Let me down," I called, "by the block and tackle. I'll try and catch them."

Rapidly I was lowered by means of the block and tackle. I attached the hooked ends to the fallen ladder which was not badly smashed. Making sure that the fallen porters were past help, I ran after the fleeing blacks.

After two miles of terrific going, I came to a reach where one got a fairly good view; here far below and beyond me I saw the men trotting and loping along looking back over their shoulders now and then, and with them were the donkeys. I turned back. Upon passing the cleft where had lain

the Touareg's body I glanced up; he had totally disappeared!

On the floor of the gorge something caught my eyes. I walked over and found it was the dead man's torn bur-noose, and had probably fallen when the vultures fought over the body. In one pocket was a scrawl in Arabic on good linen paper and on the top in Gothic letters was printed "Memorandum."

I heard a shout, and stuffing the paper and other odds and ends into my pocket, I ran. On top of the dam there seemed to be excitement concerning something on the lake.

I made excellent time up that ladder in spite of its wobbly position. When my head topped the margin, I saw with a sinking heart what it was that caused such excitement; floating perhaps one hundred and sixty feet from the dam was the boat. How it came untied we did not discover, at any rate the slight breeze was blowing it further and further away.

Professor Sharp with eyes blazing and beard bristling shouted orders at the porters, "Swim out—swim! I tell you!"

"We cannot swim in the Magic Waters, Bwana," they wailed, backing toward the other edge of the parapet. "There be crocodiles, we smell them—"

Hurriedly I began pulling off my shirt, boots and socks.

For the first one hundred and twenty five feet nothing happened. The water, however, had an oddly unpleasant odor once my nose got into it. For some unaccountable reason I grew nervous and quickened my stroke.

Now the boat floated some fifty feet or so beyond me, its reflection mirrored in the surface of the lake. Suddenly under my foot I felt the swirl of water, something large had turned at speed below me.

Back on the dam I heard cries. A cold slippery length touched my bare

leg. Then I felt a sharp stinging sensation below my right knee. I grasped the gunwale of the boat feverishly. I worked to the bow and crawled in. On looking over the sides I saw a number of dark shapes deep down in the water. I looked down at my leg, and saw that a neat chunk had been bitten out at the calf of my leg.

## CHAPTER XIII

### SUNKEN PYLONS

**T**HAT night camp was made under an immense fig tree close by the margin of the upper end of the lake, which we found was really a mile long and shaped like a broken new moon, and near us was a splendid spring. From our camp site we sat looking over the lake which resounded with the echoing splashes of fish.

It was safe here amongst the forest trees so far as floods were concerned, for it was above the Kor, which ran at a lower level to one side—only the presence of the spring and its rivulet of clear cold water made the thicket possible.

Mgongo was badly stung by a scorpion that night and between attending to him and my leg, which was not serious, but which still annoyed me, I found sleep impossible. Far back in the thicket I caught the sighing cough of a leopard and wondered what the big cat was hunting.

Slowly a sound was born. It came as if filled with some terrific message; as if the notes struggled back to the present out of the dead past; sounding like the hollow, metallic booming of an immense bell. It might have arisen from the rocks or the water; from above; from below; from anywhere. It made me turn and look about, it was not loud yet everyone awakened. Seven times the notes shivered the silence. I shuddered.

"Did you hear that?" asked the Professor excitedly.

"Yes," I answered, "and I hope it's for the last time."

"Ditto," said Eve, shivering.

"Did you locate the sound?" asked Professor Sharp, turning to me.

"No," I answered. "It seemed to come from everywhere."

"It was unnatural," whispered Eve.

The Professor broke in. "It was a bell, and if I'm not mistaken it was rung somewhere from the south."

"That reminds me," I interrupted. "What do you make of this?" I handed him the torn piece of paper, explaining where I had found it.

Excitedly he took the paper from me.

"Got your flash, Eve?"

"Here," she said, handing it to him.

A ghost of a breeze rustled the leaves, mimosa blooms spattered down, drenching the air with fragrance. A moth with beautiful silvery-green wings flapped by.

"I knew Orne was at the bottom of this," growled the Professor. Eve leaned over.

"Why," she said, "that sheet came from a memorandum book I gave him."

"It's part of a note," said the Professor. "This is what it says:"

—from above. Watch for the safari of the red-bearded one. Kill the beardless white but have care to shoot only when the red-bearded one is not about. Aim at one of the colored vermilion packs. The gun which I send as a gift will shoot straight and far. I come—

"That's all there is to it, the rest is torn. We've got to work fast. It's a tight pinch and out here Orne would stop at nothing," finished the Professor.

**F**OR the next two days, we toiled like navvies, paddling our clumsy raft up and down the lake laden with our luggage. At last everything had been transported and the charge of

dynamite laid. Each night the bell had tolled—

Discharging the dynamite I insisted was my work, the Professor wanted to risk it but I was determined. So after lighting the long fuse I raced back up the lake as fast as I could drive the collapsible boat, to the safety of the jungle. I had time to spare, still all met me with set, white faces as I jumped out of the boat and with their assistance hauled it high up on the bank.

It seemed to us hours passed before a terrific crashing report shook the air. Far down the lake we saw a spout of water leap high. Before the crashing thunder of the echoes subsided the lake, like a thing of magic, vanished!

Now our camp seemed to be on the top of a hill. The rivulet from our spring now leapt in a bold little waterfall into the steamy stinking bed of the drained lake. Hideous jelly-like things crawled about blindly looking for water.

That afternoon by another and smaller charge of dynamite we were able to drain the last drop out of the lake. The mud of a reddish color soon dried and cracked. Pools in which dead things floated still dotted the lake bed. But our attention was focused on the partially exposed pillars of a small pylon set in the cliff beyond one of the deepest pools.

Here the professor set us to work digging after we had crossed in the collapsible boat. I never did any hotter, nastier work. By moonrise we had cleared a square rock-filled doorway which led directly into the wall of the cliff.

The Professor stood gloating, beside himself with triumph. This obsession of his which his world had scoffed at, was proving itself a fact.

I confess that the walled up door with its fat squat pilasters made me shudder. It was like some hideous, wise but evil old eye which I feared

to see open. I think Eve shared my feelings but neither one of us thought of backing out. The water would not drain out for the very good reason that it lay deeper than the Kor beyond. It was forty feet wide and in order to get to our work we had to carry the folding boat down here and use it for a ferry, as I have said.

The porters absolutely refused to touch the stones at the door. Therefore we set them to work carrying our supplies down from the woods. Meanwhile, Professor Sharp and I worked with drills, picks and crow-bars and twice were able to use small shots of dynamite. The wall blocking the door was not so thick as I feared, yet it was three days before we broke through.

All this time Professor Sharp's excitement had grown for it was plain to us that the sound of the mighty bell was from beyond the door. I had the supplies ferried over despite the Professor's objections. He was like a kid, hardly sleeping, working late and early to enlarge the opening sufficiently.

## CHAPTER XIV

### CHAMBER OF THE GODS

**I**NSIDE there seemed to be a small antechamber, which was damp when we first entered. It had been ornately carved but the water which must have trickled in had all but destroyed these.

Where and how did the passage open? Was it some trick, some turning, some sliding stone? Of this the tablets had told nothing. The fourth night found us scraping and cleaning. The ceiling which was low seemed solid as did the walls and floor.

"If it's necessary we'll blow our way in," gritted the Professor with set teeth.

I do not know what sixth sense, what premonition made me have all the water bags, jars, cans and everything capable of holding water, filled

at the spring. But I felt that something was about to happen.

I was studying the rock anteroom by the aid of a flash light looking for seams and cracks which would guide me toward the secret.

The professor was twisting and working at the frieze of cobra heads and lotus buds which had, amongst the many entirely gone, a few still recognizable.

Our three porters had gone up the valley for more water and to carry back fresh meat, for early that morning I had successfully stalked and shot a gazelle.

"Look here, Adam," the professor's voice was intensely excited and boomed in the confines of the rock chamber.

I saw that he strained at the two "bosses" of the outstanding figures of the frieze. Again I heard the grating, grating sound from above.

"I think I've got it. Pull this cobra head, push against that knob of rock and twist the lotus button."

"You've got it, professor," I began when a volley of shots followed by the distant cries of our blacks echoed down the valley. I heard Eve move through the narrow opening.

"Quick! It's the Touaregs!"

I picked up my rifle and rushed out to the edge of the pylon. Running as fast as they could were two of our porters; the third was nowhere to be seen. Behind them ran figures in burnouses who fired from time to time.

Next to fall was Mgongo, he slid with legs stiff, then fell on his back. I saw his feet beating a tattoo in the caked mud. Touaregs poured out of the woods' edge, there must have been more than a hundred. The last of our porters, a long-legged fellow with a shaved head that caught the sun's rays like a polished brown egg, fairly flew. He was, however, hit badly when a couple of hundred yards from our position.

I had begun shooting long before this and had accounted for at least four of the running Touaregs before they realized what was up. As I loaded I heard Professor Sharp's voice.

"Let them have it!" His rifle jettied spitefully.

Several more of the Touaregs fell, a guttural shout sent the survivors to cover behind rocks, from there they kept up a continual fire which thundered up and down the gorge in a dinning clamor. Eve had taken refuge inside the rock chamber.

"It's lucky we've got the moat," barked the Professor. "Adam, your hunch as you called it was a good one." He paused, took careful aim at a booted foot, fired, followed a cry of pain.

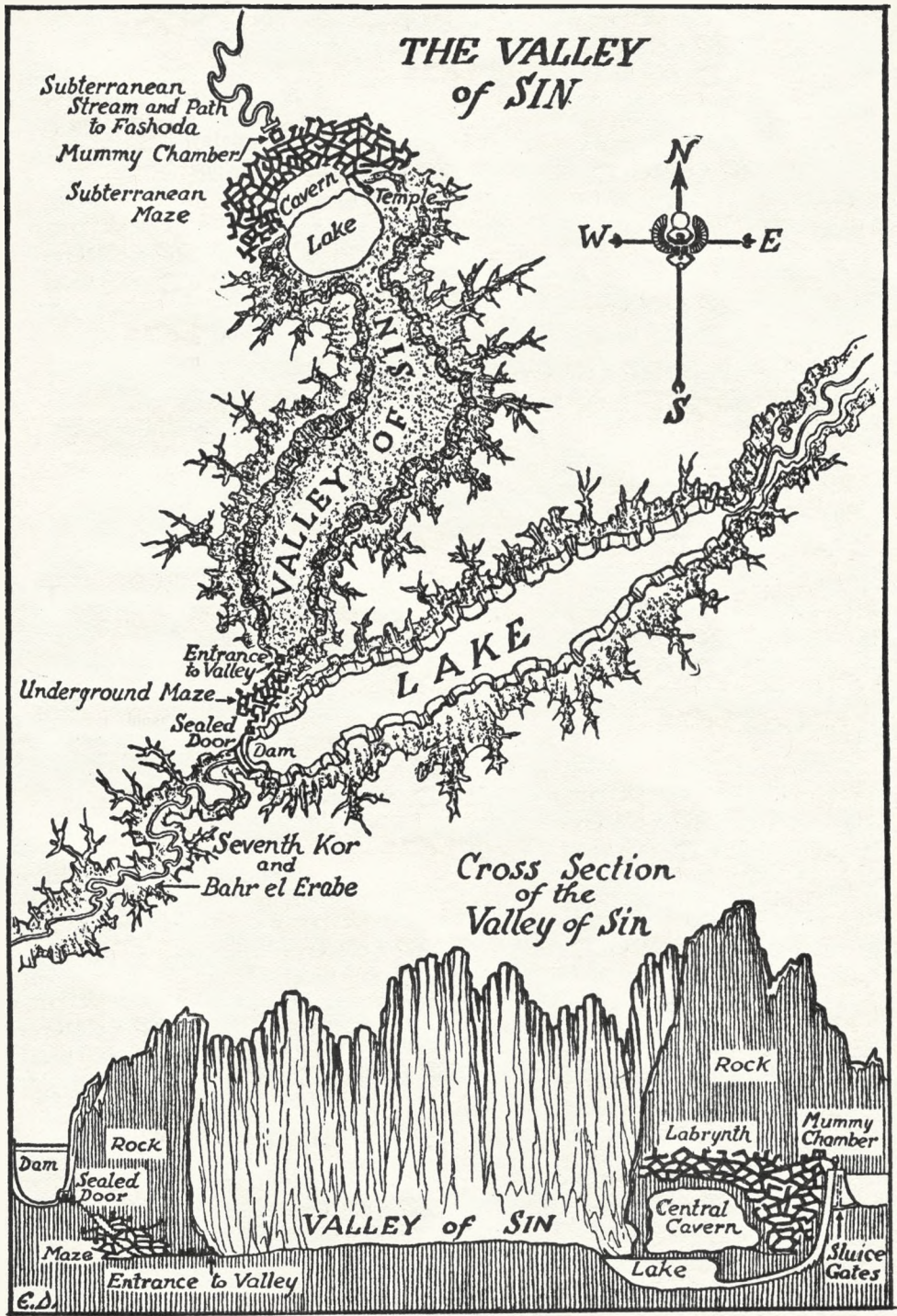
"Now what we want to do is to get the supplies into the passageway up yonder," he jerked his head toward the ceiling and I saw that he had opened the sliding rock.

"We've got water, food and everything we need. If we can get in there the Touaregs can whistle for we can pile the things and break the lever handles." Then he added, "When they go we will get out—that is after we have explored the 'Valley of Sin'."

**D**URING the remainder of the day, they lay closely besieging us. One or the other of us kept guard and shot at anything that moved. They were unable to retreat or close in. Our moat protected us and our own persons were absolutely hidden.

While one of us guarded, the other, with the aid of Eve, hoisted package after package into the blackness of the rock chamber over us, which was brilliantly painted with pictures of Set, Horus and Osiris, and over in one corner appeared the first of a series of steps.

These ascended to a platform where they narrowed and began to descend. I had no time for anything



but the most cursory glance. It was fascinating though, even that glance.

That afternoon we did a vast amount of work. The Touaregs, just as the ruddy, bloody twilight set, held up a white rag and one of their number stalked to the edge of the little moat which was being rapidly dried up by the violence of the heat.

"Speak!" said the professor who stood behind a pillar.

"Ye have come," began the tall veiled figure and as he spoke his 'haik' billowed till I saw his wide falcon nose and dark fierce eyes, "unbidden to the place which is cursed in two tongues and which I guard."

"By whose orders? Who are you, man of the Touaregs?" queried the Professor.

"That ye shall not hear for it is forbidden."

"The other Touaregs are crawling to closer positions," I whispered to the Professor.

"Tell your men to get back, treacherous one, or I shoot," declaimed the Professor in crashing tones.

"Give the beardless dog to us and you may go and take with you all."

I suppose he meant me by the beardless dog!

"That cannot be," said the Professor. "Go now!"

The Touareg turned without a word and leaped behind a porphyry block. It was a signal, for a hail of shots concentrated on our doorway. Our position was, however, too good. Dusk fell while the sound of our firing crashed about the gorge.

We watched closely and got our big acetylene searchlight ready. It was on the moat that we depended most. We had almost the last of our possessions into the rock crypt above the vestibule in which we now had our retreat. Later in the evening we intended burning our bridges; closing the rock panel after we had taken refuge above.

"Hubert Orne is at the bottom of

this," said Eve positively. "Those Touaregs would never have delivered any such message had it not been born in his mind!"

The Professor's eyes blazed. "He caused them to follow and pursue us. I'll have a score to settle with him!" Then he added, as he chewed voraciously at some sandwiches Eve and Hannibal had concocted, "What do you make of the odor?"

"It's a combination of smells, but I have detected camphor, sandalwood, frankincense, bitumen, flower fragrances and—opium smoke! and I think burning hemp!"

"That's it!" exclaimed the Professor. "It was the blend of hemp and opium that evaded me. There are other odors, some kind of musk, essential oils probably. I think we had better make masks of some kind for I feel an oddly exhilarating effect already. I don't like it! The stuff's toxic."

It had now grown very dark. I heard creeping, stealthy, movements amongst the rocks and waited intently listening, wholly surprised and bewildered when I heard a voice say in an English whisper:

"Wait, you fool, not now! Not this way!"

I called Professor Sharp and told him what I had heard. I don't think he believed me at the time and I can't say that I blamed him. He had been rummaging about and was enthusiastic in regard to the wall paintings and what was more to the point had discovered a mechanism which slid the rock ceiling back into its former closed position.

"No use in holding the fort any longer," he said. "We might as well take to our hiding place."

"Crawl in the hole and pull it in after us," I said.

It had been silent but for the squeaking of bats who had gathered in large numbers and evidently found food of sorts in the dry lake bed. Sud-



denly there burst out a volley of rifle fire. At first we thought it was one of our porters who had escaped and that the Touaregs were pursuing him. But we soon heard shouts, "Help, help!" Another voice which we both recognized called loudly:

"Don't shoot! It's Orne and Vandeen!"

## CHAPTER XV

### THE CROCODILE GOD

**F**OR a moment I think both the Professor and I had the same thought to hurry back and vanish in our hiding place, yet decency forbade such a course. Moreover neither of us had any real grudge against Vandeen. The shots grew nearer. We could hear the guttural cries of the Touaregs.

Then very near a gun crashed and two figures almost rolled down into the moat, half swimming, half wading, they crossed. Behind rattled a fusillade of shots mingled with shouts and angry maledictions.

We literally dragged the gasping figure of Vandeen into the inner room. Orne took his place beside us and fired deliberately with a rifle he carried at the flashes from the Touaregs' guns. For a short time the gorge spurted crimson points of light and rocked with the detonating thunder-like reports.

Suddenly the attack ceased, a breathless silence reigned. It closed over us smothering in its menace then slowly the bell, much louder since the rock panel was open, tolled. Seven times. It was a kind of sound that made your teeth hurt and made a chap wish his ears would cease functioning.

"God in Heaven, what's that?" chattered Vandeen. "Look at me! I came to rescue you, Sharp, at the urge of Orne. Just look at me! My specialty is cuneiform, not the hieroglyphics. Here I am damn near helpless," he added bitterly.

"How did you happen to find us?" I asked Orne.

He turned his face and stared at me with those odd un-focussing eyes.

"The Touaregs are talking much. I opened your letter—"

We had to make the best of a bad business and soon we had all clampered into the upper chamber, lit the lamps and closed the sliding panel of rock. I did not trust Orne and instead of the locking pin of bronze I snapped a heavy padlock over the lever. Eve saw me and I believe Orne was aware of my act but he showed no hostility, only a cold courtesy.

Eve by her frigidness made it plain that she had little joy in the coming of the new arrivals.

**P**ROFESSOR VANDEEN and Sharp had forgotten everything in their excitement over the cuneiform inscriptions, for it seems they settled some moot point upon which both men agreed.

Vandeen's face was peeled by the sunburn and now had grown almost purple with excitement. In a corner I rigged up a curtain for Eve and she thanked me with a look that made Orne's knuckles grow white.

I felt a bit dizzy and tingling all over. Suddenly my mind recollected the fragran e and I wet a handkerchief and breathed through it. The tingling at my toes and finger tips soon left and the pounding of my heart grew slower. The others followed my example.

Below us we heard shouts and exclamations. The Touaregs had discovered our absence. Then we sat waiting. I suspected Orne's manner of meeting us and I was afraid of what he might do. For had he not told the Touaregs of our presence and was he not their friend?

I knew the whispers I had heard had been Vandeen and he crawling past us from the Kor. The shooting and shouting was all a bunch of bunco

to hoodwink us, yet uppermost in my mind and what I really most feared was the secret that lay beyond those steps which after rising to the platform led down as far as our powerful light revealed.

What made me suspect the truth I don't know, possibly the fact that the sounds grew fainter. I looked at my wrist watch, it was five A. M.

"Professor Sharp," I called.

"It's more a notion but I should like to slide the rock panel back a bit, all sound has ceased."

Vandeen grew terrified at once and voiced my fears.

"Do you think those devils have blocked us in again?"

I said nothing as I was working feverishly over the lock, then slowly I pulled the ponderous lever, the rock gritted, hardly moved, finally bulged and slid back. Below us lay piled tons of rock. How those Touaregs must have worked!

We looked at each other. Orne's face blanched, he too, had been tricked, hoisted by his own petard, but this did not make me sorry for him.

"O God, I knew you'd bring me into something like this," groaned Vandeen. "We're blocked in here, we're walled in! We'll die like rats in a trap! My God, why did I come?"

Eve looked at me, her face white, but none of Vandeen's panic was on it. I confess I was terrified but her courage made me ashamed.

"We'll find a way out—"

Orne grimaced at my platitude, Sharp frowned and set his jaw firmly. "We might as well lock that slide again," he said.

Orne, however, sprang up and shouted down in Touareg. Far away an answering howl of derision and triumph came.

With as much food and supplies as we thought we would need we began the long descent, hoping for escape.

I BELIEVE everyone of our party felt some of the fear that seized and shook me. The most terrible of all fears was that of the unknown. We were very quiet—Orne was gazing somberly at Eve with whom he was endeavoring to hold a conversation.

Eve pressed close to my side and leaned toward me.

"Don't trust that man," she breathed, "He'll do anything, anything, I tell you!"

I forgot the smothering sensation, the knowledge that in all likelihood doom lay ahead for us, that with us was a treacherous scoundrel who had stopped at nothing and who would go to any length to accomplish his ends.

I knew as Eve knew that the main purpose of Orne's life was to win Eve Sharp as his wife. I forgot even the fact that we were walled in alive just as the Touaregs of Omar the First's reign had been, that just as they had never been heard of again, so in all likelihood would we be forgotten after a short period of search and excitement.

Our procession halted . . . Ahead Vandeen and Sharp prodded at the walls and floor of the platform beyond which the stairs descended.

"Just as I thought," exclaimed Sharp, "These stairs are guarded!"

The steps descended, worn now on one side, now on the other as if countless feet had trod them. The walls on either side were ornamented with vivid paintings, long battle lines, vessels setting out crowded with conventionally drawn warriors' pictures of animals; pictures of gods with birds or beasts' heads, some with beasts' bodies. Here and there were niches and twice before we had descended a hundred steps, narrow stone-blocked passages led to right and left.

"Isn't it odd how muffled our voices sound in here?" asked Eve.

"The acoustics are peculiar, I don't know how to account—"

"Oh, my God, watch out," cried Vandeen in a cracked falsetto.

I saw Vandeen's mottled cheek blanch as he leapt forward over Professor Sharp's body that was disappearing. Vandeen fell and bumped thumping down the long flight of stairs, vanishing into the darkness, screaming and shrieking like a hysterical woman.

"Pull up the steps, they'll break my back if you don't hurry." The Professor's tones were low and packed with the agony he was enduring.

Orne did nothing but flatten himself against the wall. The acetylene lamp still burned but the arc of light did not fall on us.

"Watch out, Adam," called Eve, her voice clear, "Watch out!"

I knew she meant watch out for Orne. As I bent above the professor and tugged at the stones which pressed on his back I felt them yielding. The steps which had turned on a pivot rose and as they did so Orne pushed me violently, only the edge of the steps which I grasped saved me from pitching headlong into the pit which yawned directly before me and out of which Professor Sharp was crawling aided by Eva and Hannibal.

Again Orne pushed me but this time I had edged back and was able by a sweeping movement of my right arm through the dark to swing him off his balance. He made no sound but followed Vandeen down the steep flight of steps. Professor Sharp sat leaning weakly against the wall. Eve had her arm about him and was wiping his face and head with a handkerchief.

## CHAPTER XVI

### LIVING MUMMIES

**I** WAS able to reach the lamp and by its light we saw that the treacherous steps once more had swung into normal position and but

for one fact they looked like all the others. They, unlike the remainder, were not worn by footsteps. I tried the mechanism and saw that four steps hung equally balanced on a bronze beam, when trodden on they swung either way letting whatever was on them drop into a pit whose bottom the lamp did not reveal.

"Nice sort of welcome to our city," I said facetiously. "Professor, whenever we see a large picture of the man with the big crocodile head—you called him Sebek—it seems to mark one of their devilish traps or murder devices."

"Yes, I remember, and I believe you've got the key. There is always a warning to the initiated." He winced as he spoke. I insisted on examining him and was thankful to find no palpable injury.

"I think," I said, "you've not been seriously damaged, Professor, only a strained back and badly bruised."

"Thanks to you," said the professor. I stammered something for I caught Eve's look and it made my head whirl with happiness, and she had called me "Adam" too. If she said it again, I'd love the name.

"But," said the professor his voice edged with anger and scorn, "I saw Orne's attempt to push you into the pit and Vandeen's cowardice. It would serve them both right if their necks were broken." As if to disapprove any such luck, Vandeen's voice arose from far below, high pitched, querulous and angry.

"Let's move," said the professor. "There's no danger till we reach Vandeen's resting place."

I loosened my forty-five and walked with Professor Sharp's arm thrown over my shoulder. Eve walked directly behind us holding the lamp so that its white glare fell ahead of us. I strained my ears and narrowly watched the wall pictures for our danger signal which I believed to be the crocodile-headed God.

**A**FTER we had descended two hundred steps and had come across no sign of either Vandeen or Orne, we began to grow worried, not for their health but because we feared some fresh devilry on Orne's part. At the two hundred and fortieth step the descent ceased and six smaller passages branched.

Here, too, was a large picture of old Sebek carrying a sarcophagus in his jaws; the ceiling was set with round gilded disks. Professor Sharp called them "The Winged Suns of Ra."

On pushing the steps directly beneath these they suddenly dropped with a thud then jerked back into their sockets in the ceiling.

"You're right, Adam. Sebek tells the tale."

"I am going to look into those passages, Professor," I said, "I want to see if they are hidden."

"Take a look but be careful."

The passages proved to be one and all walled up. Gagged and bound Vandeen lay far up in the fifth. He began cursing and raving against Orne the minute I removed the gag.

"He's gone on ahead," whined Vandeen. "He knows more about this place than you think. The Touaregs told him many of their legends—there was another tile too—He'd have left me here, I'd have rotted but for you!"

I found that his leg was not broken but that he was badly cut and bruised and worst of all his ankle was sprained.

"We'll leave you here with a lamp," said Professor Sharp coldly.

"No you won't!" whined Vandeen sobbing in his terror. "No you won't. I'll manage to keep up—I can limp along."

Once more we resumed our careful, slow progress watchful of "Sebek the Crocodile God," and "Orne, the human beast," alike. In our wake limped Professor Vandeen groaning dismally from time to time.

The path continued to descend then grew level and finally sloped up slightly, curving and looping always to the west.

"I see a light!" cried Eve, "Way off yonder."

"Some trick of Orne's to murder us all," groaned Vandeen.

I saw it, a pin point of far-off brilliant white, like a tiny twinkling star. We all hurried. Suddenly it vanished then appeared again.

"What could have done that?"

"The light was either turned out or a body moved between us and it," I ventured.

"I think it was Orne," chattered Vandeen.

"That is daylight," joyously called the professor and so it soon proved to be, for as we drew near we saw that an oval hole of some kind, covered by reticulated bars of metal, lay before us.

**F**IFTY yards or so before it was reached we noted a stone doorway. An open but still serviceable door of metal, which was black with age, swung open. It had been forced quite evidently and just beyond lay a cigarette butt still smoking. Orne had been here recently.

By the lanterns light we saw the room beyond was small; heavily gilded with life-sized paintings of human figures with animal heads. The place was cut from living rock. In the middle of the chamber lay a huge black stone sarcophagus. Its lid had been removed and scattered about the floor were splendid gold beads and jewels.

"What was Orne about?" I asked.

"Nothing good," replied Vandeen who was eagerly scanning the walls and almost ready to forget his ankle and Orne for the moment. "Those are the forty-two assessors and there's Osiris," he added.

What amazed both professors was to find that the mummy which lay inside the inner coffin whose lid had

been carefully ripped off then replaced, was naked; all his wrappings and clothes had been removed; on the floor lay a pair of broken cracked sandals—the mummy's.

Then as I leaned far into the stone sarcophagus, I touched something piled at one end and found to my amazement it was Orne's clothes, sun helmet, trousers, coat, everything in fact but his underwear.

"What do you make of this?" I questioned showing the group my find.

"I think," said Eve, "That for some reason he has decided to dress up as a mummy."

"That's it, but 'by the cats of Bast,' why?" snapped Professor Sharp.

"Orne knows something that he wouldn't tell me and it will be the death of us."

"Shut up, Vandeen or stop those jeremiads," ordered Sharp.

I didn't believe as Sharp suggested that Orne had gone suddenly insane. I believed that where there had been one brick with ivory tablets inside there might have been two with additional information.

We walked along toward the daylight which streamed in like a glaring white flame on the passage which was here thick with poppy-red dust. In this we all saw and noted Orne's footprints.

Professor Sharp came close to me.

"Keep a sharp watch," he said in low tones which were troubled. "I wish Eve was out of this."

"So do I," I breathed. "I know Orne's up to something devilish."

"That mummy was no Egyptian, it was Touareg!" he whispered.

"But what does that mean?"

"I don't know, Adam, but there's devil's work afoot."

Through the oval window sighed a steady current of air freighted with the heavy intense sweetness of mimosa, hibiscus, oleander, temple

flowers, but still underlying it was a sickening quality.

"Oh, look!" said Eve who had rushed to the window, "Isn't it perfect?"

I joined her and stood looking for the first time into the "Valley of Sin," through the bars of heavy metal shaped like twining snakes. The whole grill was on hinges. In this way Orne had escaped, a broken hasp lay in a corner.

Orne was nowhere visible but I could see that he had descended the steps outside.

Suddenly Eve turned with a shudder from the scene which lay before us: "It's lovely, wonderful, but it's dead, it's horrible and I don't know why, but I hate it!"

Outside lay a grove of geometrically planted date palms and a variety which even the professor did not recognize, their stems were utilized as supports for flowering vines, these were gorgeous in a perfect abandon of riotous color.

There was an unearthly quality, for in all this living place there seemed nothing alive, not even a lizard, not a fly, no birds, absolute stillness. All about, hemming us in, loomed sheer cliffs whose beetling summits frowned down on us and under whose deep red walls clustered shadows, inky, uneasy shadows.

Yet on the steps which led up from the deep ruddy tinted earth of the valley, there were many small naked footprints, obliterating some were the large, stockinged impressions of Orne's feet.

"Odd," murmured Professor Sharp. "Eve, you were right—it is horrible."

"I wonder what children made those footprints?" I asked to change the subject for I saw Eve's shoulders trembling in the reaction.

Violet was growling and snarling and gave every indication that he

loathed everything which had to do with this valley.

The Professor leaned over more carefully to scrutinize the slim small footprints.

"My God!" I heard him exclaim.

I bent over but he said: "No, not that one, to the left." Here the deep red dust was thicker and in it I saw that the toes of what appeared like children's feet were tipped by long, deeply curved claws.

"Claws like a wolf. What in God's name could live in this dead place where there are not even flies?"

"Let's go back before it is too late," sobbed Eve.

"I wish we could, Eve, but how can we?"

"It will be in the night—I have a feeling, they'll steal on us and it—" she sobbed.

"Never mind," comforted her father but I knew by his expression that he believed what Eve said about their coming in the night would prove true.

"The bell only tolls at night," said Eve.

"It is a nightmare," whispered Vandeen whose eyes bulged and whose mottled face was grey. "We're buried alive; walled in with the living mummies."

## CHAPTER XVII

### A BELL TOLLS

**M**Y FIRST action was to take the lock off Violet's collar and with it secure the grilled door. As I have said in spite of the small size, it was very strong and luckily the catch was not bulky.

After having attended to Vandeen and what few stores we carried into the sarcophagus room, I said, "I am going to hurry back for more supplies, we may want rifles tonight. Then I intend to put those death traps on the way out of business. We need more carbide and the big

searchlight. Whatever you do, don't get too near that grill after dark. I have a hunch!"—

The Professor grinned, "You needn't worry."

"I'd have that door ready to bolt if necessary," I added. "We've got to remember that Orne is out there and there's no telling what he may do. Hannibal, will you come with me?"

"I'm coming too," said Eve.

I was delighted to have her and I felt she would be safer with me.

As we came to them, I rendered the traps harmless.

When we had reached our stores and had unlocked and rolled back the rock ceiling, we could still hear work going on. It was a welcome sound despite the fact that they were shouts of the Touaregs bent on walling us in alive, for they at least were human.

I loaded myself like a longshoreman, even tied a load on Violet who rolled and did his best to be rid of it. Then we began to retrace our steps.

Just as we reached the turning stairs, stable enough due to four strong wedges, the first deep stroke of the bell boomed by us, quivering through the hot air like some invisible body. Six followed. We hurried, panting and frightened still with absolutely no reason. Then far beyond us I heard cries, animal sounds, yet recognizable. On we ran panting.

"Look down, Adam," Eve's voice was full of loathing.

I looked and saw a wavy, creeping line of dark opaque smoke that crept and writhed along the passage floor. It was fascinating yet horrible for it looped coiling along like a thing alive.

Beyond us, acting like crazy men were the two professors, dancing, yelling, laughing and singing. Their voices had taken on an animal tone which slurred their words into almost inarticulate mouthings. The smoke had reached their shoulders.



**"I rushed into the poisonous fumes and grasped Vandeen."**

Beyond the barred door the small oval things grew recognizable.

We saw that they were faces, cadaverous, hawk-nosed with thick wide-open nostrils, small mouths and huge dull lack-lustre eyes set wide apart. Always they swayed across the grill and made no sound. Now and then the disheveled head of Professor Sharp or Vandeen would vanish under the pall of black smoke which made us dizzy.

I knew the fumes were poisonous, some terrific mixture of hashish and opium. It exhilarated and made my every nerve tingle delightfully.

"Quick!" I shouted to Eve. "Cover your mouth with a wet handkerchief, with anything. Get out the camphor or smelling salts."

She did as I told her without a word, yet she staggered.

I thanked God that we found the door of the rock room closed.

"Eve," I said, "fix rags to close the cracks when we get them inside. Take Violet in there too."

She nodded.

"You're a brick," I whispered to her and leaned forward and kissed her cheek. For a moment, she swayed against me and then slipped into the rock room.

Not a muscle on the faces that swayed beyond the grill changed; they appeared devoid of mimetic muscle yet I seemed to know they were angry, hideously, fiendishly angry. That in their own way, they were fighting more fiercely.

Below them, winking like sapphires in the black shroud I caught the glint of flames. The smoke must be coming from there. The two professors pulled and pounded at the padlock, the hasp, they were evidently doing their best to open the grill and let those creatures in!

I rushed into the smoke, grasped Vandeen, who fought, kicked and screamed like a maniac. I was forced to beat him into insensibility. Stag-

gering back to the door, I hurriedly opened it and flung him in; grabbed the big searchlight and set it so the powerful glare fell in the direction of the door.

I heard Professor Sharp talking, a strange foreign stuff that had a stiff, twisted sound as if a man's tongue had to be hinged to get the syllables out. Then for the first time I thought I caught answers in low, twittering whispers. He worked hard with the lock, wielding a yellow bar and thumping with it viciously at the small padlock.

His face was that of a devil. I dived at him, he whirled and savagely struck at me, the blow numbing my shoulder but I strove with him desperately, clinching, staggering to and fro. He did his best to brain me with the heavy metal bar and I was finally forced to save his life and my own—to knock him unconscious with my revolver butt.

He collapsed without a sound. The smoke swirled grey-black and heavy like gaseous oils, it rolled smoothly twisting and curling. I saw that the faces at the oval door were fewer and that their heads moved more rapidly. Then I began shooting; one bullet struck a bar, the other five must have done their work.

I loaded again. Now there were no faces. In the passage, the reports of the forty-five had sounded heavy and jarring but out in "The Valley of Sin" they rushed off like vicious missiles of sound. Now only the billowing smoke remained, sickening, sweet, full of living death and sin.

**A**T THE time I could not understand why my actions seemed so retarded. I thought slowly and with immense effort. I stooped and picked up the bar with which the professor had done his best to brain me. It was heavy and carved at one end with a kite's head with a row of tinkling gold beads attached.



I did my best to decide why the faces moving outside the grill had appeared so unnatural; they had eyes, ears, noses, mouths, then I had it! It was eyelids they lacked, the lids seemed to be unable to close entirely, to be partially atrophied. It was this which gave them their ophidian stare.

Were they human beings? I didn't believe in ghosts, yet I longed to see the sight of even a dead body, or some proof that they lived and breathed like me.

With this end in view, I picked up the searchlight and flashed its beams down the steps, and into the rock room there I saw that Storm and Vandeen had recovered their senses.

When I entered the rock room a few minutes later, I asked as cheerfully as I could.

"How are the invalids?"

Professor Sharp answered me.

"My God, Adam, what did I do? I have a faint recollection of hitting you."

"You did put up a lively scrap while drugged by that smoke. It's got hashish and opium in it and the Lord knows what else," I said.

Vandeen groaned and wheezed, then went off into violent spasms of coughing which racked his fat body with pain.

For a time I thought Vandeen might die from mitral stenosis but I pulled him through. Both men suffered from terrific headaches which persisted. Eve and I were similarly afflicted but to a much lesser extent. I told them just what I had done and witnessed.

"Did you see any sign of Orne?" I asked.

"Yes, we saw him," said Vandeen looking unhappy. "He was with those atavistic remnants—those dwarfish living mummies," he spoke with loathing in his voice.

I was busy making gas masks as best I could with what material I had at hand, Eve helping me and making several good suggestions. Over in

one corner Violet lay pawing continually at his nose as if it hurt him.

Professor Sharp spoke, "We had gone out into the corridor where the air was a bit cooler and there we began to read the papyri which we found in one of the chests. You remember, the one with the lotus and hippo head carvings. They were exceedingly interesting and shed much light on this place."

Then the bell boomed from somewhere up the valley. It was dark. We sat on the floor and from the further side of the silence came something slowly, insidiously, I grew exhilarated, finally I saw the smoke and the faces. They seemed to speak in Egyptian and I answered. They spoke of mysteries and delights if we would only open the door."

"So that is what you and Professor Vandeen were talking about," I exclaimed.

"The rest I don't recollect except that I was angry just as they were when you came back. I would have killed you, Adam."

## CHAPTER XVIII

### PILLARS AND PYLONS

THE next day found all but Professor Vandeen feeling better. My first act was to hurry to the grill, intending to remove that huddled hideous body and the pools of blood, not wishing Eve to see them. To my astonishment the steps were clean! Not so much as the impression of a foot remained!

I unlocked the grilled door and stepped out and found that by worming my shoulder through the largest of the interstices of the metal bars, I could reach and unlock the padlock. This relieved me for I did not wish to leave the key with Vandeen.

Not that I feared treachery from Vandeen but I did fear the cunning of these dwellers in the valley. Outside not a breath of wind stirred.

Yet under the cliffs the shadows bulged and swam, blue-black and green, appearing cool and wet. With a shudder I felt that those shadows would mark danger.

Eve, the professor and I started soon after breakfast; we were heavily armed and it was our intention to explore the valley but return before dark. We took water, food and one of the acetylene lamps as well as our pocket flashes, neither did we forget our gas masks.

Carefully, we made our way toward the exit of the narrow gorge into which the oval door had its exit. The last thing we saw was Hannibal's face peering at us through the bars.

All about rose cliffs which fell in sheer abandon, unbroken, hemming us in. No sign of life was visible except a thin blue column of smoke which rose from behind the trees.

"I never felt such heat, it's withering," gasped the Professor.

All about were fields of white poppies but not a petal moved, not a butterfly, not a bee buzzed, not even the thin screech of a cicada could be heard yet the air was sweet, too sweet, with the perfume of the many flowers which grew and clambered by the cliff edges.

We did not venture there for the shadows sprawled and slid blue-black.

"Look at the irrigation ditches and see the sluice gates," said Eve.

"Yes," said her father, "and that field's hemp and over yonder where you see water glimmering, that's a rice paddy. There's not a weed anywhere. They tend the place well. See the sluice gates are of wood and modern, yet they bear hieroglyphics." His voice was filled with awe. "Hieroglyphics which have been a dead language for thousands of years."

"What's that tasseled stuff?" I asked.

"Sorghum and Dhurra grain, there."

"Oh look, just see," exclaimed Eve.

Out of the dirt of a ditch trench she pulled a fillet of dull yellow metal set with pearls and emeralds and having an asp carved from some blue stone, probably lapis lazuli, beside it, strung on fine gold wire, was a necklace of huge and perfect turquoise.

"These are worth a fortune," said the professor, handling the find.

"It looks as if they didn't think much of jewels and gold," I murmured.

"Aren't they exquisite?" said Eve.

**H**ERE and there we caught sight of footprints and once I saw the stockinged tracks of Orne. I was glad to see from the spoor that he limped.

We passed four smaller coves which were narrow and choked by trees but we did not explore these for they were shrouded in shadows.

Further on as we entered a less dense grove of huge trees which were figs of a variety unknown to the Professor, Eve who was staring up into the glossy green leaves, cried out:

"I saw a face looking down from that big limb!" she shuddered. "The eyes were far apart and dull and had red streaks like twisted veins in them."

We threaded the grove but kept carefully from under the shadow of the immense trees which was hard for it looked cool and inviting like pools of blue darkness. I tasted the water from the irrigation ditch which had grown in size; it was pure and sweet, but warm.

As we came to the edge of the trees, we saw the further wall of the valley formed by a huge crescent of sheer cliffs. At its base lay a lake, its waters glaring white as they reflected the sun. At one side and partially fringing the shore was a high growth of papyrus. The waters of the lake disappeared under the cliff wall. But what interested us most was the fact

that on one side of the lake squatted a building.

In the hot still air was a tint of musky scent mingled with the same sickening, sweet stench we already knew so well.

Professor Sharp stopped and stared at the Temple.

"To think of it, just to think of it," he breathed.

It was squat and built of red and white stone. From one of the pylon towers the thread of blue smoke spiraled. Slowly we walked forward until we reached the pylon. Great carved pillars ran in triple ranks about the central square of solid masonry. The walls were of immense thickness, a spiral motif of serpents was employed.

One figure, that of "Set the Demon" was carved over the large square door which yawned darkly ahead of us. The main hall was empty of life and devoid of ornament but opened directly on a steeply descending ramp.

By the aid of our flashlights, we saw it slowly spiraled to the left in which direction lay the lake.

We endeavored to enter the pylon tower from which came the smoke but found this impossible for there was no door. Suddenly I grew conscious that the shadows were creeping out from the cliff walls and that soon it would be dark.

"It is nearly five-thirty," I said.

I was uneasy and worried. Already the western side of the valley was quite dark. Fingers of purple gloom clutched at us. Had I been alone, I would have run.

"This is ridiculous," snorted the Professor, then ceased suddenly. From the direction of the oval door, there rose the most terrific screams, hideous, high-pitched, rocketing screeches, packed with terror, pain and despair. They seemed to slice the air. We looked at each other with blanched faces pausing just as the gloom touched us.

"What can it be? Oh, hurry hurry!" cried Eve.

Each of us had recognized the tones as those belonging to Professor Vandeen. Suddenly the shrieks stopped, followed by a succession of quickly fired shots which echoed away in thunder. Then fell complete silence.

## CHAPTER XIX

### BEASTS OF NIGHT

**I** BELIEVE it was the succeeding stillness which terrified us most.

"You run and see what's happened and I'll take care of Eve and follow," suggested Professor Sharp.

"I locked the door. Vandeen can't have got out. Maybe he's become delirious—" I ventured.

"Please hurry. I feel something awful has taken place," begged Eve.

Fast as I could I ran toward the oval door. On turning into the palm grove I saw spidery shadows slinking away. In front of the oval door itself pressed a jostling silent mob of the "living mummies" as I had learned to call them.

Now they wore head coverings which were in the likeness of animals; jackals, hyenas, leopards, crocodiles, hares, hawks and ibis, all turned staring expressionless masks toward me as I shouted.

They were bending bows in my direction and I stood for a second debating whether or not I should turn back. I pulled up my gun and emptied the magazine into the close huddled group. They leaped apart rolling and tumbling down the steps in soft thumping bumps, the larger number, however, springing silently down and gliding noiselessly into the gloom of the palm grove. I reloaded and poured shot after shot at them. On running forward, I found only a few still, sprawling, figures.

I stepped on one of the head masks. It smashed with a dry crackling note.

It was like the smashing of an insect.

"Hello in there, what's the matter? It's Penn."

A low gasping moan answered me.

As I reached in and unlocked the door the moans continued. The bars as I grasped them to pull the door open were wet and sticky. Also there was a length of fine chain tangled in the mouth of one of the metal serpents forming the bars.

"Where are you, Professor Vandeen?"

Only another muffled moan answered me. My heart full of terror, I asked: "Who's there?"

I switched on my flash and saw by its pencil of light that no one was in the passage; only a gun, Professor Vandeen's helmet mashed, stained together with torn strips of his clothing. I shuddered wondering what it meant yet already half guessing.

Running to the rock room, I saw in one corner a moving, moaning shape lay with its head covered. As the light fell on it the man sat howling like a dog. I saw the face of Hannibal, our cook who had insisted on following us.

"De Professor was took."

"How could they take him when I found the door locked?" I said angrily. "Wake up Hannibal, you've been having a nightmare."

"I wish to Gawd it was a nightmare. Dey dun took him spiten de bars."

He spoke in a singsong monotonous tone yet his body trembled like an aspen.

"We was settin' not so far from de doh, he was readin' one o' dem rolls of Pappyryrus—picture writin'. Den de shadows come and just den we bote look up and see folks wid bird and animal faces lookin' in on us. I yells and draps back into de rock room.

"De Professor he yells awful, dey say nuttin' but begin a shooting wid bows what had arrars wid chains on

'em. De points dey unfold when dey git in. I got one in my laig now but I bust de chain or dey would a got me. I runs foh a gun and I picks up dis yere axe.

"When I gits out of de room I see de Professor being dragged toward de doh, dey hauls him to it screeching and clawin' at everythin'. I would a gone back foh a gun but I was afraid that I would hit de professor if I shot. Den—den—oh Gawd, dey jes' tear him wid dere clawed han's, little clawed han's dey was.

"Dey tore him to pieces and pull him through de bars; dey had a kind o' knife too. I ain't sure what I don nex' but dey shoot me and I bust de chain wid de axe and den I heah you a shootin' and I come back in heah."

I stood frozen by the horror of it all. I remembered the wet sticky bars, the shreds of clothing and I did not doubt Hannibal's story. I could see the whole hideous picture. I felt that I knew why they wanted the professor's dead body. I remembered that we had not seen a live bird or even a fly in this valley of very real sin.

What I have told took less than five minutes and at the end of that time I was once more unlocking the barred door in spite of Hannibal's weeping protests.

**I** WAS tremendously worried about Professor Sharp and Eve. They must have heard my shooting and I felt should have been close to the door by now unless—something had happened! I carried the larger acetylene lamp this time as I ran, rifle cocked and every sense on the alert. Silence which held an awful menace greeted me. I shouted.

"Where are you Professor? Oh, Oh, Professor!" Only my own mocking echoes answered.

Far ahead of me I suddenly heard the explosion of a rifle then the barking, sharper explosions of Eve's auto-

matic. A thin high-pitched scream, "Adam, Adam, Help! help!"

I ran on like a crazy man. There must be some good reason why they had not answered me when I called. Why had Eve's scream come from the further side of the valley from the direction in which I had left them?

Something tinkled on a rock behind me then began dragging and thumping. I whirled, flashed the light and saw it was an arrow gleaming like gold in the glare. A hawk's mask was peering down from a palm's crown, framed by drooping fronds. I fired; something fell with a snapping sound. I swept my light around and saw without terror that I was surrounded by a ring of flitting shapes all masked like animals.

I must win through. For Eve was in peril, perhaps even now was in the hands of these monsters and—Orne would be there, too!

I don't believe that I missed a shot. One after another they crashed, crunching from their hiding places. Now I slowly retreated toward the oval door for in my heart I knew that only in the daylight would I stand any chance of rescuing those I loved.

Night belonged to these beasts. From somewhere came the sickening sweet reek of their poisonous smoke. I quickened my steps not knowing what fresh devilry they might spring on me. I was without fear which goes to show what love will do for a man who is naturally timid. My life must be cared for if not—I shuddered to think of Vandeen's fate.

I began a jog trot, halting now and then. Something whizzed near me: I felt a jerk at my coat; a bang against the lamp; I snatched at the chain and tore the arrow free of my coat; I shouted until the gorge rang with the sound. I think these shouts hurt them and it somehow made me feel more like a real man instead of a shadow fighting hideous nightmare.

I reached the steps. Something dark and furry dashed between the groups of little devils that crept closer. A dog barked. I was glad yet it clinched the knowledge that Professor Sharp and Eve had fallen into the hands of the "living mummies," for I had left Violet with them.

The bulldog and I backed up the steps, he growling and making charging rushes, I shooting with all the accuracy I could muster. I reached and found the key, then leaned through the bars and unlocked the oval door. Then, because I had been forced to let up firing, the little fiends charged; they swept up the steps in a wave.

The door was open, I felt them—lean, puny creatures. I fought them desperately, they prodded and jabbed at me but their very numbers impeded them. I swung my rifle butt and felt it crash through masks and skulls. Down the steps they fell, rolling grotesquely. Violet bit and munched at their spindling, hairy legs. Yet by weight of numbers they bore me down. I fell to my knees calling, "Hannibal, Hannibal!"

"I's comin'," he screeched. He ran out beside me, his eyes rolling, swinging an axe with which he mowed them down, for he seemed endowed with the strength of many. It was the strength and ferocity of a cornered rat.

## CHAPTER XX

### SOUNDS OF SILENCE

I STUMBLED to my feet, backed into the door followed by Violet, Hannibal limping after me, his hand still holding the dripping axe. Not once had these creatures made a sound. They seemed to live and die silently. I closed and locked the door and could see them running about almost on all fours while others, huddled under cover of the deepest shadows, might have been whispering to each other.

I felt sure Violet would be able to follow Eve's trail. I also knew that my actions would be determined on the spur of the moment. Of one thing I was positive, I would follow Eve while my life lasted.

Violet lay watching me and licking a slight wound in his shoulder which I had already attended to. Hannibal sat huddled in one corner in a hopeless apathy of terror.

Out in the night a breathless silence hung. I could not keep still. On walking out into the passage and creeping near the oval door I saw one of the blacker heaps, which I knew was the body of one of the "living mummies," slowly move and begin a silent progress toward a clump of palms.

My hair rose—for the thing was sliding head first and was not moving its arms. Suddenly with a sigh of relief I realized it was being drawn away by means of the harpoon arrows. I raised my rifle and waited, saw something flicker and fired. Then followed a dull thud and the body stopped moving.

As I stood there I became conscious that my feet were growing wet. By means of my flash I saw that back where the passage dipped the tunnel was filled with water, then I understood.

The Touaregs had been able to temporarily repair the wall. Unluckily for us there had been a cloud-burst somewhere back in the hills. The water had collected and had penetrated into the tunnel. All our provisions and supplies but the few we had here were shut off from us, ruined for the most part by this time.

Eternity passed before the stars lost their radiant glitter, before the dawn crept over the sky. Then from over the red cliffs there spread like a growing bloodstain the first beams of the new sun.

It found us some little distance up the valley in spite of the fact that I

had been forced to turn back for the gas masks which I had forgotten. Hannibal slouched beside me carrying two rifles and a large pack strapped on his shoulders. The sky grew hot, brassy turquoise blue.

Violet led me to a jumbled welter of tracks, among them I saw Eve's, the professor's and on the outskirts behind a baobob, those of Orne and all about were a great number of small bare footprints. It was easy to read the story. The professor had evidently seen a number of the little fiends and had retreated in order to escape or at least get a wall of rock back of him. I found empty cases where they had rushed him but no corpses.

From there after a trampled place I found Eve's trail walking beside her father who was limping badly, soon the big-stockinged impressions of Orne's feet joined them.

The trail led straight to the squat red Temple. Here I found Eve's handkerchief—I felt sure she had dropped it on purpose. Of life or marks of violence there was no sign. I could hear nothing but the ceaseless almost inaudible spinning thump. My heart pounded as I slowly began the descent of the evil-smelling ramp.

Hannibal and I donned our gas masks, I cocked my rifle, looked back at the glaring daylight and, after having lighted the lamp for which I carried a quantity of carbide, I began the descent.

I heard Hannibal's teeth chattering behind his mask, his eyes glared showing the sclera making them two bull's eyes. I felt the tingling, the exhilaration which the air below was burdened with and here the sickening, sweet odor was mingled with another, more abominable. It was now dark—

I heard Violet's toenails clicking on the naked rock beside me. He growled continually, deep in his throat. I bent and touched him, the hair along his back stood straight.

**A**BOVE the sizzling hiss of the lamp I began to hear the bubbling, sputtering sound as if pitch was burning. Here the ramp twisted to the right in which direction lay the lake. My heart was filled with a concentrated cold rage which left no room for fear yet I realized that by entering the dark which was *their* realm, I was putting myself at a tremendous disadvantage.

I crept in their direction. They did not light the darkness but showed only shadow shapes directly about them. I seemed to hear sounds so faint that they were like ghosts of sounds. I felt they spoke to me yet I could not understand them.

Back of me Hannibal screamed, then I heard him strike something and immediately slipped off the lamp shutter. Its white glare revealed a sight that made me utter a shout of fury.

A ring of the little fiends hemmed us in. They evidently saw in the dark. They were of both sexes and absolutely stark naked. I never saw any more loathsome sight, their lacklustre eyes stared at us; their yellow white toad-skinned bodies—they were warty and had huge pores, were sparsely covered with thick, wiry, black hairs.

For a time all three of us went mad with rage and abomination. It was as if we did what we did instinctively. I felt only the urge to kill the vermin.

I clubbed my rifle and each of us set to work. The light of my lamp danced and whirled at my efforts. I felt bones smash; I grew wet with blood and sweat. They were puny and offered little resistance for they were drugged.

The fight led me toward the blue flames, which burst with an oily splutter and from them poured thickly, black smoke which rose into a hollow sphere of metal from which ran long tubes. I battered several wretches

from these who were inhaling fumes.

I turned to see the survivors fleeing by way of a passage which led off this hall of orgies at an acute angle.

I ran down the winding, dark corridor which, when the blinding rays of my lamp fell on it, I saw was gorgeously painted with figures which appeared to stare malignantly at me as I pounded along.

The air was striated with coiling, weaving stratas of oily black smoke. I should have felt hopeless for I knew there was no retreat, that our refuge was flooded, our supplies were lost. And I could not hope to kill everyone in this valley of sin and then, too, there was Orne.

I knew well he would kill me when he could. I felt unscathed after the melee and ran on, behind came Hannibal.

The air was not so fetid now and the darkness seemed less intense. Beyond me the passage branched, both paths led upgrade. I took the left one as it seemed lighter. In here we saw none of the creatures, but I had an intuitive feeling that there were many not far off.

A diffuse green-blue light grew stronger and seemed to flow down the path up which we proceeded. The air kept growing cooler and carried the thumping spin which had now grown much louder.

Suddenly I ran full tilt into a wall which completely blocked the passage. Twenty feet above me at the mouth of what seemed to be a shaft was another level. I could see the floor edge but above that only a more intense green-blue light. For a moment I felt we had been driven into this cul de sac, that the creatures would find it easy to pen us here.

I was on the point of turning and running back to the other passage which was not far away, when I touched a metal rung embedded in the wall of the shaft.

I whispered my intentions to Han-

nibal, then carefully climbed the ladder set in the wall. When I got near the surface I slowly raised my head and peered around. What I saw amazed me yet made me the more determined on my course of action.

Far above me the hazy blue light grew grey then merged into flickering cloudy shadows. An odor which haunted me crept into my nostrils, pungent and sweet and musty, holding a hint of the charnel house. It was familiar yet I did not place it then.

Before me lay a sheet of water stirred into ceaseless, sapphire, faceted ripples by a swirling snake-like jet of water which poured from the open mouth of a huge stone crocodile on the southern side of the subterranean lake.

These waves lapped and licked at the stone banks like a million little smooth tongues. It was from the stream of entering water that the spinning sound arose, also the dull thumping. Above the stone saurian hung a huge ball.

## CHAPTER XXI

### ARENA OF THE GODS

**B**ETWEEN the lake and the southern wall ran a narrow path which disappeared on the far side into the darkness. Above the path and swallowed in the obscurity of the upper cliff ascended spidery steps.

To the north almost at the level of the water ran a line of white wrinkled flame or at least I thought so until I recognized it as sunlight. Then I knew just where we were. This was the hidden end of the lake. We had seen the other portion which lay outside on our first visit.

The origin of the blue light was solved; sunlight reflected directly through the water. The cliff which hid this part of the lake was like a great curtain of stone.

Dimly seen there rose polished black

tablets cut with hieroglyphics which were in turn inlaid with vermilion, above these, vanishing in gloom, fell away tier after tier of black seats, like an arena.

Gigantic statues brilliantly painted and set with shimmering stones stood here and there. Osiris, Horus and a great white Bull, a number of sphinxes, a child sitting on a lotus leaf with fingers to mouth, Throth, an Ibis head figure and a monstrous crocodile, all stood scattered about.

This last I supposed to be the guardian of Set's Hell. There were many statues of Sebek, in fact crocodiles were the motif in this huge cavern. It was such a vast place that my heart sank for how was I to discover where Eve and her father were imprisoned?

Beyond and partially back of me on a raised platform crowded a packed mass of the hideous little cave dwellers. They were silent and their backs were turned and all leaned gazing into the open mouth of a passage. I was sure it was I they were expecting, that this was the exit taken by the other path.

All were armed, some with boomrangs, some with short dagger-like swords and many with long slender spears. So still did they stand that they too, looked like a portion of the mural paintings. I noted that a few were gorgeously clothed but the majority were naked.

I beckoned to Hannibal, climbing down myself far enough to grasp Violet whose heart pounded like the piston of an engine but who licked my hand. Then we crept behind the statue of a group of figures. As yet the multitude had not seen or what was more curious winded or heard us. Violet did not bark or in any way reveal our presence.

All this time I was torn with anxiety. Even now unspeakable things might be claiming Eve. I saw no sign of Orne. Why had these "living mummies" not killed him and why was I



so sure he had not been injured? If I only knew where to go in this maze—

I had once more put the cover over the acetylene lamp. It was hot and burned me for I had it slung on my left chest.

I looked to the four hundred and five rifle I carried, loosened my guns. Back of me Hannibal breathed hard. If possible I now intended to gain the narrow path which led under the black bell to the other side of the lake. There we could not be surrounded.

Cautiously we crept and crawled from pillar to statue always in the direction of the narrow path. Our backs were turned on the lake; the huddled mass did not stir from where they stood on the platform whose level was above us.

Inadvertently I stepped on a pile of fish bones, the crack with which they snapped was sharp and clear. My heart sank for I felt it was our death sentence. Before and above me the black heads of the mob turned as if impelled by the same muscle. A sea of white faces stared down at us without expression, yet they made no move to charge as I had expected them to do. My heart leaped with hope.

"Run!" I shouted. "Run for the path!"

Then with no warning Hannibal sprang past me screaming:

"Look out behin' yuh, Marse Adam."

I turned instantly, forgetting the crowd. A huge crocodile was charging us. It ran fast. Now I recognized the familiar musky reek. Its long, serrated tail was held high, while its mouth, set with immensely long and gleaming teeth, was open. There was nothing of the belly-dragging crawl about this saurian for it ran with the agility of a lizard.

I raised my rifle; fired straight into the mouth three times. The terrific force of impact at this point blank range stopped the crocodile dead in his tracks; slued him around while in

this position I was able to put a bullet into the spine. At this last shot he grew rigid and suddenly rolled over, thrashing.

The sound of my shots echoed like blasts, rattling and shaking the air. I felt my ear drums bulge in. From the crowd rose a long dry sigh. All had cupped hands over their ears. I reloaded as rapidly as I could. Violet stuck to me but I saw Hannibal rapidly scuttling up the spidery stairs.

**S**LOWLY I moved toward the path. The second crocodile came to the surface not ten feet from me as I walked by the water's edge. I saw its unwinking baleful stare and saw that a portion of its long snout had been bitten away.

It was even larger than the first and must have been of immense age. I let the brute have it just back of the eyes where I hoped it would rake back breaking the spine and incidentally extracting what little brains it possessed.

It sank lashing and twisting down until I lost sight of it. The third by this time had crawled in a more leisurely manner in my direction. I took advantage of this and slipped in a fresh clip.

I retreated until I stood directly under the black bell which hung just above my head. The crowd was now streaming around toward the stairs. From far above I heard Hannibal calling me, what he said I could not understand because of the echoing turmoil.

I fired again but did not seriously injure the beast. I must have angered him for his impetus became greater and he rushed along the path a truly terrific sight. On and on he came. I used the last cartridge in the clip.

Yet though mortally wounded he ran directly at me. I heard Professor Sharp's voice shouting far above me. The crocodile was less than a yard from me, Violet at this point rushed

forward and before the saurian could seize him the bulldog had the lizard's front leg between his jaws.

The big reptile crawled closer but more slowly. I was about to take to the water for I did not dare turn when I happened to glance up, saw that the frame on which the bell hung ran along the wall in such a way that by jumping I might be able to reach it and draw myself up out of danger till the crocodile passed when I hoped he would either die from the terrific wounds which I had already inflicted or this failing I should be at least given the opportunity to load.

I sprang just in time for the great jaws snapped with a wet smacking sound. I jerked my feet up, then to my consternation I felt the metal arms of the support slowly buckling. I suppose age and the corrosive effects of the water had weakened the frame.

The bell itself must have weighed two or three tons. It boomed softly and deeply as my feet kicked at it. Below me I saw Violet running in and out just beyond the monster's still viciously-snapping jaws. Past the corner of my eye I saw something bulky flash then splash into the lake with a terrific impact.

I had no time to see what it was, for with a terrific din that seemed to shake the very walls and which made my rifle shots seem noiseless, the great black bell fell, with me on top of it, onto the crocodile's back. Then the three of us rolled into the water.

Burdened as I was it was no easy task to crawl out onto that slippery path. As rapidly as I could, however, I reloaded my rifle which had partially fallen in the water. Then and only then, with Violet close by my heels, did I begin to retreat in the direction of the stairs. Far above I could hear Hannibal's cracked screeching.

"Adam, help me, will you?" I turned quickly for the voice was Professor Sharp's. "I'm here back of you.

There's a pipe or something with a devilish suction."

I waded out and extended the gun barrel.

"Can you reach this?" I asked. He took hold and after a struggle I succeeded in dragging him onto the bank.

"Good boy, I knew you'd come. I told Eve so before Orne took her away."

"What's that? Where are they?"

"I saw your battle with the crocodiles. It was a good fight. These little devils worshipped those brutes. Now you've killed them and pulled down their sacred bell to boot!"

"Come on, Professor for God's sake, come on! Hé may—Where is she?" My heart was agonized to think of Eve helpless in the power of these little fiends and Orne. To me it seemed that her father was heartless.

Far above us huddled at the top of the stairs was Hannibal I could barely see him but his voice left no doubt as to his identity.

"Hannibal has the spare rifles." I said.

Professor Sharp shouted, "Come back Hannibal, bring the guns." Then turning to me said smiling grimly, "We'll meet him on the way up."

## CHAPTER XXII

### RUMBLES OF TERROR

**I** WAS almost wild when I thought of Eve's peril. Above me the Professor—nearly naked, for they had taken his clothes—limped on and up brandishing my revolver. Presently he was joined by Hannibal who handed over one of the rifles.

"For God's sake let's hurry." I said.

"I can't go any faster," said Professor Sharp. "I know they won't be able to get through before we catch up. Orne's got to fight for he's lost prestige because of you, Adam."

"I don't know how it came about

but I do know that much," he added after a moment's thought.

I heard Violet sniffing behind me.

"Aren't you afraid that they will roll a stone down on us and wipe us off those steps?" I asked.

"We've got to chance it. It's the only way up and out," said Professor Sharp between panting breaths. He went on, "After they had taken us prisoners, which was Orne's doing, they carried us above. I'm taking you there now. It's where the Priests of Set live, their Holy of Holies. Orne tried to tempt me, said he'd lead us out if we'd leave you and Vandeen and Hannibal. Where's Vandeen anyway?"

"They killed him," I blurted.

"Yes, I suspected as much. They put me in a cell that had a window which was barred and looked out on the lake. Watched you fight the crocs and was afraid that you'd never find my prison, so jumped down—I know the way for a short distance."

We had come to where the stairs dived into the cliff wall, a passageway which rapidly broadened led spiraling in.

"Violet ought to be able to trail them," I whispered to the professor.

"You're right—that solves the worst of our difficulties."

For a few moments we stood listening and hesitating. An unearthly quiet was broken only by the ceaseless spinning thump and the sly rustling movements rising from the pitch dark beyond. Behind us the ant-like figures had once more begun their tedious ascent of the stairs.

"Orne knows there is another exit, he told me that much," panted the professor. "The hound got his additional information from a mosque of el Kurana. He's masquerading as the reincarnation of some Touareg Savior whose coming was prophesied. That's why he stole the clothes. It wasn't an Egyptian mummy but that of a Touareg."

"Hurry," I cried, "I can't stand this any longer. To think of her in that devil's power."

"For the present he's not going to harm her and I believe her danger is not imminent," jerked the Professor who was hastily donning the extra riding breeches, boots and shirt Hannibal carried. I was engaged in recharging the carbide in the searchlight and adding more water.

**WE STARTED**, the Professor led with lamp slung to his chest, then Hannibal, with me as rear guard. Almost at once the passage which we followed forked when not more than a hundred yards had been covered.

"How do you know the way?" I asked in surprise after the professor had chosen a particular passageway from amongst the four bifurcations.

"Easy enough," he said with a chuckle, "when I passed before I scratched a groove in the wall with a nail I happened to have in my pocket."

The place in which we wandered was a labyrinth.

"You'll notice too," said the Professor, "that in every case the passage leads up, also that there is a picture of Sebek or Set just beyond the forking. It is on these two clues that I hope to win through after we pass that portion of these warrens which I know. These in case we don't reach Eve before Orne's made his plans."

"If he had taken Eve and gone with her, Violet will be able to follow them." I said. I was not frightened at this time. I think my heart was too full of anguish on Eve's account to think of our own peril.

I seemed to see her face ahead of me forming and reforming before my eyes against the curtain of ink which closed behind us and which even the powerful searchlight was barely able to banish. Strange odors drifted along the passageways, some fragrant, some aromatic, yet all holding a hint of the charnel house. I longed to cry out, to

fight, to kill, to do anything to take her from them. It was awful to think of her alone amongst such fiends.

"Odd they haven't made an attack," cried the Professor harshly.

We made no secret of our progress, knowing it to be useless with these creatures. Abruptly we came to another forking. Three passages met ahead of us at acute angles. From somewhere beyond we heard a bounding, crashing sound, rapidly growing louder.

"What the—" began the Professor.

"Sounds like an avalanche—" I interrupted.

"Listen and try to determine which passageway it is coming along."

"She's a comin' down de middle one, Marse Virgil. An ef we don git outen de way shę gwine bust us wide open," spouted Hannibal.

Now the rumbling note had grown into a bounding crashing thunder.

"Quick, in here," shouted the Professor. "We'll have to chance it."

**WE ALL** dashed into the right hand passageway and just in the nick of time, for with a whizzing, grating crash a large round boulder like a huge cannon ball raced by, sending out sparks as it sped along.

"Must have been a last resort, Adam," called the Professor over his shoulder. "You notice it smashed and scarred their walls."

"That explains why there were none of the little fiends about. I'm glad they timed their juggernaut poorly. It seems to me if we follow its course it will lead to their Holy of Holies as it very likely guarded their most precious or sacred place."

During this talk we had been walking onward and I confess my ears were strained for another distant rumble. It came too—

We saw no less than four of these huge black balls rushing through the tunnels through which we made our molish way ever upward.

"Somewhere in the narrower passageways below those stones will stick and block the tunnel," I said.

"Yes," answered the Professor. "I think that was their main purpose also as well as very efficient exterminators to anyone meeting them as they descended. Now we know why the floor is slightly concave."

"What's that? Hark!" the Professor's harsh tones trembled.

I froze into a crouching attention. There it was again, a high, shrill and powerful, a woman's scream.

"I can't understand you," shouted the Professor as he began running in a lumbering, limping gallop which caused the searchlight arc to bound up and down. To me his gait seemed a snail's pace. I shouted.

"Hurry, hurry for God's sake, she needs us."

"Can't go any faster," yelled the Professor. "And we'd best stick together."

The wall paintings seemed to run with us; to come to life; our shadows sped before us like grotesque black scouts. I passed Hannibal who puffed and blew like an Orca.

Once again Eve's shriek reached us, a thin ribbon of sound. Now we could distinguish words or parts of words. My heart swelled.

"Be careful of the doors—he's taking me up to—Set— Suddenly her voice ceased as if a knife had cut it. I almost saw Orne's big hand closing over her mouth. At that moment I could have killed him. I seemed to be bursting with a terrible fear for Eve.

The last time she had screamed her voice sounded much nearer. My breath whistled for the path ascended steeply. Suddenly before I knew it it had ceased and we found ourselves pounding along the floor of a great hexagonal room, six doors all open gaped wide. We stopped, then I began a frenzied shouting.

"Eve, Eve, where are you?"

## CHAPTER XXIII

## THE CAVE PEOPLE

**T**HE Professor wheeled slowly inspecting the doors whose arches were peaked like inverted V's and had a peculiar look about them which I did not then understand. Violet darted across the floor and stood barking in one of the openings and turning his head toward us, where we stood undecided, listening intently.

Then a long wailing scream arose from beyond the door next to the one in which Violet stood. It rose filled with pain and terror. I rushed like a goaded bull straight through the doorway. Hannibal, Professor Sharp and finally Violet followed, the dog barking continually.

As we ran, from four of the six doors streamed a mob of cave people; spears whizzed about us, Hannibal screeched as he turned and fired. I paid no attention to the little fiends but dashed into the small rock room which appeared to have another of the queer V-shaped doors.

At its further end gliding under it with Eve's head held close to his body, I saw Orne. Eve must have known we were close for she uttered a muffled scream and struggled. I saw Orne hit her brutally. I bounded on only to see the V shaped pieces of stone which I had thought door arches, swing down and clang together. I caught Orne's laugh as the door leaves ground.

Now that it was too late I understood Eve's shriek about the doors for on running out we saw that four of the other gates had closed leaving only two open and from these streamed an ever-increasing mob of the little fiends.

"Back, back!" called the professor who stood in the smaller rock chamber from which Orne had escaped. "They may close these doors!"

**I** RAN back through the room a maniac for the time being, beating and tearing at the heavy stone leaves, all to no avail, shouting threats and feeling as if I would burst. If I could only lay my hands on Orne—

Quickly Sharp loaded while I fired into the close packed mob.

The damage we inflicted was terrific. It was impossible to miss and each high-powered mushrooming soft-nosed bullet meant for a rhino's hide, expanded and literally tore them to pieces.

Desperately the Professor and I fired and reloaded. Where did they all come from? Now they climbed over the bloody bodies of the slain.

"We've got to close the door," I yelled. "Give them hell while I see if I can manage it."

The Professor nodded his head as he fired. The silent throng moved on slowly doing no execution with their arrows for they were packed too tight to utilize their weapons. Our light danced on short sword-like daggers and turned them into silvery fangs. Some held long, slim spears.

I had been wounded by one of these but it was not serious. The echoing thunder of our shots seemed to daze and entirely deafen the creatures who yet in spite of the carnage we wrought on them, advanced. I wondered was it the press of numbers behind that drove them on to death?

I sprang back and by the electric torch I examined the wall above the inverted V stones of the door. There seemed to be chains which held the corners up and the peak of the arch was pivoted. Then I noticed there were wedges of metal really holding the huge stone leaves back, that the chains no doubt had been used to draw them open again.

"Hurry," called the Professor in a cracked dry voice as he stood firing. I kicked at the nearest wedge, it did not budge. I dashed about looking for some heavy object to use as a hammer.

Saw nothing but a metal box. With this in my arms I ran to the wedge and drove down blow after blow.

**I** FELT the wedge give, with a creak the remaining half of the door slid down crushing the leaders flat as it fell.

Professor Sharp and I turned toward each other, both dirty, powder grimed and bleeding. Making sure that they could not open the doors I climbed up on the battered chest and chopped at the chains till I had them severed.

"We've used more than two-thirds of our ammunition," I panted.

"Yes, we can't stand them off like that again." Laboriously the words came from Professor Sharp's heaving chest and working throat. "We seem safe for the present but prisoners as well. Hello, we have stumbled into their treasure vault."

Rubies, diamonds, emeralds, sapphires, and many stones I was not enough of an expert to recognize lay winking up at us like little constellations from where I had tumbled them out of their chest when I had picked it up to use as a hammer.

Automatically I began to gather some of them and just as mechanically to fill my pockets with them. Hannibal had set the lamp down and was gazing in wonder into one of the other chests.

The reaction after the fight was wearing away and once more the paramount question of where Eve and Orne were filled my mind.

Carefully I examined the door through which they had gone. Its leaves swung on a pivot outside our vault-like prison. Pry and pull as I would I could not even stir them.

"No use that way, Adam," said the Professor. "We'll have to think of some other plan."

I saw that he was sorting precious stones in the same careless way. Even then I thought of how differently we

should have greeted this find under other circumstances.

"God, but where can Orne have taken Eve?"

## CHAPTER XXIV

### PRIESTS OF SET

**F**ROM the two small openings which appeared high on each side of the door and from under its edges, I caught the glimmer of light. Violet began barking.

"Keep still," I said to him.

I peered through and saw a flight of short steps leading down to the door through which Orne had borne Eve. Standing at the head of the steps, holding a smoking torch which threw a flickering light on his face, stood the man himself.

Where was Eve and why was he alone?

Orne waited; Violet growled from time to time. I knew the man had no idea he was being spied upon. I watched his face grow troubled, then he moved toward the hole through which I peered directly into line of my fire. Had I shot I could have broken his leg or shattered his face for he was leaning over, and putting his mouth near the aperture called:

"Are you there, Professor Sharp?" His tone emotionless and cold. The Professor answered him tersely.

"Yes, I am here."

"Then listen to me, for this is your last chance. But none of this applies to your doctor friend, his dog or Hannibal.

"I've got you all trapped. The game is mine and only by my aid and by meeting all my requirements can you escape."

"What are your terms?" questioned the professor in a grating voice.

**"I** AM not heartless. I love your daughter. She is safe now almost at the threshold of the second exit—on the way—My explanations

to her have made her see the light of reason, how unjust she was to me.

"We shall be married on reaching civilization. I have enough jewels to make us rich beyond the dreams of Croesus. She wishes me to save your life. I also desire to spare you, but this depends entirely upon yourself and the swine with you." His flat voice paused.

I withdrew the revolver barrel from the cranny and saw that he was peering about, then he lighted a fresh torch from a bundle which I had not seen before.

"Where are you talking from?" asked the professor in an inflectionless voice.

"It doesn't matter," replied Orne. "Eve is comfortable. My terms are these! Arrange with Penn, shoot him, or do anything so that you accomplish his disarming, also that of Hannibal. Kill the dog at once.

"Bind the two men, then give me your word of honor that you have complied. They cannot come with us. Then you must promise to forget all that has happened in the 'Valley of Sin' and confirm any story I shall tell, with your word."

"You mean to have Penn and Hannibal left to the mercy of those little fiends?" asked the Professor.

"Yes and no," answered Orne. "Our path is a peculiar one, by taking it we open the floodgates and the valley will be flooded. Therefore I believe that your companions will drown—

"I shall give you approximately five minutes to decide, Professor. To be or not to be a martyr, proteid food for the famished priests of Set and the disciples of Sebek, or what I consider the lesser evil, that of being drowned.

"Vandeen's fate must be fresh in your minds. I discovered at el Kurana and from my friends the Touaregs that there were other tiles and from them I learned of this prophecy. I decided to become the reincarnation of Sheik el Mora Ber, that is after Van-

deen's hysteria forced my hand. Then I was compelled to slow up your work.

"I should have never come at all had it not been for my love for Eve, my hate for your swine doctor and my need of money. I was a complete success until Penn began his campaign." For the first time his voice grew higher, brittle with rage. "Now they want to make me a mummy again, claiming that my coming has been a curse instead of a blessing.

"They have starved for animal food so long and smoked their devilish Mirra, as they call it—Opium and hashish—that they have no minds, only a few debased instincts."

Orne continued, his words were cruel, they tore at the silence like vicious insects, I could see that his face worked with mingled fury and fear.

"You've had time to consider. Quick, choose. They want to make a mummy of me, ME. I tell you it's because of your doctor. He killed their sacred crocodiles and lost their bell and because he slaughtered them they say I am responsible, because they believe I am the mummy and now because of the calamities which have befallen they'll torture me and kill me and make ME into a damned grinning mummy! Choose now! I can't wait."

His voice rose high and cracked.

"I HAVE chosen, Orne," the Professor's tones were cool and contemptuous. "If you were not a dirty dog and a coward you would have spared your breath. Now Orne, hold up your hands. Fire if he doesn't obey."

"Then you can go to Hell. I hope the priests of Set make it interesting on the way."

"Fire!" Sharp's tones spurted but I had squeezed the trigger before the word was half uttered. I felt the Colt jump. The sound of its report was muffled. Six times I fired and prayed

that one of the bullets would find Orne.

At the second or third shot I fancied there came a scream but not until I ceased firing did I realize that Orne was running up the steep corridor screaming in long high accents of agony. One arm held the torch which streamed sparks behind the fleeing figure. The other arm flopped by his side, boneless and limp.

"You broke his arm, Adam," said the Professor. "He's leaving an easy trail behind him."

The empty cases tinkled on the rock floor. I slipped six fresh cartridges into the cylinder, as I did so I felt the bulk of my pack. Somehow it reminded me of something. My brain was groping for a solution to our difficulties and I believe this was the first time I got a clue toward our release.

**WE** COULD no longer hear Orne. I was profoundly dejected and nearly lost my head as my imagination got busy when I thought of what that coward might do to Eve before we could get out of this hole.

"He will have to hurry. Unless his arm is attended to he will bleed to death."

Then coolly and systematically we began our search. We pried into cracks, we sounded the floors, walls and even ceilings. From beyond the outer doors came scraping notes which we could not understand.

Meanwhile back in the dark recesses of my brain a spark of a plan was burrowing toward my consciousness. It came to me as I pried and scraped at a big stone which formed a portion of the floor. The rest was solid living rock. We endeavored to lift this to see why it had been so placed, just as it trembled and stirred under our united efforts I had the idea and it frightened me.

As the rock was lifting a rushing, swirling sound rose to our ears and we saw by the lamps rays far down,

a foam flecked, black racing stream of water.

"No chance there," said the Professor with a grimace.

Over a half hour had passed and time as we were well aware was of the very greatest importance. For none of us could guess what these priests of Set had in reserve and we knew that wounded though he was Orne was capable of anything.

"We can get out of this. I don't know why I haven't thought of it before. The chances of its killing us are great, though," I said in a low voice.

"What is it? Quick, hurry man," excitedly exclaimed the Professor. For the first time I understood what self control he had been exercising and was ashamed of myself.

"You remember the dynamite? Can't we blow down the doors?"

He looked at me with his bright eyes blinking seemingly weighing our chances carefully. I continued.

"Couldn't we place a charge against the leaves of one of the doors, cover ourselves up and tie the rest of the explosive on a string and hang it down yonder so even if it does explode, it won't be so likely to hoist us?"

"It's our only chance and we'd better try it, Adam," he answered simply.

"It's not quite suicide and our situation warrants desperate measures if one ever did!" After he had spoken he walked over and began kneading our last loaf of bread into dough by the addition of water.

By the aid of this putty-like substance we placed the dynamite against the stone. I inserted a fuse and cap and was surprised to find that I had no fear though I had a curious feeling as if I was the executioner preparing my own scaffold. Hannibal moaned and was already covered by a pile of empty chests into one of which he had stuck his head.

The two remaining sticks of explosives I tied to a string and lowered



them till they dangled just above the surface of the swirling, spinning black water.

Our supplies we gathered conveniently together, and took positions at separate corners of the room farthest away from the charge so that should the ceiling fall in one spot the other might be spared to care for and save Eve.

Just before we lighted the fuse the Professor gripped my hand and said: "We've been through a lot together," his grip tightened, "you're a good comrade Adam. If you win through you'll take care of Eve if it can be done." I nodded my head as I was not able to speak. "You love her I know," he said, "and I am glad."

After that I lighted the fuse and crept into the furthest corner, watching the tiny red spark whose hissing was audible as it rapidly ate its way toward what might prove our sudden death.

## CHAPTER XXV

### THE CRIMSON SPOOR

**T**HE scratching which we heard before grew suddenly louder. Violet growled. I supposed the living mummies were in some way of their own attempting to dig us out. I remember smiling at the thought of their shortly coming surprise. Never for an instant did I forget Eve and I prayed to live so that I might save her from Orne and his allies.

One—two—three—four, I felt the dynamite would go off at seven. I counted more slowly, five—my tongue was so dry I could hardly articulate. Six—S—

**I** NEVER finished the word, a soundless blast of awful energy, a wind that deafened and pressed me, shook and twisted me, until I was in torture. I heard no sound of the explosion, only the rushing roar of what seemed like a cyclone that was kill-

ing me by the pressure of its awful strength.

Beyond me in the dark some one moaned. I reached for my flash and swept its finger of white light up. A great crack yawned in the ceiling. Sharp sat beside a fragment of rock that had barely missed him; he moaned as he tried to pull his coat tail out from under it.

I managed to crawl over to him and set to work freeing his head. Stone fragments lay all about him and I felt more than ever the wonder of our survival.

**L**ONG before I had his head free, he asked if the charge had worked. Was our path open to follow Eve and rescue her? I had been so dazed and shocked that I had not even thought to look.

I turned the searchlight on either end of the rock vault and was amazed to see the havoc. The door which we ourselves had closed was badly cracked while the door which had borne the full brunt of the dynamite had all but vanished tearing away a large portion of the steps which led up and into the corridor beyond.

"Yes, the way is open," I said.

Professor Sharp was not a pretty sight when I had freed him. He was bruised and cut and covered with blood.

It was ten minutes before either Hannibal or Professor Sharp could even limp along after me up the steep corridor. Our pace was a slow crawl and the Professor would not listen to my scouting on ahead, claiming that our success depended entirely on not getting separated again.

From ahead there came no sound. I think we all felt as though we had clambered out of a tomb as we limped panting along the corridor.

"Light the acetylene lamp, Adam," whispered the Professor as we paused. I was able to do so after a great deal of trouble, at first my heart

sank for I was afraid it was broken.

The steep passage was blocked by a wall of blackness. Behind us from beyond the doorway arose the soft spin of the water and a thin scratching, picking note that grew louder and ate into the menacing silence.

The scratching, picking sound had evidently been made by the survivors prying at the loose fragment. They were like bull dogs in their tenacity of purpose.

By the glare of the light I saw that they were squeezing through the hole made by the fallen section of door. Notwithstanding that several of their number lay under the stone with their legs twitching, they made no effort to rescue the injured and maimed.

**I**T WAS as if some terrific urge to kill us drove them on, yet their efforts had been weak and futile as if they were only partially conscious and had all but forgotten just how to fight. They had never seemed brave to me, but like automata with no feeling. They were like snakes or scorpions to me, less than human and utterly odious.

"Quick!" shouted the professor. "They're after us again."

A spear flew by us jangling on the rock passage ahead of us. I picked it up and hurled it back. Followed a snapping thud then more crawling scratchings.

"Come on, Adam."

"It's easy to follow Orne's trail," I said passing along at the head of our little procession. "Lord but the man bled!"

The passageway was now growing much more narrow with all its walls gilded so that it looked as if we walked through a tunnel of burnished gold. Our forms were mirrored in grotesquely twisted shapes while our shadows fled before us. As we proceeded the grade grew steeper and we suddenly came to a flight of steps.

Orne's bloody trail zigzagged up these.

"See, he is weakening, he staggered and here's where he rested; the pool of blood shows that. Humph! He's bandaged himself or managed a tourniquet."

Beyond there was hardly any blood only a drop here and there. Behind us the sounds of pursuit grew louder.

"Yes, I think that's it."

The draft blew by us freighted by the black fumes not by sight but by the tingling exhilaration which I felt. Then I noted that the air was growing grey and that it swirled like a horror growing slowly visible.

"Get your masks on," I said pulling mine out of my bulging tunic pocket.

They followed my example as the air grew darker and the dry rustle of pursuit louder.

"I wonder if we've got to kill 'em all?" I asked bitterly.

"We will unless we can escape," said the Professor, adding gravely, "There certainly are many more of them than we first suspected!"

"Hello, what's that?"

I think the three of us saw the danger simultaneously, for like sprinters at the starter's pistol we all sprang forward. Then just as suddenly I stopped and raised my rifle.

I loaded, fumbled with a clip, my fingers seemed clumsy. Then as I fired the men at the ladder top crumbled. I saw Hannibal begin clambering up and under his arm dangled the legs of Violet.

At the top a figure leaned over and struck at the Professor. I saw him, through the fog of black, duck his head then reach up and jerk the creature over the wall's rim; he fell and nearly brushed Hannibal off. I ran on.

Something struck my right shoulder, I felt a stabbing pain and as I turned saw that the pursuers were upon me; raising my rifle I fired again; they cowered where they

crawled and crept up the steep steps, yet they did not retreat.

As I ceased firing I screamed and noted that they covered their ears as if the loud noise hurt them. I dashed forward with rifle clubbed, slipped on the stairs and was immediately clutched by claw-like hands that tore at me and jabbed with short dagger-like swords. Struggling up I swept the rifle about me flail-like. I thanked God they were puny and weak, if it had not been for this fact I should never have gained the ladder's foot. I backed up the steps.

## CHAPTER XXVI

### DREAD SARCOPHAGUS

**Q**UICKLY turning I dashed for the ladder and began climbing, encumbered as I was with the bulky lamp and the rifle the bandolier being broken, my progress was of necessity slow.

"I'll take care of them," Professor Sharp's voice cut the air like a knife.

The little mob crowded about the ladder below jabbing at me with their spears. At the time I did not feel any of the wounds they inflicted. Under me the ladder moved and swayed. I felt as if I should never be able to reach the top. How interminable that climb seemed no one can guess.

I felt the rush of air beside me and heard something smash amongst the horde below; another and another missile fell among them yet slowly but surely the ladder was slipping. I heard Professor Sharp panting and sensed his struggles just above me. Now my head was over the rim but under me the ladder slipped faster jerking back.

"Your arms, quick, hold up your arms!"

I felt them grasp just as the ladder slid from under me. Felt myself hauled up over the edge and lay gulping and sobbing for air. My mask suffocated me and I longed to take it

off. From below came a crash. I got to my knees and saw by the lamp's light that the ladder together with many of the mob had vanished. I hoped with all my heart that in falling it had broken. Evidently it had slid far down the steps.

"There is no time to lose, Adam," said the Professor his voice anxious and sounding muffled and far away behind the mask. "I heard Eve scream a moment ago."

His words brought me back to actual consciousness, but for them I believe I should have become a raving madman for the time at least. I fancy this was due to the smoke which our masks could not entirely keep out.

As we drew nearer the saffron lights I saw that they were lamps containing oil which reflected the flames of the floating wicks. Over them hung carved pots in which liquid thickly bubbled. From beyond a heavy curtain of black shredding the silence, arose low moans.

About the fire and paying little attention to us, but running and leaping as if life and more depended on their actions, shuffled and glided men whose faces were hidden by crocodile masks; men whose robes were of black and who wore shapeless bags over their heads. We stood at a loss for a moment.

Three of the creatures who looked like hideous demons—half man, half reptile—grasped one of the pots and glided with it under the curtain.

**A**LL ABOUT the chamber, which was walled by gold and black, stood open sarcophagi. Thick as the black smoke had become it smelled of bitumen and aromatic oils in which was blended a pitch-like odor. Strange glass and porcelain shapes stood out as I swept the lamp over the chamber. Nowhere was there any other door or exit.

For a moment in the room beyond the moaning ceased. I knew it was not

Eve and really had not been curious who had been making the sound so intent had I been on locating the girl I loved.

"I think it's Orne," said the Professor as he whirled and brought his rifle down with a smashing crash on the head of a crocodile-masked man who had crept back of him with a bowl of something oily and reddish which he had been about to fling on Sharp.

As the man went down the stuff spilled and there arose a biting acrid odor. Another from a greater distance hurled a dish and a few drops fell on my wrist and made me leap away. It was as if I had been sprayed by fire.

"It is acid, or—"

My words were cut short for from beyond the heavy black curtain a terrible scream—a blood-curdling sound, burst out. At the same moment a group of black-clad priests as I took them to be, rushed us, all armed with bowls. Professor Sharp fired. I saw one man fall, the stuff he carried trickling over him, his body squirmed away from it even as he died.

I ran to the pitchy stuff bubbling over the fire picked it up and flung it at the huddled group. They went down with a high, thin, moaning shriek. As the gummy stuff hit them it hardened and clung, they fell writhing and kicking but prisoners in the viscid material.

"Come on let's see what's beyond that curtain," cried Sharp, peering into the pitchy dark. Just as he did so another unearthly yell arose and died.

"In a minute after I've poured this stuff out."

**I** TURNED over the last of the three simmering pots, then extinguished the oil lamps. We pushed our way into the room beyond. Here the air was sweeter and not so hot. I was battered and bruised and felt hopeless for nowhere could I see any signs of Eve's

presence. As far as my smarting, burning eyes could see there was no exit here. We must make our last stand.

From all about us rose the soaring spin of water as if it voiced with a thousand tongues, the anger of the Valley of Sin. A charnel, pungent odor bit at the sense of smell.

About the walls stood many sarcophagi. They seemed, as I looked at them, to squirm and wiggle their detestable little vermilion forms. Beyond a pile of papyri stood high. I wondered callously what hideous histories they related. Already my heart seemed dead.

Violet, who had been pressing against my leg, scuttled off toward the deepest shadows where a huge shape squatted, wrapped in shadows. He barked excitedly.

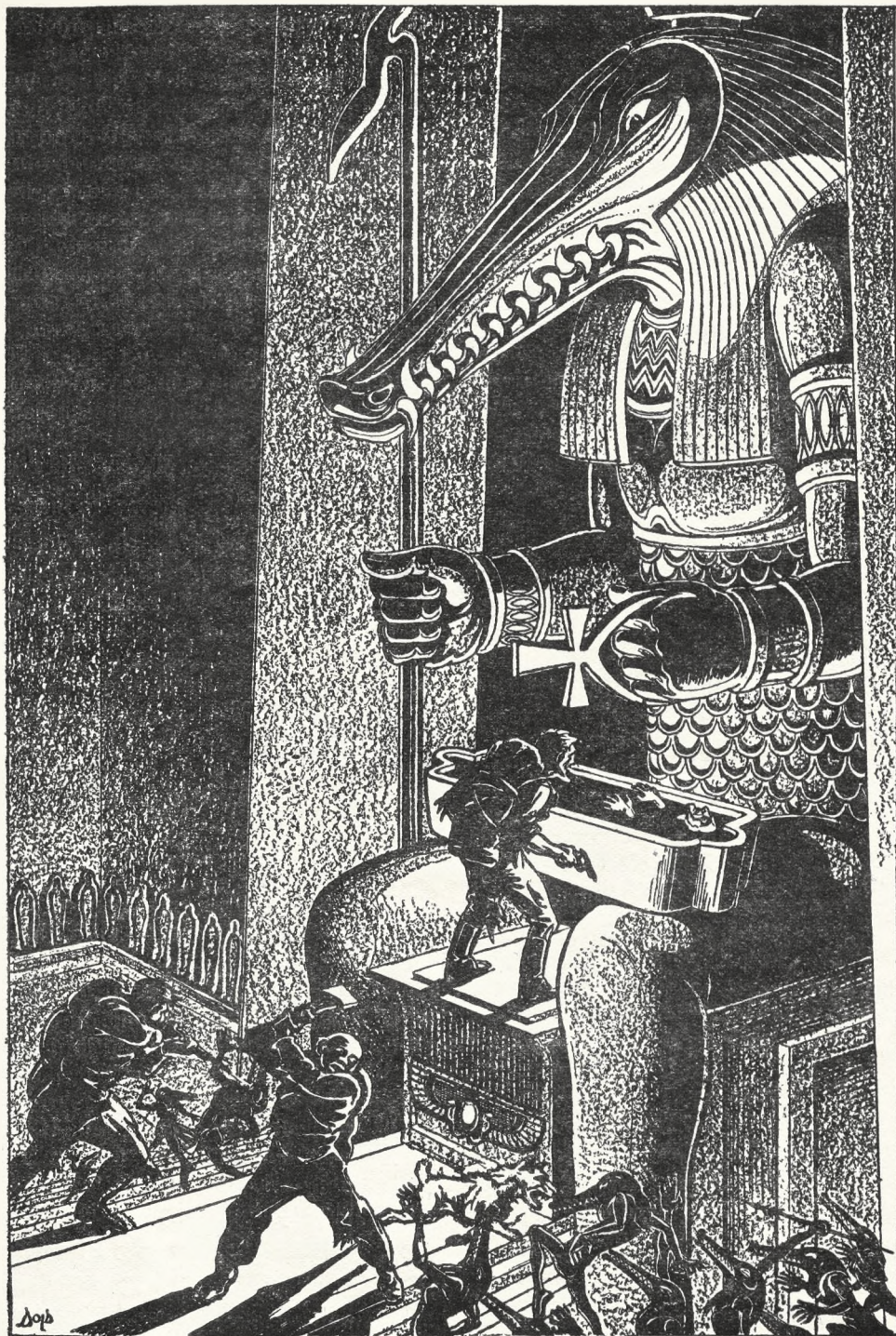
I swept the searchlight in the direction the dog had taken. The glare showed a gigantic figure carved in sooty black stone representing the naked body of a man who squatted, glowering down into an open sarcophagus which lay across his knees.

I started back for the carving was so lifelike that, as if born from the very pigment of shadow, it seemed horribly alive and menacing. Yet, it was nothing but cunningly fashioned stone and ivory.

Something inside stirred. I saw that metal tubes ran over the edges of the coffin and moved forward, the shadows oozed crawling about me; my feet slipped on the floor which slanted and twinkled like frozen ink.

I rushed forward, hardly conscious that I was being attacked by a half score of figures that tore and clutched at me and seemed bent on pulling me away from the sight within. Professor Sharp had been like a man frozen, only his burning blue eyes moved about the apartment.

I swayed hither and thither in the grip of the black-clad priests. Suddenly with a mighty shout the pro-



I stared down at the dead-alive face of Orne. They were turning him into a mummy.

fessor startled me back into an acute consciousness.

"Eve, Eve where are you?" he cried loudly.

The men holding and prodding at me with stirring rods let go. I sprang forward and turned the beams of my lamp full down on the contents of the sarcophagus. I cried out in horror.

A figure lay there partially covered by the viscid dark liquid which left nothing but hands and face exposed. It was Orne!

## CHAPTER XXVII

### PRISON OF THE DEAD

**A**BOUT me rocked and echoed Professor Sharp's voice calling to Eve. There was no answer. Yet, somewhere I thought I heard a faint pounding tattoo as of heels on the stone floor.

I had tried to kill Orne. I hated and despised him, yet what I saw in the livid white face as still and lifeless as a face could be and yet live, made me pity him.

He was bound about like a veritable mummy with inscribed lengths of cloth. Orne gave no actual sign of life, yet from under his partially closed lids I caught the wet light of living eyes.

Slowly, as I bent over, they opened and I gazed deep down into the man's heart.

"Eve! Eve! Where are you?" Again and again the professor's voice boomed savage with fear yet holding a desperate appeal.

"What are you looking at, Adam?" barked Sharp.

"It's Orne. They are turning him into a mummy I think. O, God, it's too awful!"

Just as suddenly as it had come upon me my impotence vanished. I was once more alive and horrified at my own torpid immobility. I reached down and dipping my hands into the

black thick mass which almost covered Orne, I tugged and pulled until I finally felt the stiff rigid figure yielding and slowly rise with streamers of the sticky stuff clinging to it.

I set him against one of the legs of the statue and realized for the first time that my hands stung, that the pain was growing. It was as if a thousand minute claws and teeth scraped and bit at my skin. Then I understood what Orne's torture must have been.

I ran to the curtain and wiped as much of the gluey mess off as I was able. Then stooping I tore the black garment off of one of the dead priests and rushed back to Orne.

"My God, my God, it's awful, frightful." Sharp stood staring with wide open eyes down on the dead-alive face. Suddenly Orne's eyes flew open once more. He looked at us and recognized us. Not a muscle moved so far as we could see yet from the closed mouth we heard:

"Behind Set—Only the door of Stars—the Star door—push—flood gates—save Eve."

Each word had grown lower and less distinct. As Orne finished his jaw dropped; his head rolled over onto the swathed shoulders.

"He's dead," I cried. "Let's see what is behind Set."

The big black statue nearly blocked the end of the room, how much space was behind it we could not tell. We squeezed through the narrow crevice between the pith and the wall, saw with deadly fear four black-clad figures, who carried something which writhed in their grasp, disappearing through a narrow door. One of seven set in the angles of the wall.

I cursed myself even as my heart gave a great bound, for I saw, as the men vanished, that it was Eve they bore. Violet had discovered her and had endeavored to summon me to her aid!

**P**ROFESSOR SHARP who had preceded me through the crack saw the situation and charged like an enraged bull. A packed mass of the black-clad figures faced us with their long, pointed teeth bared. Behind them the door was closing!

The professor reached the door just as it swung too, jerked it open and dived through. The lane his furious charge had opened closed after him. I fought against the pack of fiends, who tore, prodded and bit at me, mouth-ing in their ferocious anger. Yet all the time I seemed to look into Orne's dying eyes, there had been truth in them when he said:

"Pleiades."

I caught sight of the door he must have meant, for on it were set little constellations in bright gold splashes that caught and reflected my lamps' rays.

As I fought, firing now and then but for the most part using my rifle as a club, I was tortured with the thought that Professor Sharp was one against four with only Violet to help. The notes of roaring, ripping water also held a menace as if they, too, were hostile.

From beyond the crack I heard the pattering of many feet whose claws clicked as they ran, like dogs. The horde had at last surmounted the wall. My position was truly desperate.

"You hold the crack entrance, Hannibal," I yelled, "while I open this door."

I had no knowledge as to how it worked except that some pressure or twisting movement was necessary. I was aware that among the seven doors were those which would probably mean death to me.

I stood before the black oblong on which was Osiris. In there had disappeared Professor Sharp and Eve, farthest away and at the extreme left was the smallest door set with golden star constellations and what looked like zodiacal signs. Orne might have

died with a lie in his eyes, yet I did not believe this. I heard the mob outside rushing about like mad dogs bent on destruction.

Once more I rushed back, my hands trembled as I twisted the little golden bosses with their seven angles. Suddenly when I pressed obliquely give. The door yielded and swung, a rush and roar of water suddenly entered.

At the same time Hannibal shrieked out:

"Watch out! Fer Gawd sake watch out, Marse Adam. Des pushin' Set back onto us. He's afalling. He's gwine smash us."

I saw the great black figure lean—totter—sway.

**"B**ACK HANNIBAL, back, into the door!"

For a moment he did not understand. I thought he would squeeze out through the crack into the heart of that murderous horde beyond, who squealed and shrieked in thin thread-like voices. I dashed forward, jerked him back and tossed him like an inanimate thing into the narrow black chasm which seemed packed with angry sounds.

Over and almost on me was the toppling statue, tons and tons of carved black rock. I hurled myself at the door pulling it to after me. I was safe but slid and tumbled down into a pit of blackness over which the arc of the lamp danced crazily as I fell.

Beyond but invisible except when my lamp touched it was water which tore at the rock walls angrily. Hollow echoes surrounded us, back of us I heard a muffled splintering crash.

Of Professor Sharp, Eve and the Priests I could hear nothing. My heart sank. God, had I made a mistake after all? Had this been the wrong door? I knew that I could not retrace my steps for the broken statue of Set lay blocking all egress. Were we doomed to die in this hideous place?

I sat up and called "Professor Sharp, oh, Professor Sharp!"

It seemed to me that the water swallowed my voice like a starving beast a morsel of food. Again and again I shouted, but my ears only heard the water and the mocking desolation of my own voice.

Assailed by a crushing suspicion I got up wishing to know the worst. Was I separated forever from the two I loved? Were they in jeopardy alone somewhere in the dark or had that door of Osiris been the right way? Had Orne lied?

The lamps' light fell on a swirling angry surface of ink-black water whose further side I could not see. We appeared to stand on a promontory which twisted and sloped gently to where the little waves lapped and licked hungrily.

This vanishing path led away due South but only a fish or a man in a boat could follow it. Far away the cavern walls narrowed, but the angry roar which filled the dark with angry tumult arose from the North.

As I turned the light here a strange and gigantic testimony of man's ingenuity and labor met my eyes for a mighty wall was flung across the pit. Set on its summit and rising like monoliths were mighty huge stone drums evidently operating the sluice gates which consisted of a number of basalt leaves. It was this wall that formed the cavern lake and it was over these gates that the prisoned water rushed and leapt into the foam-flecked inferno which I could see far below.

Suddenly I realized what that vanishing path meant. Once the flood gates were opened the level of the subterranean lake would fall and the path would become passable, but to accomplish this the Valley of Sin must be flooded.

Then I understood the ingenuity of the long dead Pharaoh who had designed this prison. There was a way out but only possible for a few and by

escaping these few would destroy the remainder which would have served old Tutankh's purpose.

The small platform-like promontory could hold but a few. It was such a terrible vengeance always to look up the flooded path and know that lowering the gates led to freedom for a few—and annihilation for many. How the priests must have guarded against this danger through the ages.

I stood gripping the metal mechanism of the ponderous windlass holding my lantern so its arc fell directly down into the boiling inferno of foam-flecked water, out of which vomited, crashed and smashed a battle of sounds. I crawled back along the wall top peering below; a spidery stone arch bridged the sluice gate.

## CHAPTER XXVIII

### THE OTHER WAY OUT

**A**S YET I had seen no sign of Eve or the professor but I saw that the wall grew lower and the pit less chasm-like as I approached the near end of the dam. Suddenly my heart paused, then pounded on. I could have sworn I heard a distant barking. Was it Violet? Had they survived? It was too much to hope. Some trick of the echoes; perhaps I was hearing because my heart and soul so longed to know that they lived.

"Eve, Eve."

I strained my ears, only the echoes flung back my words and my heart sank. I crawled further, Hannibal following me.

From far away I too heard it; a thin high-pitched keening shriek and it seemed to say:

"Help, Adam, help!"

I was frantic with excitement for I had heard distinctly in spite of the pandemonium and knew that they must live and must also be near. Yet, sweep the cliffs as I would I could see nothing of them, only swirling black water and wet cruel rocks. How could



I hear them and yet not see them? I was desperate, again I heard Eve's voice:

"Here! Adam."

I looked all about and caught a tiny star of light far down on the dam wall itself. Then I understood. My searchlight swept the bulging slimy blocks of masonry that oozed and trickled water; here and there picking out some hideous blind thing that wriggled out of the light into the dark.

But further along the beam of light picked out a tiny platform and on it with Violet by her side looking up at me was Eve Sharp. I saw Violet's big mouth open and close. I knew he was barking but could barely hear him. The fact that I had heard him before was probably due to some acoustic peculiarity.

She looked like a spirit standing there in the blackness with the inky water not thirty feet below and the slimy walls all about. Yet the position was a terrific one for I had no rope long enough to reach her for a hundred feet separated us. She raised her arms to me as if begging me to get her.

I leaned far over and answered her gesture calling:

"Have courage. I'll save you!"

How could I ever without ropes rescue her and lift her to where I stood? Carefully I looked over the brink scanning the dam wall. It was smooth, slimy and sloped slightly outward. Climbing would be utterly impossible. It was hard thinking amid the thunderous dark. I must save her, I must! There was little time. Yet, I could think of nothing reasonable. How was I to reach her and when I did what was I to do?

**I** CLAMBERED back along the dam minutely inspecting its summit for stone ladders or stairs. I examined the sluice gates. They were composed of two huge immensely thick basalt leaves which now and then as the wa-

ter pressure varied, thumped and bumped setting the whole dam atremble. Over them poured the black flood. On each side of the bridge which spanned the waterfall stood the windlass-like machine and below them were well-like pits.

I directed my light down and saw that a series of ponderous stone wedges ran directly into the mighty flanges which held the sluice gates themselves in position.

With a new born plan in my mind I worked with feverish energy. I hardly heard the roaring water as I fixed a loop in the end of the chain and worked at the release mechanism of the drum.

When Hannibal understood what I was about he staggered and struggled to a position along the brink of the dam above the ledge upon which Eve stood. I saw that she was still safe.

As I swung the chain over the edge of the dam I tested it again. It slid down, its clanking jangle swallowed by the din and merging into the unearthly roar.

I saw that she climbed into the loop and gathering Violet in one arm grasped the chain with the other.

Inch by inch we drew the chain up with its precious freight.

**O**NCE as I leaned over to grasp a fresh handhold I saw her forty or so feet below, fending off from the wall as she bumped and hitched up. As we lifted her and Violet over the edge I fell back. I lay on my back in the blackness, the beams of the searchlight prodding a shaft of white light into the darkness above us—Like a voice over a long distance telephone I heard Eve's voice. Violet was licking my face and Hannibal plucked at me with torn, bleeding fingers.

"Quick, Adam, for God's sake. Quick! let down the chain. I'll help you, dear—father's fighting them by the door of Osiris at the top of the

steps. He's waiting for the chain but he says they're working at the broken statue of Set and when they get it away they'll be at us before we can escape and open the gates."

Her words galvanized me into fresh energy. I looked at her, pale and thin, clothes torn and dirty yet she stood brave and courageous, a small figure magnificent to me. I longed to take her into my arms and tell her—but there was no time. Her father's life, our lives depended upon speed.

I raked the spot where was the door of Pleiades with my light. I shuddered at the thought of what it might reveal. We all sighed. It was still closed. I cursed myself for my sense of false security on this score.

I might have known the little beasts beyond would never cease their efforts to kill us since it meant continued existence for them. For there were among them those who must have known of the secret sluice—of the "other way out."

The toxic green chain tore at my fingers like a live thing as it raced down the dam walls. I saw it dangle over the ledge, I jerked with all my might and saw it slam back and forth. To us it was soundless. Then we shouted. Quickly almost like an animal, the Professor darted into our light that illumined the ledge. He was torn and the rags of his coat fluttered.

I saw his blue eyes raise and over his face was a grim expression of determination and savage purpose. He almost tore the chains from the combined grip of the three of us. Leaping agilely into the loop and swinging a gleaming bar of metal at something that cast a monstrous shadow as it obtruded into the radius of light which I kept intentionally on the professor as I knew the living mummies could not see in a glare.

I saw him lean down and smash and hit at something. His shadow reached out and flowed into the outer darkness like a huge figure of obsidian.

With all our strength we lifted and heaved. Yard by yard we raised him.

Below the Professor the ledge was crowded by the figures of the priests of Set, who held bows and arrows but were unable to use them as the light made them cower blindly. Also the noise must have been torture to them although I did not think of this fact until later.

I saw the Professor lean far down and strike; saw them twist their faces up and prod at him haphazard; their thin necks writhed and their faces looked like dirty gray bubbles; two toppled and fell into the welter of foam and rock fangs below.

## CHAPTER XXIX

### PLACE OF BATS

**WE SWEATED** and hauled like mechanical figures. It seemed to me what I felt was almost beyond human bearing. I could see Hannibal's black hands knotted and clawing the green chain while Eve's pretty little fingers already bled. It was her bleeding fingers that gave me strength.

The chain swayed like something alive and on looking over I saw the professor clambering up arm over arm. Where he got the reserve strength I do not know. When he was at least ten feet below the edge we began to hear his shouts:

"Watch the door! Watch the door. They'll be here any minute. Drive out the wedges!"

Before any of us could act on his admonitions, he had crawled and fallen gasping over the edge of the wall.

"Have you located the wedges?"

I nodded and picking up Hannibal's axe leaped into the slime of the wedge pit. My frantic blows made no sound. From the Professor's eyes I had seen that the situation was desperate—more hopeless than even I suspected

it to be. But there was no weakening in this man.

Eve tied a rag fragment over a slice in her father's shoulder as he drew tottering to his feet—my mind had grown dull I suppose, I was beyond human emotion so far as anger, fear or excitement went. I remembered only Eve's determined face, the pallid pugnacity of the Professor whose ragged reddish beard bristled more belligerently than ever.

My axe as it struck the wedges sent tingling lances of pain through my arm, the sparks splintered the darkness with sprays of light—living fiery gold. I felt the first wedge tremble, give and fall shivering at my strokes. I attacked the second climbing down to the next foothold, it shivered and slipped at my first blow. Dully I wondered whether the waters would engulf me where I stood or whether the dam itself might not be swept away. Still I struck. The only human thing about me was my love for the girl who waited up there in the dark.

I climbed further down, struck and pounded, the third wedge resisted me for what seemed an eternity. I knew that some one looked into the pit and bade me hurry, but I was doing my best.

I struck faster, it shivered, I felt it slipping. Below me the last wedge bumped and I could see that it would be easy. I clambered down, my first blow set it slowly moving out as if an irresistible force aided me at last.

Hastily I climbed up feeling as if the blow of a feather would send me sprawling; as if I should never get enough air again. My head rose above the pit. I was aware that the awful noise had grown many times louder. So packed was the cavern with turmoil that it pushed and tortured one. Beyond me in the dark I saw a jet of red light; someone had fired a gun. I felt the dam walls tremble under me as if at the impact of giant blows.

Beyond the dam a gray luminosity shrouded the pit, under which roared thousands of tons of falling water. I looked into the sluice and saw that the flood gates had vanished. Now a steep slide of creaming, hurtling, black water rushed through and as nearly as I can describe it exploded into a wild burst of frenzy once it gained the other side of the dam. I gasped as I stumbled along the tottering wall. It seemed to me that the cavern was choked by mist, I was wet and felt that the awful grinding, rushing roar had sucked out all the air.

I gained the dam edge. Eve had taken my lantern and I saw by its round moon of light, which was focussed on the wall through which I had come, that the door of Pleiades gaped. I saw that pouring out into the misty hades was a thin stream of living mummies. Each had his head bound about. I stumbled on a fallen figure and stooping saw it was not one of us.

Back of me a portion of the dam wall fell. I had escaped just in time. How could we ever reach safety now? I had believed that there could be no louder sound on earth yet when the wall fell the shock of it knocked me flat. I crawled to my feet. Below me the surface of the lake had vanished. Slowly too I realized that the thunder of water was diminishing. Something white and toad-like touched me, struck me with a weapon. My axe, however, put an end to the creature. I did my best to run for I knew the others must be waiting for me by the path. No doubt we could begin our journey for the waters must have subsided enough.

Tottering, stumbling and shouting I swung my axe in a circle, so I mowed a way through the ranks of living mummies. I felt that I should have never been able to achieve this had it not been for the still terrible noise.

I SCARCELY knew I was being guarded by the lamp's beam. I cursed the creatures in a voice I could not hear because of the clamor which was, however, dying and as it diminished the cave creatures grew menacing, more savage in their attacks.

At last I joined the Professor, his voice shouting into my deafened ears: "Have you any more carbide?"

I fumbled and after a time found the bag in which I carried it and handed it to him. He groaned as he took it from me. There was barely enough for one more refilling. Hannibal had taken the axe from me and now guarded our front while I got my rifle ready. Only a few more cartridges remained.

Eve held one of my big revolvers in one hand while with the other she wielded the electric flash whose beams had become feeble. I knew it, too, was playing out. All our light soon would be gone.

Behind us the path led away as if boring into the heart of darkness. It slid a slimy, twisting course down and away. Slowly we began our retreat. There could be no hurry and what lay beyond we could only guess with a shudder. Yet take it we must or be killed by the little demons who pressed us closer and closer.

The last sight I had of the door of Pleiades was an open rectangle which vomited ugly little toad-like beasts formed like men.

As the light flashed on the Professor I saw that he bulged in monstrous lumps. As I fired into the mob, I wondered what it was he carried. The enemy beat and rushed like waves hungrily and I think it was their desperation that led them into the very muzzles of our guns and made them so brave. Their valley was being submerged. Like rats in a corner they had gone mad with terror.

Ahead of us the cavern narrowed, below the stream, crawling through the slime of the path were loathsome,

formless creatures of the dark. To slip might mean death. Oozy, creeping creatures wriggled from under our feet, things whose glimpsed shapes made my skin crawl.

For two hours we backed foot by foot, yard by yard along the ever ascending passage, always a foaming, speeding river raced below us to one side and spiky, jagged, dripping rocks hemmed us in on the other.

Always pressing us and viciously tenacious pursued the living mummies. Now we could hear our own voices.

Hannibal, Sharp and I took turn at guarding the rear. Luckily the path was narrow and only two abreast could attack at one time. But we feared the time which was drawing near when our lamps should fail.

Already the electric flashlight was but a dim shadow of itself. And the carbide could not last much longer. I searched my pockets and could only find jewels. I would have exchanged rubies and diamonds for a handful of carbide. We were all nearly exhausted and only by an effort of will were we able to proceed.

Each turn we hoped would show a ray of light marking daylight. Suddenly a terrible thought came to me. I had just swept two of the priests of Set, clad in yellow smocks and bright with gold headdresses, into a pool fifty feet below us. Would it be daylight or night when we reached the earth's surface?

I screamed the question back over my shoulder to the Professor. His watch had gone as had mine. Eve's had stopped and Hannibal's broken to fragments two days before. We had lost all sense of day and night yet on that fact would depend our lives! That is, if we were successful in making our way to the surface of the earth.

For the daylight blinded the priests of Set while by night they would have us at their mercy once our lamp used

up its fuel. I swept the axe about, felt it drive deep into a small body, then turned and trotted back fifty or so feet before I once more turned.

**A**HEAD of us we heard a roaring tumult. I wondered what new terror lay beyond. The Professor joined me.

"It's a waterfall, Adam, and there are rock steps cut in the cliff," he said.

"We'll hold them at the top and let Eve get ahead, so in case—" I said.

"It's no use, Adam, she won't leave us. I've already pleaded with her. I'm afraid the lamp's going 'dead.' Are you sure you have no more carbide?"

Mechanically I struck at an oscillating head that jabbed viciously at me with a spear. "Absolutely sure. I've not got a thing that will burn and give light either."

A smooth wall of water fell some fifty feet, close by its side slippery, but deep cut, ascended a rock ladder from whose summit Eve held the paling lantern.

I fired a couple of precious shots into the van and hurried up the ladder. As it was, they almost got me with one of their beastly harpoon arrows; had it not been for a rock boss which I was able to grip I should have been jerked backward.

How Eve kept the pace and bore without a murmur what was all but causing me to drop, I could not understand. As we hurried along I had always the one thought in my mind; would it be daylight or dark?

The path was covered by a thick layer of stinking dust which rose as we ran and caused us to sneeze continually. Above us hung thousands of bats, when we paused for breath we could hear them chittering and grating their needle-like teeth.

The river ran twenty feet below us, broad, silent and evidently deep. We knew we were much more vulnerable in case of attack due to the greater width of the path. We had only a

few shots left and momentarily we expected the lamp to go out.

I was bringing up the rear and was therefore the first to hear the pattering of their bare feet. They were still after us. I shouted the warning and we did our best to quicken our steps but were unable to do so.

Ahead of us there seemed no evidence of daylight. Still the path looped and wound in the most circuitous way following the course of the river.

"Watch out! They're coming!" I shouted.

## CHAPTER XXX

### CONCLUSION

**T**HE pattering of many bare feet grew louder. I thought it would soon be over. I put Eve behind me. We had said no word. A match spluttered in the dark, a tiny light flickered and grew. By the glow and leaping flames I saw a look of torture on the Professor's face.

Now I understood what he had been carrying inside his shirt. Many rolls of papyrus had made him bulge so grotesquely. He had lit one of these precious papyri and now holding it as a torch we once more retreated. Behind us not a hundred feet distant trotted the cavern's horde, naked, sniffing and whimpering in thread-thin, hungry whines.

Eve took the torch which burned with a smoky red flame and a dry crackling note arose. At our side the river lapped musically; behind us shuffled our would-be killers and flying about them thickly fluttered many shrilly squeaking bats. Over us their small ruby eyes glowed when the torch flames fell on them.

Both Eve and I knew what it cost the Professor to burn one of those papyri, yet when the first was consumed he silently handed Eve a second.

If something did not happen soon we should have to rest. No human be-

ings could keep up this continual effort.

"I ain't able to go no further," said Hannibal's flat voice with a half-dead note in it.

"I'm about done up too," said the Professor. "You two hurry along and if the passage ends and if it is day you can come back for us. We'll hold them, for a while, in check."

"No, no," wailed Eve. "I can't last much longer either, and I'll not go a step without you and Hannibal."

Doggedly we stumbled on. I had only one clip of cartridges left and the second papyri was low. I saw the Professor fumble for a third. I saw him stroke it lovingly.

Ahead of us and echoing down to us came the loud barking of Violet who had run ahead. I could have sworn there was a sound of joy in his tones.

With the first faint hope I had felt in nobody knows how long, I gasped. The air was no longer clammy but felt warmer and in it there was a hint of fragrance. I turned and emptied my rifle into the horde which were scuttling rapidly down on us, hands clawed, they seemed aware of something. The path twisted and doubled on itself. Violet's bark grew much louder and we all used the last atom of energy as we ran staggering down the rapidly warming dark.

Far ahead of us standing in a patch of grey light we saw Violet. Eve's torch streamed out behind her as she sped along. I saw her stumble and but for my arm she would have fallen. She dropped the torch and with my arm about her we made what haste we could for behind us faster sped the horde of Set. Flapping and darting over and about them were the cloud of black bats.

I saw the Professor stoop and pick up the burning papyrus roll—saw him smother the flames as he ran.

Hannibal lurched along dragging his feet with bloody axe a-trail. The air grew still warmer and on turning

the corner by which Violet stood barking wildly, joyously, we ran full tilt into the burning glare of a tropical day.

**WE** DID not stop, but more slowly now and blinded by the white light we hurried away from the mouth of that damnable path. Before us lay a lake, a wide green-shored lake; about us grew green grass with mimosas and palms stirring in a hot wind.

I shall never forget the joy I felt at the sight of the sun which had but lately risen.

We limped to the very edge of the lake and there we fell. Not in the shade but in the full glare of the blistering equatorial sun! Eve sobbed as if her heart would break but I knew it was the reaction and happiness. I said foolish things which she later vowed she had heard in spite of Hannibal's prayer which rose in wailing crescendos.

I glanced at the Professor and found his gaze directed back at the path's exit from which a slowly moving dark mass cowered just within the shadow of the entrance and above their heads flapped the disturbed bats like bits of living shadow. Sharp's hands smoothed and fondled the half-burnt papyrus.

I looked down on Eve's head where the sunlight made a splendid halo of her ruddy chestnut curls.

"Oh, Adam," she stopped sobbing and raised her face, pale, thin and haggard, yet in her deep clear eyes that gazed into mine there was the glory of Paradise for me. We forgot her father and Hannibal. For we kissed now not in the presence of death but life—a life together. What we said to each other I shall not repeat. Her father claims he tried to attract our attention for ten minutes before we paid him any heed.

The first words I heard were from Hannibal.

"It ain't no use talkin' to dem. De two is in Eden, dat's whar dey is!"

"I say, Adam and Eve, if you both don't want to be addled and end your days right here and now by sunstroke, you had better shift your operations to the shade!"

"Oh, Dad, I'm so happy," said Eve, springing up and hugging her father.

"I'll be second fiddle now," he said smiling as he looked up. Then he added, "I'm glad, Adam. I hoped for this."

"So is I," said Hannibal. "Now we ain't neber gwine be separated no moh, is we?"

"Right you are, Hannibal. I think we had better put a few miles between us and that cave opening," said the Professor, practically. "And discover where we are."

Later we slowly wound our way along the edge of the lake and came quite suddenly and unexpectedly into a native village.

With much difficulty we persuaded these simple folks that we were not spirits arisen from the rapidly falling water. They had been much frightened by the sudden lowering of its level.

We warned them not to venture near the cave before we left for Fashoda, which we learned was the nearest settlement.

How we reached it and then Cairo is another story. There at Cairo, Eve and I were married.

The jewels which we had brought out of the Valley of Sin were of immense value . . . . Professor Sharp still threatens to re-enter the valley and drain it. He had been able by his six and one-half rolls of papyrus to astound the archeological world.

From a monetary point of view we had been successful, we had found and lost the Valley of Sin but to me what really counted was Eve.

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SINCE THIS MAGAZINE IS  
A NEW VENTURE FOR US,  
WE WOULD APPRECIATE  
CONSTRUCTIVE CRITICISM.  
ADDRESS YOUR LETTERS  
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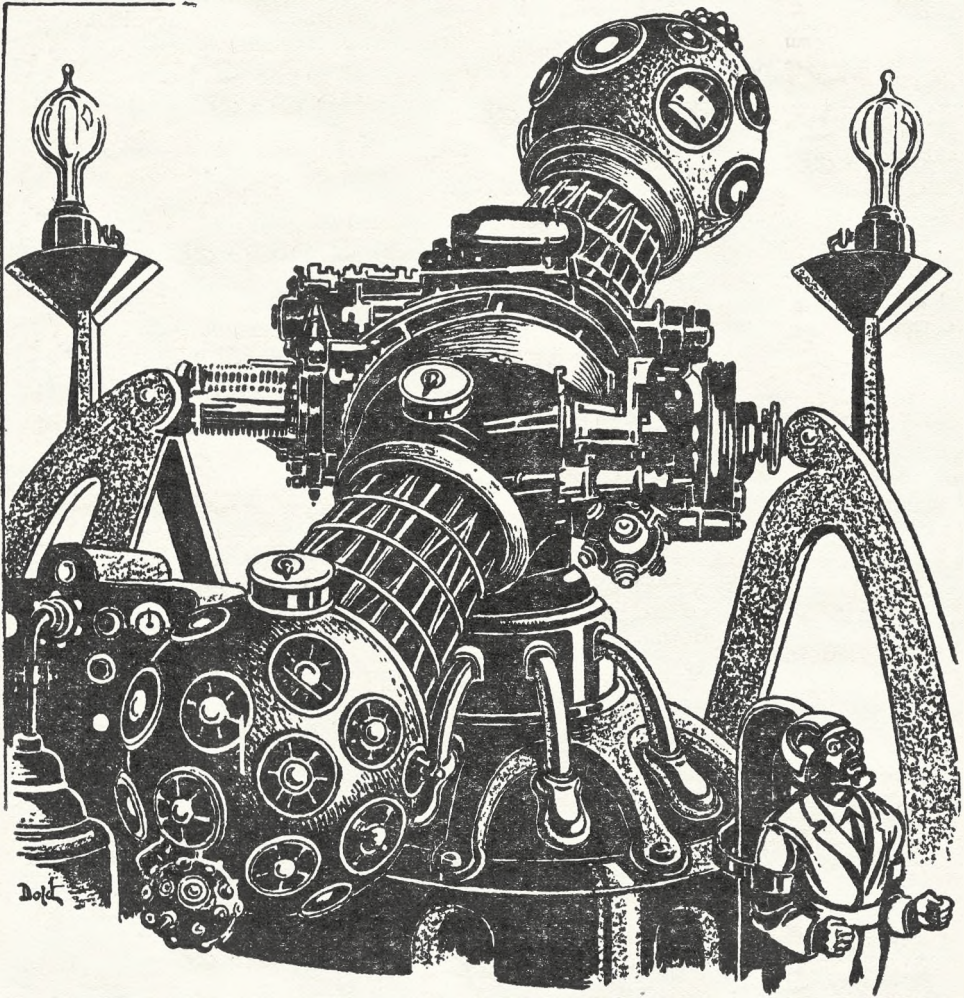
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# Outlaws of the Sun

A Complete Novel

By VICTOR ROUSSEAU



The metal cartridge containing Tony's body slid into place.

## CHAPTER I

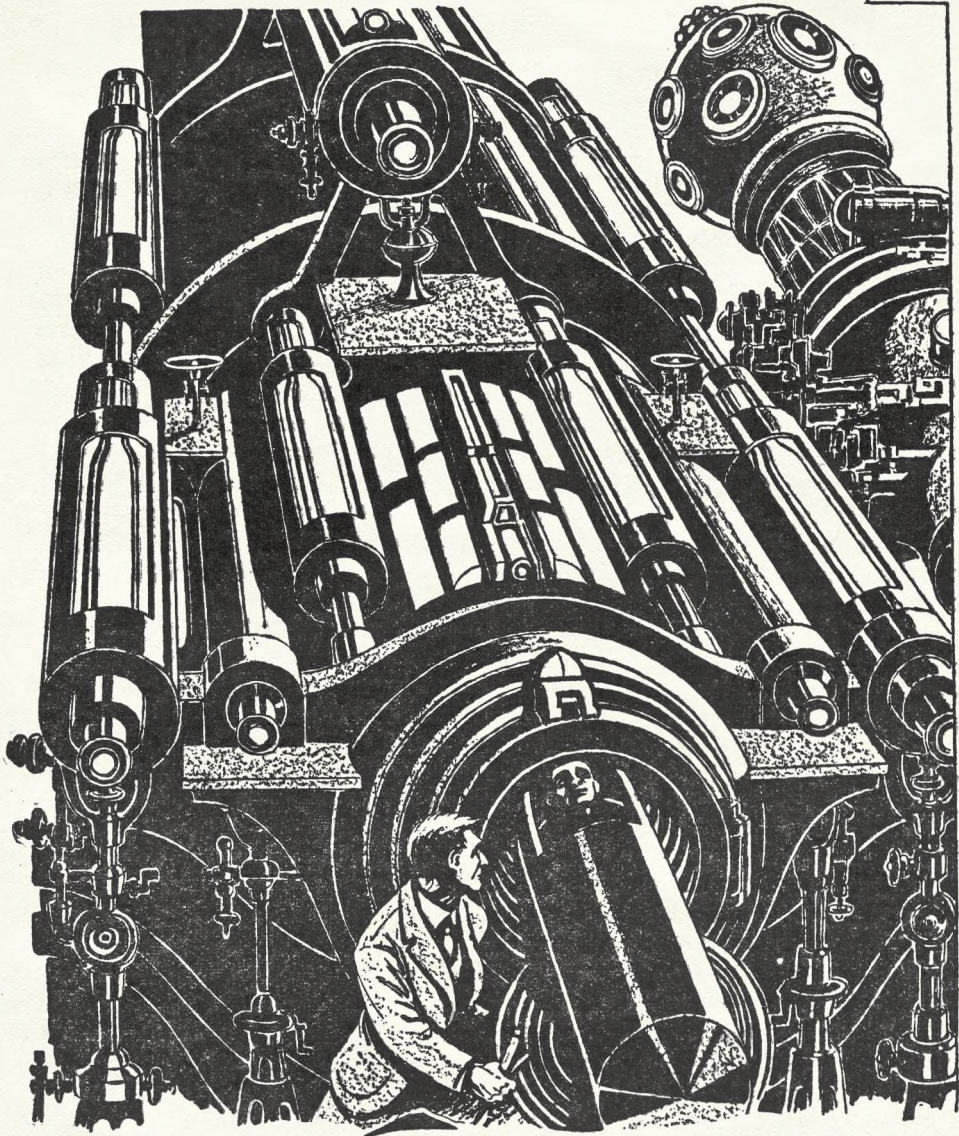
### CARL SNOW'S VENGEANCE

**T**HE room looked like an observatory. It was of immense dimensions, built of steel and glass, a steel shell encased in glass, through which on every side could be seen the stupendous scenery of the

Canadian Rockies under the light of the setting sun.

The inexpert might have taken it for an observatory. And yet that was a curious kind of telescope, that enormous cylinder mounted on a carriage which, in turn, stood on a turntable that would have accommodated a railroad engine. It looked more like





*Transported by an infernal mechanism to Circe, outermost of the planets, where the sun seems like a small, yellow moon, where giants, monsters, and cannibal, walking plants dispute for supremacy—such was the fate of three who fell victims to the designs of a strange scientist.*

a great gun. It dwarfed the complex of machinery that filled the room; it dwarfed the room itself.

Especially it dwarfed the two figures standing motionless at its base. A man and a girl. Tony Betts, eight-

and-twenty, with the figure of a Greek athlete and a mop of fair hair; Celia Birch, twenty-two, grey-eyed, of medium coloring, and as charming as any American girl should have been in the year 1972.

And neither Tony nor Celia felt overawed by that grim, cannon-like cylinder that towered above them; neither of them was conscious of it. Wrapped in each other's arms, they stood there in all the happiness of love first declared and admitted.

A long, long time before, an immensely long time as love reckons it—three weeks before, to be exact, Tony Betts, assistant to Andrew Birch, the stellar physicist, had first met Celia, returning from finishing her education at Cambridge.

"I hope you two will get along together, Tony," said Birch. "Celia's a determined sort of person. Six months every year in these wilds isn't exactly the sort of life for a girl.

"And I don't hold with women butting into physics. Seems to me their minds oughtn't to be built that way. But she was determined to be my aide. And so I had to send her to Cambridge, and she's a double first in the finals, with all the men hopelessly behind.

"You'll have to make your way with her, Tony. She'll rule this place with a rod of steel. And I can't afford to lose you, though I'd be glad to lose Carl Snow."

Carl Snow had been associated with Professor Birch longer than Tony. When Birch was forced to ask for a government subsidy, the Canalaskan government had sent Snow with it, much to the old man's disgust.

There was no way of getting rid of Snow. Between him and Tony existed one of those veiled enmities that are instinctive, and recognized by each immediately.

Since Celia's arrival the breach had widened; Tony's relations with Snow had become frigidly polite. The old professor, absorbed in his experiments, was hardly aware of any change.

"Celia, do you really care?" asked Tony.

"Doesn't it look as if I did?" Celia answered.

"How long have you cared, Celia?"

"Oh, about three weeks, one day, and seven hours. How long have you cared, Tony?"

"Three weeks, one day, seven hours, and one minute and a quarter."

"Where d'you get the minute and a quarter?" Celia demanded.

"I saw you in the compartment of the heliosphere a minute and a quarter before it came to rest."

"And I saw you, too, through the window of the heliosphere compartment, so you've nothing on me," said Celia triumphantly. "But oh, Tony, I don't know what Carl Snow is going to do about it."

"Do about it? That fellow?"

"I'm afraid of him, Tony. He's been bothering me ever since I got back here."

"Then I'll fix things with Mr. Snow. Leave him to me," said Tony. "What's he said to you, Celia, darling?"

"Nothing, but—"

"What's he done?"

"Nothing, but—"

"Well, what has he—what has he—?"

"It's the way he's looked at me, Tony. I can feel his thoughts. He's in love with me, as far as it's possible for that kind of man to be in love. And he's relentless, unscrupulous.

"Dad said if he'd known the Canalaskan government would send a man like him, he'd rather have let the Station go. Now he's under governmental control, and Snow is practically in authority."

"Best thing is for us to get married as quick as we can," said Tony, "and that will settle any little designs Snow may be harboring. Just say the word, darling, and we'll signal the Vancouver-New York heliosphere tomorrow and drop off at Winnipeg."

"But, Tony, dear, don't you know I've only been back three weeks, and

the Bureau of Pedigrees requires a month's residence before they'll issue a permit."

"Damn!" muttered Tony. "I can't wait another whole week for you."

"I'm afraid we'll have to, darling," answered Celia mournfully.

Like two people struck down by a mortal blow, they stood there at the base of the great cylinder, their arms about each other. The misfortune seemed more than they could bear.

Two feet beneath them stood Carl Snow, observing them attentively through the expansion vent in the base of the travelling carriage. He was standing on the ladder that ran down beneath the heavy steel-descolozite trap door to the storage basement.

A man a year or two older than Tony, blonde, furtive, with eyes of a cold green that just now blazed with hate and malice.

Carl Snow had been sent by the Canalaskan government because his work at Toronto University had showed him to be one of those minds that appear perhaps once in a century, a physicist whose fame had already become world-wide.

There was no one else who could pretend to be able to assist Professor Birch in his astro-physical investigations, and Birch himself was of an older school.

Birch, with his ingenious method of applying the ultra-violet microscopic method of telescoping, had been the first to map out the extreme limits of the universe, showing, what was long suspected, that it was self-contained, finite, and yet unbounded; but Carl Snow had gone farther—a long way farther.

The cylinder in the observatory-like building was some sort of projector, but its secret was hidden even from Birch. Snow had virtually excluded Birch from his own observatory under the plea that he was engaged upon important researches, and

under the threat of reporting adversely to the Canalaskan government.

Through the expansion vent Snow watched the lovers locked in their sad embrace, and he shook his fist in fury. Then he drew back his arm quickly, with a muffled expletive that Tony and Celia were too absorbed in each other to hear.

Carl Snow had skinned his knuckles against the projecting flange.

"**H**OW soon will this experiment of yours be ready for demonstration, Snow?" asked Birch that night, as the three men sat at the supper table awaiting Celia's advent.

"It is practically ready now, my dear Birch," responded Snow suavely. There was no trace on his features of the rage that had transformed him into a wild beast two short hours before. "In fact, I believe I am in a position to give you a demonstration this evening, if necessary."

"I must confess, Betts and I are entirely in the dark," said Birch, stroking his white beard. "And I have been consumed with curiosity. If it is really possible to disintegrate a solid object, send it through space with the velocity of light, and reassemble it a million light years away, you have accomplished the miracle formerly attributed to the Mahatmas. Have you actually succeeded in accomplishing this feat?" inquired the old scientist incredulously.

"I have actually performed it," replied Snow suavely. "I have not sent objects to a star a million light years distant—naturally. I should have to live a million years in order to see it arrive at its destination. But I have transmitted objects to Mars, Venus, and, particularly, to some of the asteroids."

"Such as?" asked Tony.

"I began with a harmless guinea-pig," answered Snow, smiling. "The amiable rodent whose name will be

forever linked with laboratory experiment."

"But a guinea-pig is a living thing!" shouted Tony incredulously.

"It is still a living thing," replied Carl Snow.

"You mean it—survived?"

"It survived." Snow was enjoying the two men's bewilderment, and yet his malicious smile seemed to conceal some ulterior knowledge.

"Pardon me, Snow," interposed old Professor Birch incredulously, "but how do you know? Even if you sent this rodent to the moon, it would be impossible to discover it even by my ultra-violet method of telescoping. A guinea-pig on the moon? Really, Snow, it is hardly credible."

Carl Snow leaned across the table. "Birch, there are a number of things that no doubt appear incredible to you at present, and yet they are true," he said. "Let me briefly record in outline the work I have been accomplishing in the observatory.

"The cylinder with which I have sheathed the telescope was, frankly, to some extent a blind. It was necessary that my work should not be suspected by any one who might anticipate me."

He glanced scornfully at Tony, who was about to break out in indignant repudiation. But a glance from Birch restrained him. And now Tony no longer resented Snow's insolence, for there was something menacing about Snow's aspect.

The man seemed transformed, dynamic, upon the verge of some immense revelation.

"By an adaptation to your telescope, for which you deserve every credit, Birch," Snow went on, "I have been engaged in disintegrating, first inanimate objects, then guinea-pigs, and, after converting them into etheric waves, reassembling them, not on the moon, but on the planet Circe.

"The steel chamber at the base of

the cylinder, which had excited your curiosity so much, my dear Birch, contains a new type of camera, more powerful than any known. The lens is adapted to your ultra-violet process.

"The sensitized film is coated with a substance more sensitive to light than any known. By means of this camera, affixed to the telescope, I have been enabled to photograph objects on Circe the size of a guinea-pig.

"The same mechanism that transmits the disintegrated body, controls the direction of the lens, so that the camera is pointing exactly at the spot where the disintegrated form is reassembled."

"How does it reassemble?" queried Birch, obviously incredulous. "If you could dissolve an object into etheric waves, why should it regain its original substance on reaching its destination?"

Snow smiled, as one might smile at a persistent child. "I have projected the reassembling apparatus to the planet Circe," he answered.

"But how—?" Birch stammered.

"First I disintegrated and projected the reassembling apparatus to Circe," Snow expounded. "It is a small and simple mechanism, which merely assists the atoms to reform more rapidly according to the original scheme. Then I projected the—well, let us say the guinea-pig. It is not necessary for the pig to reach exactly the same locality as that occupied by the reassembling apparatus. Anywhere within twenty degrees of it, the magnetic field is sufficiently powerful to cause the disintegrated atoms to rush together.

"Why they should rush together, why the original structure persists, why the original design reforms, I confess I do not know, Birch. There you enter the metaphysical field, and metaphysics are outside my province."

"But, if you can send guinea-pigs, why not men?" demanded Birch.

"Why not?" Snow echoed, with

that furtive smile of his. "Would either of you gentlemen like to be subjects for my experiment?"

"I'd like to see you send a guinea-pig first," said Birch cautiously. "I wonder where Celia is. She's a long time getting supper ready."

Since her arrival, Celia had been running the small household. The two Indian servants had refused to remain. Why they had gone, slipped away in the night without an explanation, without even asking for their wages, nobody knew. Probably they had taken fright at something. They had always evinced a lively terror of Snow, and his apparatus.

Birch rose from the table and went into the kitchen. "Celia!" he called. "My dear, where are you?"

Tony, vaguely alarmed, got on his feet and followed him. Celia was not in the kitchen, nor anywhere on the plateau that contained the observatory and the house building. Birch was hurrying toward the former, calling Celia's name.

Tony followed him inside. They looked around the interior, both calling. But Celia was not there.

Frantic now, Tony swung the handle that raised the trap door at the base of the cylinder. He switched on the electric light and hurriedly descended the ladder. He shouted Celia's name as he dropped into the basement. But the basement was a small one, and a glance about him showed that Celia was not there either.

He heard old Birch's shouts above. He reascended, pressed a lever, and the trap door closed slowly after him. Birch and he stood staring at each other in dismay and apprehension.

"Where is she, Tony?" The old man's voice was tremulous.

Both started at a sound behind them. Carl Snow stood in the entrance. There was something so repulsive, so malicious and vindictive on his face that for an instant the two were

aghast. Then Tony leaped toward him.

"Where's Celia?" he demanded. "You know! Damn you, you know, Snow!" he shouted.

"Yes," answered Snow with a malignant smile, "I know. She's on the planet Circe. Would you like to have a look at her?"

## CHAPTER II

### TREACHERY

"**YOU** devil!" Tony shouted. Never for an instant did it occur to him to doubt the truth of what Snow had told him. The man's words, looks, demeanor, carried conviction. He drew back his fist to dash it into the malicious, sneering face before him.

Snow did not move. There was something so chilling in his attitude that Tony did not strike. His arm dropped to his side. What use to strike? This was no occasion for a brawl. A blow would be meaningless folly.

Birch's voice broke in on his ear. "Snow—Carl, you're only jesting! You wouldn't do that to my girl, my Celia. We're all friends, Snow."

"Perhaps you'd like to have a look at her," Snow sneered.

He moved toward the great cabinet at the base of the cylinder. The others turned as he did so, but their steps were heavy as lead. The dreadful conviction that Snow was speaking the truth, the belief that he had them in his power, was paralyzing in its effect.

Suddenly Snow turned and laughed. "I saw you and Celia making love this afternoon," he hissed at Tony. "I overheard your talk about marriage. That's what actuated me. She's mine, and I hate you as my mortal enemy, Betts.

"We've known that we were enemies since we first met. Don't lie about it. We've always hated each other. I meant to send you, Betts, but

the main thing was to separate you, and my opportunity came when Celia was alone here this afternoon."

He drew a key from his pocket and unfastened the padlock of the cabinet. He swung back the door and passed inside.

"Come in," he taunted. "The exhibits are ready!"

Tony, now supporting old Birch, who seemed to have gone to pieces, passed inside. The cabinet was fitted up as a dark room. The interior was heavily lined with what looked like black felt, but a strong electric bulb threw a glaring light beneath a shade. There was plenty of room for the three men to stand there.

Snow took an ordinary photographic printing-frame from a shelf and held it for an instant beneath the light. He switched this off, plunging the interior into comparative darkness. Tony could see him raise the cover of a tank and plunge the print into it. Then he switched on the light again.

"Look, gentlemen!" shouted Snow, in a voice that had an insane tremolo in it. "See if you can find the missing heiress in the picture!"

He lifted a shallow tray out of the tank. It was just a developing tray, and in it, lying flat, and face up, was the print, measuring some eight by twelve inches. Snow placed the tray under the light.

For a moment or two Birch and Tony looked at the print without making out the details. It looked like a small, and very much enlarged, section of the surface of a planet, which, in fact, it was. Then a cry broke from old Birch's lips. Suddenly the old man hurled himself upon Snow.

"It's a trick! It's a lie! Merciful God, it isn't true!" he shouted, his fingers outstretched toward Snow's throat.

Snow caught him in his arms and held him powerless. "Don't try that

game with me, you old fool!" he shouted.

Trembling, old Birch staggered back against the wall and stood there, looking down into the tray again. Upon one spot on the planet's surface both men could plainly see what looked like a glistening pile of machinery, and a duplicate of the huge cylinder in the observatory.

Seated beside it was a tiny, doll-like figure, with its head bowed on its breast in an attitude of despair. Infinitely small though the figure was, there was no mistaking it. It was Celia.

Celia, transported to the planet Circe, the outermost of the ten known planets, within three hours! It seemed preposterous, madness!

Tony looked up and saw Snow watching him malignantly. "Yes, she's alive," sneered Snow. "There's oxygen on Circe, you know, according to the spectroscopic lines, and we're agreed that the planet's interior heat compensates for its distance from the sun, by warming the atmosphere.

"The question is how far the interior heat and the icy exterior are compensated. I'm afraid Celia may be suffering from hot feet and a cold in the head, Betts."

"God!" muttered Tony, surveying the madman before him. For that Snow was mad he had no doubt whatever. None but a madman would have designed such a fiendish scheme.

Snow leaned forward. "Would you like to prove that she is alive, Betts?" he sneered. "Shall we talk to her?"

"What?" shouted Tony.

Snow turned his back on him and stepped out of the cabinet. Tony turned to old Birch, who was still standing against the wall, his eyes fixed on vacancy. He touched the old man on the arm. Birch started.

"You must pull yourself together, Professor," he whispered. "We've got to play second fiddle to that fiend until our chance comes. He'll slip up soon.

No use attempting violence; not with Celia in his power."

Birch nodded, but it was doubtful in Tony's mind whether the old man understood. The shock he had received seemed to have affected his reason. Nevertheless, he accompanied Tony out of the cabinet in Snow's wake.

Snow had unlocked a door leading to the laboratory, from which Tony and Birch had been excluded since Snow's experiments began. In one corner was a radio transmitting set, Snow leaned forward and pressed a lever. Instantly the whole interior was lit with flashes of white, crackling electricity as the long Hertzian waves leaped to and fro.

Some transformation had evidently been effected in the apparatus, for that interplay of light was like the "sparklers" that children burn on Independence Day. The vivid flames played all about the three men, yet without harming them.

In front of the set a tiny dynamo was revolving so fast that it looked like a mere circle of light. Beside it was an ordinary microphone. Snow put his lips to the latter. "Celia!" he called in a mocking tone. "This is Carl speaking. Your father and that fool Betts are here. Have you any message for them?"

A pause. Then a loudspeaker attached to a receiving set began to crackle. And out of it came a whisper as thin as the voice of a "spirit" speaking out of a medium's trumpet at a séance.

Snow turned a dial. The voice ceased, came back again, then suddenly grew louder, louder, almost as loud as the normal human voice: "Tony! Help me!" it said.

Old Birch gasped, "God, it's true, Betts, it's true! That voice is Celia's!"

**H**E WOULD have fallen had not Tony caught him. Yes, it was true, and that was Celia's voice. Tony

himself felt upon the verge of a mental breakdown. He pulled himself together. Across those millions of miles of space Celia still lived; their love could penetrate further than that. She was still his.

Snow, grinning at him viciously, put his lips to the microphone again. "He can't help you, Celia," he said. "You're mine. I'm coming after you. I'm through with my experiments here. With the apparatus that I have sent to Circe I shall be able to amuse myself at the expense of Earth. Well? Have you nothing to say?"

Again the voice came back: "Tony, come to me! If he comes here I'll kill myself. Tell him that. I swear it!"

Snow muttered an oath. "Don't be a fool!" he shouted. "I'm ready to talk things over with you, Celia. If you knew how I love you—"

"Tell him that, Tony. Make him believe it's true. I'll kill myself unless you and dad come to me!"

"Celia—" Snow began.

There followed a strange sound, and yet a very human sound, and concomitantly with it the shooting, spluttering Hertzian rays suddenly ceased. Snow ripped out a blasphemous oath. But Tony knew what that sound was, and it was characteristic of Celia. She had simply smashed the mechanism at the other end—on Circe.

On Circe, thousands of millions of miles away, out on the edges of the huge solar system, a girl had raised a metal bar of some kind and wrecked communications with Earth. And that took some doing!

Old Birch tottered forward and grasped Snow by the arm. "Snow, for God's sake listen to reason," he implored him. "All this has happened within the past three hours. Three hours ago—think of it—we were three sane men, and Celia was here.

"Wipe out this madness. Destroy this interlude. Bring my daughter back to me, and let us all forget! Snow, I knew of your rivalry with

Betts for Celia. I wasn't so blind as not to see that. But it was an honorable rivalry. It may become one again, if only you'll bring Celia back to me!"

There was something at once so dignified and so pathetic in the old man's appearance, in the impassioned words that poured from his lips, that for a moment Snow seemed shaken. Then he seemed to shake off the effect of the petition. A wild laugh broke from his lips.

"I can't oblige you, Birch," he shouted. "God himself can't turn back the past. Even if I wanted to bring her back, I couldn't do so without going to Circe and transmitting her and myself from there. And when we got back to Earth, while I was unconscious and recovering from my journey, Betts would destroy me."

"If that's your fear, Snow," said Tony, "you can put it out of your mind. I join Professor Birch in his petition. Project yourself to Circe, bring back Celia, and the past shall be forgotten."

A cunning look came over Snow's face. "Don't forget that she has announced her intention of killing herself if I go there," he said. "You'll have to come with me, Betts. And Birch too. We'd have to reassure Celia, make her believe that the past was really to be forgotten."

"You'll do it?" cried the old Professor.

"I'll do it," answered Snow.

"Snow," said Tony, "I don't trust you. Maybe I'm wrong in that, but you can hardly expect Professor Birch and myself to place ourselves at your mercy in this way. If you're willing to let bygones be bygones, this is what must be done. You'll first project me to Circe—"

Snow grinned. "No, no, Betts, that's ingenious, but I'm not trusting you alone on Circe with Celia," he answered.

"Let him send me first," said Birch. "I'm quite willing to risk the experi-

ment. Let him send me first, to comfort my girl. Then he can project himself, and Betts will watch how it is done, and follow if he has any suspicion of trickery."

"Now that sounds more reasonable," answered Snow. His voice was conciliatory, but Tony had an undercurrent of suspicion in spite of that. Did Snow really mean to forfeit his advantage in order to square things? He doubted it. He watched him warily.

"Yes, that sounds much more reasonable," Snow repeated. "Of course, our stay on Circe is apt to be a protracted one. If her revolution is, as we suspect, one of three weeks, it will necessitate our remaining there that long until Circe and Earth are in the same relative positions again.

"It's fortunate her revolution isn't a hundred years!" Again he laughed. "But I've projected a supply of food there, gentlemen, and we should have no need to worry. How soon will you be ready to make the leap, Professor?"

"At once," cried Birch in tremulous tones. "The sooner the better, Snow."

"Then, gentlemen, will you kindly take your stand on this platform?" asked Snow smoothly, pointing to a square slab of metal which was a little to one side of the breach of the cylinder.

Tony hesitated for a moment, then complied. He still distrusted Snow completely, particularly he disbelieved that the man had changed the fiendish scheme which he had so long been harboring.

It was reasonable enough to suppose that he meant to transmit both himself and Professor Birch to Circe alive, otherwise it was certain that Celia would keep her word and kill herself.

Tony stepped to the platform on which Professor Birch had already taken his station. Behind the platform



was a steel upright with a projecting arm, somewhat resembling one of the old-fashioned weighing machines that were to be seen on the platforms of steam railroad stations, and are still to be found in museums.

Snow adjusted the positions of the two men, aligned them side by side, and slowly swung down a lever. Two head-rests came out of the uprights, and Snow manipulated them until each supported the head of one of the two.

"Don't be alarmed," said Snow, smiling, as he pressed another lever, and a thin half-hoop began to extend from the mechanism. "It is necessary to support you, but there will be no constraint."

He adjusted this loosely about their bodies. At the moment Tony's mind was a medley of emotions. Paramount was fear and anxiety for Celia. Mingled with this was a little natural agitation regarding the journey that he was about to undertake.

The idea of being resolved into etheric waves and then recombined into human form was not exactly a pleasant one, particularly since Tony was perfectly aware that Snow had no intention of leaving him free to make love to Celia.

Snow hovered about the two men as they stood side by side, their heads snugly fitted into the rests, as a photographer who might be expected to say, "Look pleasant, please!" before snapping the shutter. There was, in fact, something a little ridiculous about the whole situation.

But it wasn't the shutter that Snow snapped. He bent forward and picked up a long rubber tube that hung from the breech of the cylinder. At the termination of this was a small rubber ball. Emerging from the ball was a perforated metallic nozzle. It looked, in fact, like part of an atomizer.

Snow pointed the nozzle at the faces of the two men, and a diabolical smile spread over his own. A fine

spray, cold as ice, penetrated Tony's nostrils and clung to his eyelashes.

For an instant Tony remained motionless, not realizing what Snow was doing. And that instant was his defeat. Frozen into immobility, he remained, a block of inanimate flesh, while the spray continued to rain on him, and he was unable even to wink an eyelid.

### CHAPTER III

#### HORRORS OF CIRCE

NOT a cord or muscle would obey Tony's will. He struggled with all his might to free himself, and without the least success. He tried to cry out, and the muscles of his throat might have been carved out of granite. He felt his tongue like a lifeless thing in his mouth. His eyes were open, and he could feel the moisture in them slowly dripping down his cheeks. And his senses were as alert as ever.

Snow approached Tony and tapped him insolently across the cheek with the rubber tube. "Feel that?" he asked.

Tony felt the blow as plainly as he had ever felt anything in his life.

"Curare, Betts," said Snow, with his devilish smile. "No need to explain the effects of curare to you. The motor nerves are completely paralyzed, for you have inhaled sufficient of the drug to keep you in that condition for several hours. The sensory nerves are, of course, totally unaffected."

He grinned, and the expression on his face told Tony that without a doubt Snow was insane. There was something so malevolent, so mocking, in that look, that Tony would have shuddered, if he had been able to.

"I am going to deliver you and this old fool to Celia, on Circe," said Snow, jerking his thumb toward the Professor. "You'll arrive paralyzed and quite incapable of any of the tricks which you no doubt planned to play

on me after arrival. Then, Betts"—he leaned forward, and a look of intense malignity came upon his features—"no need to tell you why they give curare to animals that are to be vivisected. We shall have some fun—if Celia still holds out against me!"

The fiendish scheme in Snow's mind, to torture him and her father until she yielded, struck Tony with horror. He knew that, though curare paralyzes the motor centres, it leaves the sensory nerves as keenly alive to pain as ever.

He tried to turn his head to see Birch, but he was incapable of the least movement, he could not utter a sound, and supported by the headrest, he stood there, a man within, marble without.

Snow's next act was to open a closet and produce two oilskin bags. He enveloped first Birch and then Tony in one of these, laying them down side by side at the base of the cylinder, with only their heads protruding.

He then swung a lever which opened the cylinder's base, and another which brought the breech mechanism upward until it formed an acute angle with the cylinder itself. A third lever brought the cover of the breech slowly down toward the floor. The cavity that was disclosed was about the size of a man.

During the next half-hour, ignoring his prisoners, Snow occupied himself with various measures. He traced parabolas upon a large chart suspended from the side of the cylinder. He consulted three separate chronometers, and set a sort of time fuse.

Then he pulled back a slot in the upper surface of the cylinder, disclosing five or six vacuum tubes, glowing with indescribable colors, which, to Tony's eyes, appeared to be just upon the verge of the ultra-violet, for they scintillated, now violet, now blue, and then went out, and then glowed purple. And then, of a sudden, the colors

in the six tubes were mingled in a burst of glorious yellow sunlight.

Snow turned to Tony and kicked him. "Ready to start on your journey, Betts?" he sneered. "It won't hurt you. The hurt comes afterward. It's going to be an odd sensation, dissolving into electronic spray, but I've sufficient confidence in it to promise you success. I had sufficient confidence in it to project the woman I love—the woman who loves you, damn you!"

Then he turned back and once more pulled a lever. The end of the breechblock opened, and a long cartridge of thin metal, six feet in length, slid slowly to the floor.

Picking up Tony's helpless body, Snow thrust it into the cartridge. The inside was perfectly smooth. Tony fitted perfectly, except for three inches of space at his feet.

Snow vanished, reappeared with a mask which he clapped over Tony's face. There was a smell of bromine and ethylate, a sense of choking that stirred the involuntary nerves to a fit of violent coughing. Snow chuckled.

"Nice, Betts?" he leered. "There's worse coming. Just at the moment when you feel yourself being transmuted into electronic spray and ether waves, it won't be a nice sensation at all, I fancy.

"And yet it ought to be painless, for the conversion is instantaneous, while sensation travels along the nerves at a low rate of speed. Celia didn't cry. The guinea-pig didn't even squeal. It's just the nervous shock, Betts, damn you, Betts!"

He punched Tony viciously in the jaw, and Tony felt the blow as a spasm of pain running up the facial nerves, all the more painful because there was no resiliency in the flesh whatever. Then Snow began pressing the lever.

The lowered breech mechanism of the cylinder began to reassemble itself in alignment with it. As it moved

slowly upward into position, the metal cartridge containing Tony's body slid into place.

Click! The light was shut off abruptly. Snow's jeering cough was cut off instantaneously. Tony was now lying within the mechanism of the cylinder. He could hear not a sound, and he was in utter darkness.

The sickening stench of the chemicals upon the mask was in his nostrils, and he coughed spasmodically without being able to clear his throat or move his tongue.

And then, almost for the first moment in his life, Tony understood the meaning of fear. Not the fear which the ordinary man knows, but gripping, stark, soul-rending terror that was like an icy hand clutching his heart and closing upon his lungs.

Fear for Celia, and fear for himself. Fear that drove him to the verge of madness, and was accentuated to the nth degree by his inability to force his muscles to move in obedience to his will, even to twitch. Fear without physical relief in action. He had become a mind, and nothing more.

Suppose Snow's elaborate calculations proved fallacious! The least error made in computing the distance that Circe had moved since Celia was sent there would land him—where? Perhaps a million miles away, in space. Not even on a planet. In space, to become a satellite, an asteroid, pursuing some eccentric orbit of his own!

Worse than that! He would land far enough from the reassembling mechanism to prevent the reassociation of the electronic spray that he had become into flesh and bone and blood!

Already the modicum of air within the cylinder was becoming exhausted. Tony was choking, his lungs, driven by the involuntary muscles, heaved convulsively, and drew in nothing. Tony lay there like a fish out of water, feeling the sweat damp upon his face, and his starved lungs quivering.

Then suddenly agony rent him. Every nerve and sinew in his body seemed to be dissolving. No pain, Snow had said! If this was not pain—

But like a black wave unconsciousness came upon him, and he knew no more.

**A** THOUSAND darts of fire seemed to be stabbing through Tony's limbs. He drew in a breath, and that breath was like liquid lead. His lungs, opening under its impact, felt like two foreign bodies rending his chest asunder. A groan broke from Tony's lips. He unclosed his eyes. He looked about him.

Slowly and painfully he flexed his fingers, drew up his knees. The effects of the curare had worn off, then! Tony remembered the curare! Evidently Snow's experiment—what had it been?—had failed, and he had vanished, leaving Tony in the laboratory.

But this was not the laboratory. Was the pale starlight that diffused itself through a semi-luminous envelope merely the reflection from the windows of the laboratory, or was it—Circe?

As the recollection of the planet flashed into Tony's consciousness, it brought with it the memory of the past in ample detail. Celia's projection, his own and Birch's capture by the madman, that ghastly bed within the cylinder—everything fell into place.

Tony sat up, and as did so the mask, now odorless, fell from his face. He became conscious of a drag upon his limbs. He looked down, and in the dim light he saw that he was still enveloped in the oilskin bag that Snow had drawn about him. It was fastened about the neck with a cord, and Tony, cramped though his fingers were, succeeded in releasing himself from it without very much difficulty.

He swung the oilskin bag around his head and cast it from him. He stood on his feet, he took a step, and

flew six feet through the air, landing upon his hands and knees. Yes, this was Circe!

It was Circe! Bode's law had made it clear that this outermost of the known planets of the solar system would be of very small dimensions—small enough to change completely the ratio of a man's gravity to the planetary core. On Earth, Tony weighed a hefty hundred and seventy pounds. On Circe he weighed perhaps fifty!

Tony sat down and forced his mind to function. Where was the mechanism that Snow had projected to the planet? It could not be very far away, otherwise he would never have been changed back from ether waves and electronic spray to a human being. Then Celia must be near.

But how had the effects of the curare worn off so quickly? The actual journey through space would not have occupied more than a half-minute, if he travelled at the speed of light. Why had not Snow, following, made him a captive? And where was Birch?

The explanation flashed through Tony's mind. Snow had made his calculations correctly, in all probability, but Circe had moved appreciably while he was venting his spite upon him after making them and before projecting him. Tony might have landed anywhere within a hundred miles or so of Celia!

The thought rendered him desperate. He got on his feet and took a cautious stride. He came down hard on his knees after turning a half-somersault through the air. He got up again, tottered a few paces, which Circe's gravity converted into strange, skipping strides. He stood still, trying to preserve his balance, and looking about him.

The first thing that struck his notice was the strange amber light diffused everywhere through a sort of uniform thin mist. This mist did not seem to extend higher than a hun-

dred feet above the ground. Overhead, through this mist, he could see that the heavens were brilliant with stars.

Despite the immense distance that separated Circe from Earth, he could still see the familiar constellations. That distance, huge though it was, was nothing in comparison with the abysmal depths of space.

In the sky, far down toward the horizon, a huge star emitted a bright yellow glow. It was the source of the amber glow all about him. For a moment Tony looked at it in wonder, for it was one-third as large as the moon. Then he knew he was looking at the distant sun, still the centre of Circe's system.

Tony was standing on a stretch of sloping ground, of a curious marshy consistency, rising up to a hilltop not far away, and sloping down toward a jungle, in which odd plants like rattans flourished profusely. Standing there, Tony saw a speck of red appear between two rocks almost at his feet.

It was growing larger as he looked. At first he thought it was some form of animal life. Then he saw what it was. It was a spike as thick as a cane, and it was increasing in height at the rate of a foot a minute.

It opened into an umbrella. It was a fungus, but twice as large as the head of a cabbage. In another minute it had begun to droop. It wilted, and suddenly a cloud of spores was emitted in all directions, covering Tony's clothing with a fine, greyish dust.

Tony took a step or two—tiny ones which became a sort of prancing leap. He felt extraordinarily fit. If he inhaled too deeply there was a sense of intoxication. The air must contain an unusual proportion of oxygen. He looked about him once more. Why, he had not noticed it before, but that vegetation beneath him was red instead of green!

Red, of course, since the chloro-

phyllian function would hardly have developed in the absence of sunshine—and one could not call that amber glow sunshine. Nothing strange in that. What was strange was the commotion in the thicket of rattan trees. They were parting, although there was not the least vestige of a wind, parting this way and that, as if something was forcing its way between them.

**T**HEN, in the middle of this parting, Tony saw a thick tree with a smooth bole of a rusty reddish coloring, its leaves pendulous, a few small tufts at the end of long, pliant branches. As he watched it he noticed that it seemed to be moving.

But it was moving. The tree was moving! It was moving in his direction! It was advancing not very fast—perhaps three miles an hour, swaying and reeling, if the word could be applied. In utter amazement, Tony looked to see its means of locomotion.

Then he saw. The ground was a swamp, and through this swamp the tree was dragging its roots, which were apparently not fastened in the soil. It was thrusting them forward and then dragging itself onward, preserving its balance with a kind of drunken rhythm.

As it was moving up the slope—less easily now, for here the ground was hard, and it was evident that the tree was experiencing considerable difficulty in forcing its way through the harder soil. It swayed and reeled.

It swung its branches with the tufts of leathery leaves at their ends; and if ever a tree could be said to show signs of conscious purpose, this tree was doing so.

Tony heard a fluttering as of wings in the air around him, but could see nothing. The sun was setting. The amber glow in the air was becoming grey.

Suddenly one of the branches of the tree shot forward with the speed of a

thrown rope and hooked itself around Tony's neck. As he cried out and tried to free himself, a second vegetable tentacle hissed through the air and caught him about the body.

Vibrant with life, strong as the tentacles of an octopod, they began dragging him toward the greyish bole, which now stood erect some fifty yards distant, and from the tufts of leathery leaves a sickening, ether-like odor diffused itself through the air.

Tony struggled in vain. Irresistibly he was being dragged toward the trunk. He was near enough to see the bole, which he had thought smooth, was, instead, studded with plate-like disks, set in regular lines. There was a horrible movement all up and down the surface as these disks alternately opened and closed in suction.

And the two tentacles were shortening as they drew Tony breast on toward that fearful death.

He could still hear that strange fluttering of wings about him, and still he could see nothing. The sounds passed dimly through his consciousness as, bracing himself against a rock, he fought his last battle against the choking tentacles that enmeshed him.

Suddenly the last amber glow disappeared. The world grew grey. And with that a succession of short quivers ran through the vegetable tentacles. They were relaxing, drooping. The day-feeding, cannibal tree had lost its power.

Tony felt the tentacles torn from his throat and body. Half-unconscious, he looked up, to find the air filled with long, winged, bird-like shapes that, even as he watched, were quickly changing from semi-transparent to visibility.

Two wings were extended beneath him, and he felt himself being lifted and borne away through the air. Then again the dark cloud of unconsciousness descended over him, and only the dim sensation of flight remained.

## CHAPTER IV

## THE BIRD-CREATURES

TONY could not have been unconscious long, for when he revived he was still being borne through the air. He could see his companions clearly now. Close beside him on his right and left flew one of the shapes, and the whole flock, numbering about a score, accompanied them, flying about fifty feet above the ground.

They were perfectly visible in the darkness that had fallen, shining by virtue of some interior phosphorescent quality. About five feet in length, with strong wings covered with down rather than feathers, feet stretched out in flight, slim, graceful bodies, and faces—God, those were human faces!

They were faces like those of angels, men's and women's faces, perfectly formed, mobile and expressive. Good faces! One of Tony's companions, realizing that he was conscious, turned her face toward his and smiled reassuringly.

"If I didn't know this was Circe, I'd think I'd died and gone to heaven," Tony muttered.

Or hell! Never had conception pictured anything more ghastly than that huge trunk with the leech-like suckers and the octopus arms. Heaven and hell! Perhaps that was the nature of Circe, the outermost, abandoned planet of the sun's family!

Faint, twittering cries came from the leaders of the human birds. Luminous shapes appeared in the faint starlight. Things like men, a dozen or more, stalking on the ground.

Suddenly they leaped—fifty feet into into the air. Tony caught sight of a bestial, half-human face, a shaggy body, an arm that grasped a club, embedded in whose end was a sharp, unpolished flint. Palaeolithic men, but far less human than the men

of palaeolithic times. Men who, on account of Circe's lesser bulk, could leap fifty feet into the air.

One of the bird-creatures shrieked faintly, and fell, struggling in the grip of one of the ape-men. In a moment it was upon the ground, and the other ape-men, whose leaps had failed to secure them prey, were upon it, and tearing it limb from limb.

Simultaneously the whole flock swerved upward, as a flock of birds will—up to the limit of the vapor that hung low over the ground. Instantly a piercing cold, of an intensity Tony had never before experienced, enveloped him. The air grew rarefied; he gasped for breath.

Then, with a long, graceful, swooping glide, the bird-creatures descended to a lower level again, and flew on.

The scene was weirder than any Tony could have imagined. The bird-creatures were following a ridge of rock, perhaps half-a-mile wide, that projected above the low-lying marsh-jungles on either side.

These jungles were filled with trees and undergrowth, but the high ground was comparatively clear, and it was evident that the bird-creatures were following it with a view to avoiding any of the cannibal trees that were nocturnal in their feeding-habits.

Overhead shone the stars, with giant Jupiter alone of the planets visible as a point of light. The mists swirled up ceaselessly from the swamps below. From time to time a faint rumbling, indicative of volcanic activity, could be heard in the depths of the earth.

Another half-hour passed. The ridge was rising into high ground that seemed to form the foothills of a line of mountains visible in the distance. Deep canyons appeared, forming a criss-cross of lines and gashes. There was no longer any visible vegetation.

On all sides the land was as bare and desolate as the surface of the Moon.

Then the leaders of the flight drooped to earth and rested beside a yawning cave that appeared in the side of a cliff. Tony's two guides, who had sustained him on their wings without apparent effort, set him down lightly on his feet, and the whole band gathered about him, looking at him in evident amazement.

Tony surveyed them too. Male faces and female faces, but both hairless, emerging at the throat out of the soft down that covered their bodies and formed a hood over the heads. Graceful limbs, feathered to the knee.

No arms apart from wings, since the economy of nature does not permit six limbs, but the legs terminating in normal human feet. And the downy covering was curiously translucent. Even in the starlight it seemed to weave into mazy patterns that appeared and vanished.

A play of lights like those on the material known as "shot" silk ran all over it. A device of nature to render these strange bird-creatures practically invisible by day.

The female who had smiled at Tony put out her hand and touched his clothing timidly. She stroked his sleeve, evidently thinking it a portion of his body.

"Not me," said Tony, pulling it up and showing his forearm.

At the sound of his voice, there broke out a shrill twittering of alarm. The circle recoiled in terror, then timidly advanced again as Tony smiled encouragingly. Smiles certainly were known to these inhabitants of Circe, and this gave Tony some feeling of contact with human minds.

The leader of the band, a man-bird with the face of a Greek god—all these creatures seemed the same age—twittered, and the flock closed about Tony and began to usher him within the depths of the cave.

IT WAS a vast, cavernous vault, and at first Tony walked in complete darkness. Then a luminous patch appeared ahead, and grew brighter. It grew warmer, too.

They had proceeded perhaps a quarter of a mile along the winding cavern before Tony was able to distinguish the source of the light, which now filled the interior with a bluish, phosphorescent glow.

It came from great masses of some growth resembling Virginia creeper, which covered the walls of the cavern and emitted a continuous radiance that grew more brilliant as they proceeded further.

Then the cavern ended in a wide, open space, about half the size of a city block, with the brilliant weed hanging in clusters on all sides. The heat was intense.

But what astounded Tony was the sight of a number of empty eggshells lying about, and, cowering near them, perhaps a dozen tiny, downy creatures about the size of human babies. An equivalent number of the mother bird-creatures ran to them and, crouching over them with expanded wings, began feeding them.

The rest, producing masses of the same substance, began eating delicately. One of the bird-creatures offered a large piece to Tony, who bit into it gingerly.

It was faintly sweet and aromatic. It tasted, in fact, much like sponge-cake. And Tony suddenly discovered that he was hungry.

And now the stupendous nature of life on Circe was beginning to reveal itself to him. These timid, harried creatures, which had rescued him probably because they had believed him to be one of their kind, were the progenitors of man on Circe.

Man, existing by stealth and subterfuge, in the presence of the great shaggy apes that preyed on him; in spite of the cannibal trees that took toll of the animal world, in spite of

probably a score of other perils! So had Man been on Earth, a timid, harried mammal in the days of the great saurians, when it seemed impossible that such an experiment could survive!

Circe, an experimental world, as Earth had once been, with evil dominant and good slowly rising to confront it! These were like the score of experiments Nature had made with life on Earth and abandoned. These bird-creatures, like the egg-laying monotremes, now almost extinct on Earth, represented the beginnings of humanity on Circe!

A topsy-turvy world, with the vegetative life at present supreme. A world of terrors, of anarchic existence, and yet—the bird-creature had smiled! Nature's plan was good, even on this cold planet! Tony took heart. If only he could find Celia!

He moved toward the dark region at the rear of the cave. Instantly the shrill twitterings of alarm broke out again. The bird-creatures surrounded Tony, gesturing to him to return.

Tony pointed into the darkness. He was consumed with impatience to know what lay beyond the zone of light. He did not like being in a cavern open at both ends.

The twittering grew more agitated. Evidently these creatures had some means of inter-communication!

Finally one of the bird-men snatched down a great mass of creeper from the wall of the cavern, and, holding it before him, signed to Tony to accompany him, while the rest shrank back, their faces showing terror at their leader's boldness.

The creeper illumined the darkness through which Tony and the bird-creature moved, throwing a phosphorescent light before it. The rest of the bird-creatures disappeared in the obscurity behind; their twitterings were no longer heard.

For perhaps three hundred yards the two proceeded, then the bird-

creature looked round at Tony in unmistakable warning. There was fear on his features too now, intense and unmistakable.

**H**E LOWERED the phosphorescent creeper, whose light was already beginning to grow dim, and its leaves to wilt. Tony saw that the rock bottom of the cave gave way to a stagnant and evil-smelling marsh. Beyond the rim of it, a slimy scum was bubbling up to the surface.

Suddenly Tony heard once more that subterranean rumbling, which he had taken for volcanic action. It rolled and died away, and the surface of the marsh grew still more agitated. The bird-creature started back in terror, and caught at Tony's arm, as if urging him to flee.

Tony stood still. He was wondering that the bird-creatures should be afraid of these volcanic mutterings, habituated to them as they must be by long experience. Then suddenly a cry of amazement broke from his own lips. Something was moving beneath the surface of the marsh. Something larger than it had the right to be. Something that seemed to come out of infinity. Something larger than the largest whale extant on earth. Outlined beneath the mud of the marsh, and *swimming through it*, as a mole swims through solid earth.

Suddenly, up through the mire at the very edge of the swamp, not twenty feet away, appeared a thing that rooted Tony to the spot in horror worse than that which he had felt when seized by the carnivorous tree.

A giant human head, such as a caricaturist might draw! A head ten times as large as a man's head, yet undeniably human, with luminous, bestial eyes, and bridgeless nose, and—vilest of all, a mouth that stretched from one small, pointed ear to the other! A yawning, toothless cavern of a mouth that could have swallowed a lamb entire!



There was no vestige of hair, but a slimy, leathery skin covered the head of the monster, and the rounded shoulders, smoothed and fused to present a fish-like rather than a human body.

The thing opened its cavernous mouth wider, and emitted a roar that sounded loud as thunder. And that was the rumbling Tony had heard in the depths of the earth!

The bird-creature stood at Tony's side as motionless as himself. Whether it was paralyzed with fear, or whether it considered flight impossible, Tony did not afterward know. Tony stared into the eyes of the earth monster with the feeling that it was all a hideous nightmare.

Suddenly the mud was cloven again, and out of it projected something like a seal's flipper, at the end of a twenty-foot arm. It passed by Tony's face, emitting a stench of putrid flesh, and grasped the bird-creature around the waist.

A twittering cry escaped the bird-creature's lips. It writhed and struggled, and at its call the rest of the flock came hurrying out of the darkness with curious bird-like hops, carrying fresh branches of the creeper, which they waved frantically, and their united cries became a long, whining, strident ululation.

The immense bulk of the monster heaved itself above the surface of the marsh, sending the mud splashing in torrents. The captured bird-creature was lifted into the air and conveyed by the flipper to the cavernous mouth, which closed upon it. Then, with another bellow, the monster plunged beneath the surface.

The mud heaved and boiled and grew calm. The beast was gone with its victim, and shrill, piercing cries broke forth from the assembled bird-creatures.

Then suddenly Tony's limbs were flexed. He turned and broke through the bird-creatures, mewing and gib-

bering as a man does in dreams. Out through the mouth of the cave and into the night he ran, stumbling and slipping on the steep hillside, desirous only of placing as great a distance as possible between himself and that scene of horror.

Once he found himself on marshy ground, and had the sense to reascend the slopes to avoid the cannibal trees, but apart from that he ran like an automaton until his strength failed him and he dropped in a coma-like sleep.

## CHAPTER V

### "YOU HAVE BECOME A GIANT"

WHEN Tony opened his eyes again the amber glow was in the air. It was day, as was evidenced by the tiny golden sun, shining far off over the horizon—a glow so weak that the stars shone down with almost unabated brilliance. For a few minutes Tony lay still, while the events of the night raced through his mind in a phantasmagoric nightmare.

Then, aroused by the realization of his danger, should any of the cannibal trees be in his vicinity, he staggered to his feet and looked about him.

He must have run far during the night, for he was almost at the summit of the ridge that he had seen in the distance the evening before. A stark, barren land, seared with canyons and black with a brittle, lava-like stone that crumbled underfoot. And somewhere in those wastes—where, God only knew—was Celia!

Perhaps she had carried out her threat to kill herself when Snow and her father arrived without him! The thought filled Tony with despair, but it also aroused him to the determination to pursue his search, and, if he found Celia dead, to kill the madman who had transported her to the abominable planet.

All about him was the same waste, but in front, not more than half-a-mile, where the ridge reached its

summit, Tony thought he might be able to get some idea of the condition of the country.

He started on accordingly, covering a distance of twelve or fifteen yards at each hopping stride, until at length he stood upon the summit.

Here the mists, swirling thickly around the jagged rocks, concealed Tony from those below, and Tony was fortunate enough to catch a glimpse of what was below and to have presence of mind enough to drop flat before being seen.

Lying behind a rock, he glanced through gaps in the mist in amazement at the scene that disclosed itself.

The ridge terminated in a sheer precipice of perhaps a hundred feet. At the bottom of this was a huge lake of mud, perhaps miles in extent, stretching away, at any rate, as far as the eye could see.

Between the margin of this lake and the foot of the precipice was a strip of land about a hundred yards in width, and through a tunnel at the bottom of the precipice flowed a river of moving mud. Upon the strip of land was a pile village.

Yes, but a village of giants. The ill-constructed dwellings were each something like a hundred feet in height above the lake, enormous chambers open at both sides, crude as the first pile dwellings uncovered on the shores of Lake Geneva. And squatting beside the shore was a cluster of human beings, each fully fifty feet high and broad in proportion.

The shore was white with enormous skeletons, and the group were busily engaged in devouring some meal that they had taken from the mud lake.

As Tony watched, he heard a cry. The giants sprang to their feet and began hauling on what Tony now perceived to be one of a number of lines that were fastened around the piles of the houses and ran down into the lake, while terrific bellows broke from their throats.

Presently the surface of the lake began to be agitated. Some monstrous body was being dragged ashore. Then it began to cut the surface of the mud, a flipper appeared, and the huge form of one of the man-monsters, such as Tony had seen in the cave the night before, was dragged to the beach, churning the mud into furious whirlpools.

It was a sight that Tony was to remember to the last day of his life. The hideous denizen of the mud, man-faced though it was, had the flippers of a seal; in the rear, two short and imperfectly formed legs, fused into a rudimentary tail. It might have been five hundred feet in length. It utterly dwarfed the giants who had captured it.

Hooked fast in the gills that palpitated on either side of the huge, gaping mouth, it roared and bellowed, and thrashed the sandy loam, while the giants, roaring with delight at their capture, ran round and round the piles beneath their dwellings, winding in the rope as they did so.

For perhaps an hour the struggle went on, the man-monster making a succession of furious attempts to liberate itself, while the giants held the rope, to prevent the piles being torn away. Then the second phase of the combat opened.

Seizing long clubs, with the sharp flints embedded in their ends, the giants rushed upon their helpless prey. Swarming over its body, but taking care to keep away from the huge, gaping mouth, toothless though this appeared to be, they inflicted fearful wounds with their weapons. Blood streamed and spurted from the monster's sides in a score of places, and ran down to dye the black mud of the foreshore.

The monster's bellowings grew fainter. Its thrashings grew feebler. The yells of the giants increased in volume as they hacked and slashed.

Then the monster lay inert, and the



The cavernous mouth closed upon the struggling bird creature.

giants were staggering away, each carrying a lump of flesh almost as large as itself. Once more, seated together on the strand of the lake, they began to devour the raw flesh that had fallen to their lot.

And they lifted up their voices in a song that filled the air, a hideous, phrenetic chant of triumph.

Tony, crouching behind his rock, looked down, physically nauseated. At that moment it was difficult for him to retain his sanity, to realize that dear Mother Earth, with all her wrongs and injustices, was revolving round that same pale, tiny sun shining in the eastern sky. A planet that had passed through these same phases and given birth to higher things. To Celia, with her love and human instincts.

Tony looked down. Something was moving in one of the open chambers of one of the pile dwellings. A tiny figure appeared upon the wooden platform and stood looking down at the hideous scene below.

The figure of a woman! Tony's heart leaped madly. That figure was Celia!

**F**OR a moment he went mad with exultation. He wanted to shout to her, to scramble straight down the precipice toward her, to seize her in his arms, all else forgotten. But an instant later sanity returned to him. Celia was evidently the giants' prisoner, and he would need to exercise the utmost care if he was to hope to reach her unobserved.

He surveyed the scene below him once more. The giants had ceased to sing, and squatting on their haunches, were engaged in devouring their horrible meal. Two of them arose, went to the carcass of the dead man-monster, and cut off fresh chunks of meat, leaden with which they staggered back, to resume their repast.

A short distance to the right there was a break in the vertical wall of the

precipice, and here its face was coated with thick shrubbery. It seemed feasible to Tony to gain the cover of this in the mist, and to reach the bottom unobserved.

Once at the bottom, he could reach the pile dwellings by taking advantage of the great rocks and boulders that strewed the foreshore, and then it would be a matter of a minute or two before he reached Celia.

Waiting until a fresh wreath of fog came swirling down, Tony broke cover and ran for the shrubbery. He gained it and dropped. Then, feet first, face toward the cliff, he began slowly to work his way down the precipitous slope, grasping the branches tightly with his hands to prevent falling.

He was half-way down when something coiled about his arm. He hung suspended in a loop. He looked up. A young cannibal tree, that had taken root there, was holding him. The suckers on the bole, not yet fully developed, looked like an eruption of measles.

Rooted fast in the hard shale of the precipice, unable to work its roots through mud, its natural habitat, it was a starveling of a young tree, and yet that tenacious grasp sent a fresh thrill of horror through Tony.

The tentacle was making desperate attempts to pull him toward the trunk, and the roots quivered and strained in their efforts to detach themselves.

With a mighty effort Tony succeeded in detaching the tentacle. A nauseous odor was emitted from the tufts of leathery leaves. He put forth all his strength in the attempt to break the coil, but this proved totally beyond his powers, and he was forced to abandon the effort.

The coil whipped slowly back, the roots grew still, the suckers closed, and Tony resumed his groundward journey.

He reached the bottom at last, con-

siderably bruised by the rocks over which he had descended, and stopped, crouching behind a great boulder to gain breath.

Celia was no longer visible; she must have gone back inside the pile dwelling. The giants were still at their nauseous meal. But now an odd thing struck Tony. The giants, who had appeared at least fifty feet high, now seemed to have shrunk to half that height. And the pile dwelling was smaller—unmistakably smaller.

Celia came into view. She was pacing to and fro inside the erection. And her figure was no larger than it had seemed when viewed from above. It was the figure of a doll!

Tony rubbed his eyes. Was it an illusion of vision produced by the mist that was swirling thickly up from the turbid lake of mud? Was anything real upon this hideous planet? Again that sense of stark unreality came over him.

Celia came out on the platform. A doll—yes, the figure of a doll, a little higher than Tony's knee, so far as he was able to judge! Of course that could not be! Probably all objects were distorted by that swirling vapor, perhaps the very air had the properties of a diffracting lens. At any rate, Tony shook the impression from his mind. No time to waste, with Celia there, and the giants at their horrid feast!

Again the temptation to call to the girl was almost irresistible. Tony put it aside. He waited until Celia had once more gone back inside the erection, and then began to work his way from rock to rock, taking infinite precautions lest an incautiously strong movement should bounce him feet high into the air.

He thought he had exhausted all the sights of horror upon Circe, but there was another to come—something immediately before him.

That was the giants' larder. Skinned, and hanging from the base

of the building among the piles by great hooks cut clumsily from flint, were the bodies of a dozen of the apemen whom Tony had encountered in his flight with the bird-creatures.

The carcasses looked even more human than the living men. Here and there a joint had been cut away, and the repulsive remnants hung with heads on their furry chests, the ghastliest sight that Tony had yet seen.

It sickened him, but it filled him with new energy by virtue of his reviving fears. The giants were cannibals, then, like everything else upon this hateful planet, except the bird-creatures! But, if they ate their kind—and surely they recognized the apemen as their kind—what about Celia and Professor Birch?

And Snow—what part was he playing in this horrible drama?

**T**ONY advanced among the piles, looking upward. Through a wide gap in the base of one of the dwellings overhead he saw her for a moment. Tony's fears became panic. Glaring about him, he saw a clumsy ladder placed against one of the piles and leading up to a sort of trap door, open, and disclosing the interior of the pile dwelling overhead.

In another moment he had set foot upon the lowest rung, and was scrambling upward. As he reached the summit, something whipped down and clutched at him. His leap just saved him.

He uttered a shout of rage and horror. It was an immense cannibal tree, rooted in the black swamp beneath, its bole fashioned into one of the supporting piles. It was the principal sign of intelligence that Tony had yet seen on Circe. The cannibal tree was a prisoner, tamed to the service of the giants!

For the pile dwelling held it in restraint and forbade its roots to move. Chained there in wood, it seemed to

writhe impotently as it fulfilled the duties of guardian of the threshold against its will, because its every instinct was to seize upon all living things that passed it.

The tentacle that had attacked Tony, as if exhausted by its effort, receded slowly. It was a short and small one, apparently recently grown. But three immense tentacles protruded through holes in the opposite wall of the dwelling, imprisoned there by the craft of the giants who had converted the cannibal to their service.

They squirmed and writhed throughout their length, as if endeavoring to free themselves. Tony made his way beneath them and passed through a gap in the wall into the adjoining chamber.

Then he saw to what purpose the three captive tentacles had been put. One grasped Professor Birch, holding him tightly against the wall, and, since the whole instinct in the tentacle was to convey its captive to the sucker disks upon the trunk, it held the old man as in a vise.

A second tentacle held Snow captive in a similar manner. And the third held Celia.

But this tentacle, the longest of all, had passed through the hole in the wall and had somehow become entangled between two of the logs that formed the front of the building. Tony could see at once that this gave Celia considerable leeway.

The girl was free to move up and down, from front to rear of the building, even though held in the creeper's grasp, and this she was doing, with quick, nervous steps, and a face which looked as if every emotion had been frozen out of it.

Tony stopped on the threshold. Mechanically he beat his head with his fist. Yes, this was madness. Each of the three figures was no more than knee-high to him! Celia, Birch, and Snow had shrunk to the dimensions of dolls.

"Celia!" shouted Tony.

The girl turned, saw him, and uttered a terrible cry. She shrank away until the tentacle grew rigid, holding her from further movement. Yells broke from the throats of Snow and Birch. But Tony was not looking at them. Only at that piteous, doll-like figure that he could have held on the palm of his hand. Celia—dwarfed into this puppet! Tony felt his brain reeling.

"Celia!" The name burst from his lips again. He saw her still trying to shrink away from him, while her lips opened in a soundless cry, and her eyes were filled with wild madness of fear.

"Tony! Oh God!" That cry pierced Tony's soul like a sword. "Tony! You—you—you've become a giant too!"

## CHAPTER VI

### PRISONERS

**T**HEN only did the sense of proportion come upon Tony. Suddenly he understood why he had been confused before. He had not realized the change in him simply because everything upon Circe was proportionately large. He had become a giant, perhaps fifty feet in height; his very clothes, dissolved into electronic spray, had recombined upon the larger scale.

He backed away from Celia, who collapsed upon the floor and sat looking at him, the terror in her eyes gradually fading, but no longer capable of speech. Tony wanted to go to her, but he realized that to approach her would simply be to throw her into fresh terrors. He backed to the edge of the partition and turned his attention to Snow and Birch.

The two men had almost recovered their equanimity, though it was evident that both were badly shaken, especially Birch.

"Now, Snow!" Tony hissed through

his teeth. "If you've anything to say, I'm ready to hear it."

"Betts, listen to me," jabbered Snow. "I swear that I meant to play fair with you. I was only threatening you in the observator. I did play fair. But I see what's happened."

"It was the projector. I didn't make proper calculations for the reassembling. I'd discovered that this was the hardest part of my task. Bodies and things can only reassemble in two ways—according to their original proportions and according to the natural proportions they would assume on Circe, where they vary inversely according to the gravitational pull."

"It has to be the one or the other. I'd calculated correctly in the case of ourselves, but the slight deflection in your case brought you to the borderline—just across the borderline where the physical atoms reassembled according to the principle ruling on Circe."

"Humph!" said Tony.

"But I can get you back again, Betts," went on Snow eagerly. "I assure you this experience has cured me of all desire for any more experiments. If only we can get back to Earth again, safe and sound, you'll be in your normal size once more. For God's sake let the past be past and help us get away."

"Humph!" grunted Tony again. It seemed somehow absurd to listen to this tiny puppet pleading with him for forgiveness; it was that element of the ludicrous that turned Tony from his first impulse toward vengeance. "Suppose you tell me as quickly as possible what happened to you all."

He glanced out at the giants. What he would do if they took it into their heads to come he did not know, but they seemed to be drowsing over the remnants of their meal in the dull glow of what on earth would have been sunshine.

"There isn't much to tell, Betts,"

answered Snow, with what was doubtless a hollow laugh, but sounded like a shrill whistle. "They caught Birch and myself before we recovered consciousness, and Celia too."

"There was a crowd of these giants had apparently been watching Celia for some time, uncertain who she was, and what to do about her. From their gesticulations I gathered it was the machinery that frightened them. They don't know anything about iron, apparently."

"When we woke up we found ourselves prisoners. The giants gave me to understand, from their gesticulations, that they had sent to ask advice from their chief in the mountains. They carried the instruments away on their shoulders, and we were brought here."

"They've got the instruments?" shouted Tony.

"God, don't bellow like that! Now you've started them!" cried Snow in terror, rolling his eyes toward where the group was squatting outside. "Yes, yes, we've got to get them back. Here they come! God, help us all now!"

Tony's voice, which had sounded like the roar of one of the giants, had aroused them, and two of them were taking mincing steps, which had the effect of strides, toward the dwelling. Tony went to the platform and looked down at them.

They did not seem to be alarmed at his appearance. Great, shaggy monsters with heads like those of Neanderthal men, they seemed to take him for one of their group, for they looked up stupidly, clucked, and went back to their companions. Birch uttered an exclamation of relief.

"You must help us get away, Tony," he said. "Once we are free, with our intelligence I fancy we'll be a match for anything on Circe. This creeper's constricting me badly. Help us, Tony."

Tony went to Celia. She had got

over her fear of him and looked up at him with a piteous smile. He went down on his huge knees, took her tiny hand in his and kissed it. A doll's hand, no more! Then he bent his efforts to removing the coil of the creeper.

They were vain, utterly vain. The creeper was no thicker than a man's cane, but it defied all efforts to remove or break it.

Tough as steel, flexible as rubber, it twisted hideously beneath his hands, but only coiled itself tighter about Celia.

**B**AFFLED and sweating after ten minutes' unceasing effort, Tony stopped. He looked about him. He checked a shout of delight that rose to his lips. In a corner of the room, faintly illumined by the amber glow, was one of the flint axe-heads.

He crossed and picked it up. It was as large as a modern axe-head, and as sharp as steel. He went back and began hacking at the creeper.

To his amazement he could not make the slightest impression on it. It simply turned the flint in Tony's hands. The creeper had no outer bark, and the whole substance seemed homogeneous. It was, no doubt, cellulose, but it was the sort of cellulose one finds in a haircomb, toughened to a degree and absolutely unassailable.

Tony let the flint fall in despair. His only chance of saving them seemed to have vanished.

At this moment the roaring of the giants outside came to their ears. Tony picked up the flint and ran to the front platform. Along the border of the lake three giant figures were progressing.

Progressing—for their extraordinary gait could be described in no other words: Running, perhaps, would be the equivalent, for they were skipping like fleas, bounding fifty feet in the air and alighting every second.

Their speed was that of an express train.

Unlike the giants outside the structures, who wore only loin-clouts of some skin, these newcomers wore skins over their trunks, dyed a brilliant red.

Tony turned around. "Well," he said, "it looks as if the old chief in the mountains has sent for you." He turned toward Celia, uncertain what to do. If he attempted to beat off the giants, either he would be killed, leaving the prisoners at their mercy, or, in the almost inconceivable possibility of his succeeding, they would die in the grip of the cannibal tree.

And even while he was struggling with his problem, the giants were at hand. No trap door guarded by the cannibal for them. A leap and a bound—and the three had landed squarely inside the room.

Three giants, yet hardly larger than Tony, savage, repulsive, black of skin, yet human as Neanderthal man was human. Their blood-red skins glowed crimson in the amber glow of mid-day.

For a moment Tony felt a return of all his old horror as he saw that these skins were those of the small species of human beings, sewn together with sinews; for the heads, still attached and mummified, hung grotesquely over the giants' shoulders. Then he realized that the purpose of the visitors was not a hostile one, either to him or to the captives.

Perhaps the dull brains of the giants could only take in one thing at a time. Perhaps they imagined Tony to be an albino of their race. What passed in their minds was inconceivable, but their leader simply grinned at Tony and rubbed his stomach.

It was a gesture of peace, and Tony followed suit. Yet he watched the giants' every movement in fear of treachery. One of them was with-



drawing something from his skin covering.

It was a hollow tube, apparently of some species of bamboo. He held it up to Tony for his inspection. A few inches inside the mouth Tony saw what looked like some grains of black powder—tiny grains.

Setting the tube upright on the floor, the giant proceeded to twirl it in his huge hands, yet so skilfully that none of the grains was spilled. It was obvious to Tony what he was doing. He was generating heat by friction.

As he proceeded, Tony saw the grains of black powder begin to swell. They changed color. They became blood-red, and about the size of little peas. Tiny tendrils proceeded from them.

The giant stopped twirling the bamboo. He shook one of the peas out upon the tuft of leathery leaves that fringed the end of the creeper. He passed to each of the two other creepers and shook out one of the peas on each. The bamboo tube he corked with a plug of wood.

An extraordinary thing happened. Each of the three peas increased swiftly in size. It became a spike, which opened into a hood. Now Tony knew. It was the fungus that he had seen on his first awakening on Circe.

As the horrible growth increased, attaching itself by tendrils, the tufts of leathery leaves became violently agitated. The agitation extended to the creepers. They waved, uncoiled, lashed the walls of the room like some creature in agony.

Within another minute the fungi had each attained the size of a cabbage head. They burst, discharging a cloud of spores. The creepers hung like dead things from the walls. The prisoners were free.

**S**O AMAZING was the whole operation that, in spite of Celia's and her father's peril, Tony had

watched spellbound. Within the space of two or three minutes he had seen the complete life-cycle of the fungus. He understood that, like every species of fungus growth on Earth, it required an exact amount of warmth, almost to a degree, in order to germinate.

It was evidently feared by the cannibal tree beyond all other enemies; and from the care with which the giant recorked the tube it was apparent that it was also feared by man—or man's Circean equivalent.

Now Tony had formed his plan. Since the giants evidently were not actuated by hostile sentiments toward him, he would accompany them with the captives.

He saw Celia looking at him intently and guessed that she had divined his purpose.

Yet his resolution almost failed him when the leader of the three stooped, caught the girl up in his hands, and placed her upon his shoulder. Celia screamed shrilly and Tony took a stride forward—a stride which brought him into hard collision with the wall. In his excitement he had forgotten that gravity was not the same on Circe.

The three giants emitted yells of what was evidently laughter. Apparently Tony's action had aroused the sense of humor in them. Then each of the two others snatched up Snow and the professor, and suddenly the three were gone with three simultaneous bounds out through the front.

Tony leaped, too, leaped recklessly, expecting to be maimed, stumbled and fell upon his knees, bruising himself, but not badly. He straightened himself. The rest of the giants were still dozing in the sunlight, but the three were almost on the horizon.

Then it was that Tony cast away all thoughts of size, stature and gravitation. He braced his soles against mother Circe and leaped. He soared until the piercing cold above the level

of Circe's atmosphere enveloped his head and shoulders, and he gasped in the thin air. Then he was down again, and seventy yards had been covered at a bound.

Again and again, with the three just in sight but always apparently on the horizon's rim, Tony bounded through the air. He was growing used to this method of locomotion. He was learning to aim at length instead of height.

He was gaining slowly on the three at last, but an hour had gone by, and it had begun to seem as if he would have to chase them all the way around Circe. Then he began gaining faster. And now he could see Celia, seated on one of the giants' shoulders, her tiny arms thrust out toward him.

In the distance appeared a high range of mountains, thrust up from the meteorite-scarred ground. It was toward this range that the three were evidently on their way. Tony came to a quick resolution.

Exerting an immense effort, he began drawing up abreast of the giant who carried Celia. He was level with him now. Suddenly he bent sidewise and snatched Celia from the giant's shoulder.

He turned—too late. With a bellow of rage the other whirled in flight, executing an amazing pirouette that Tony had not yet learned to master. Tony had just time to fling his arm above Celia to protect her, when the bulk of the giant descended on him, flattening him to the ground.

The giant's yells were taken up by the others. Answering shouts came from across the plain. As Tony wrestled desperately but unavailingly to free himself, a score more of the giants, wearing the blood-red skins, came bounding out of infinity and Tony was quickly seized and rendered powerless.

Thin creepers of the cannibal plant, which still seemed to possess a certain vitality, were attached to his wrists and ankles. Helpless, and

yoked to one of his captors by a long, pliant rope of creeper, he was forced to bound behind him over the plain, and to watch Celia borne to the giants' destination.

In the heart of the hills appeared an enormous plateau. Ascending toward it were flights of rough-hewn steps, flight above flight, which might have been the work of Cyclopeans.

No such enormous steps had ever been conceived in the history of the world before, for each one was a hundred yards in length, and they towered dizzily up until the top was invisible in the mists. In depth each of these steps was the size of a large room.

Bounding upward, a dozen steps at a time, the giants quickly negotiated the ascent. Tony saw the immense, flat plateau in front of him, with a small cave in the mountain wall behind. But what amazed him and gave him sudden hope was the sight of Snow's projected instruments, duplicates of the ones in the observatory, which had been assembled there by the giants.

And mingled with them were other instruments whose presence there seemed impossible. Certainly Snow had never had these fashioned, for they were of hand-wrought bronze, covered with the green patina of centuries.

They looked something like the mediæval Chinese astronomical instruments still to be seen; and yet there was a complexity about them that showed them to be the work of highly scientific artificers.

Suddenly there issued from the cavern in the mountain wall an indescribable sound. It was like the wind whistling through a tunnel; it was like the distant drumming of the surf on shingle; it was like a hoarse human voice.

At the sound of it the giants flung themselves upon the ground in abject

terror. And even Tony, standing there roped by his creeper, was conscious of a sense of terrible awe.

## CHAPTER VII

### THE VOICE IN THE TREE

**M**ECHEANICAL or natural, that voice—it was plainly now nothing else—was conveying meaning to the giants. Tony's guard began drawing him toward the cavern's entrance, while another carried Celia, and another Snow and Professor Birch, one on either palm.

At the entrance of the cavern, which was dimly lighted, the giants seemed to hesitate in fear. And again that voice came roaring forth, and the three captives were set down inside, while Tony was thrust violently within, his guard detaching the wilting creeper branch that had bound him.

Tony's first realization was that he was unrestrained. He bent to look at Celia. She had shrunk up against the interior wall beside her father, and was looking at him. No terror in her gaze now, but an infinite, wistful sorrow. Snow, undismayed, was advancing into the interior, a tiny figure against Tony's, almost lost in the immensity.

The light that filled the cave grew brighter. It came from the same luminous creeper that Tony had seen in the cavern of the bird-creatures. As Tony's eyes became adapted to it, he was able to take in the interior clearly.

The interior was much larger than the small entrance had rendered probable, but it was not deep. Fifty yards away it appeared to terminate in a rock wall. Fastened against this wall in some way was one of the cannibal trees, larger than any Tony had seen hitherto.

The immense trunk, which must have been the size of one of the California redwoods, was covered with rows of the plate-like suckers, and the

long tendrils, which quivered incessantly, were somehow caught in the rock wall on either side and overhead.

But from where had that voice come? Snow, advancing confidently, had stopped; the four looked about them, expecting some immediate event, yet unable to guess the purpose of the giants in thrusting them inside.

And then the voice began once more, but softer now—a sighing sibilation that seemed to come from the heart of the cannibal tree itself.

What was it saying? Words? Was the cannibal tree talking? It was more incredible than anything Tony had experienced yet. But if those were not words in any known speech, they were more like words than a mere natural phenomenon.

Snow started back. "My God, that tree—that tree—" he babbled.

And then something happened that froze Tony's very soul with fear. For the tree spoke! And it spoke English, though with a queer accent, English in a hissing whisper that ran through the cave:

"Come here! Do not try to escape me! I can drop my branches instantly and hold ye all in captivity. Of your free will advance!"

Celia stepped from the wall and ranged herself at Tony's knee, and old Birch followed her. "I'm not afraid, Tony," whispered the girl, looking up at him. "It's not the forms of things, it's the souls of people that count."

"Come here!" whispered the tree. "The man of youth and human size, not the old fellow nor yet the man of our size. Come hither!"

At this remark, obviously addressed to him, Snow stepped forward, while the others ranged themselves in his rear.

"Who are thou, mortal, that speaketh the English tongue? An Englishman?"

Snow answered in stuttering, terrified accents that gradually grew bolder:

"I'm an American."

"I know not the name." Either the tree's diction was improving or their ears were becoming attuned to it. "Where is this America? On Earth, doubtless."

"It lies in the western continent—"

"I know. I know. For I am a man like yourself, and even in my day it was known as a secret doctrine that there existed a continent beyond the broad Atlantic. So man has found it?"

"And peopled it. It is a great country, filled with flourishing cities."

"And thou, American, hast done what I did centuries ago! Truly knowledge hath advanced!"

"You are a man?" gasped Snow.

"I am a man who lived on Earth, in the fair land of England, when the third Henry reigned seven centuries ago, as time is reckoned on Earth. All this while I have awaited the coming of a mortal who should have rediscovered what I discovered, and who could set me free."

"Who are you?"

"Nay, names matter nothing. For the Black Art they sought my life. I escaped to this distant planet, having discovered a method of destroying the species while retaining the substance. Here it was my plan to recombine my corporeal atoms into their original form."

"Go on!" whispered Snow, trembling.

"Alas, my son, I had miscalculated my powers. I did not know that the forms of things are ruled by the attractive forces of the planets. When I arrived, I could not combine my corporeal particles into human form. They are dispersed so widely that I am invisible, for I extend far beyond the atmosphere of this accursed planet.

**A**FTER centuries of effort, I have succeeded in condensing my throat so that I can speak, and, by the terror I inspire, I have made my-

self lord over these ignorant men who inhabit these spheres.

"Likewise, in some measure, I have regained the use of a single hand. But how I did these things I know not, unless the will can rule the form independently of a mediating substance, as many of the Schoolmen teach."

"Yes—yes," Snow whispered.

"When they brought word to me that mortals had arrived, I issued orders that you and your machines should be brought here. I, too, have machines, as you may have seen. And with the aid of them I can condense my body to the corporeal magnitude of an Earth Mortal. But my one hand, which I can thus condense, is not potent enough to control the machines."

"Yes," breathed Snow. "Will you show me your hand, Master?"

A pause followed, as if the effort to materialize the hand exhausted the potency of the voice. Then gradually something began to take outline in the cavern.

Celia screamed and clutched at Tony's knee. It was the dim outline of a human hand, of vast size, yet beautifully formed. The wrinkled hand of an old man.

Slowly it decreased in size and at the same time seemed to condense. It moved tremulously around the walls of the cave and stopped.

"Dost thou believe?" came the faint whisper.

"I believe, Master. What do you wish of me?"

"I shall show thee how to control my machines, and thou shalt bring me back to human corporeal dimensions. Then thou and I shall learn each other's wisdom, and together we shall rule not alone this planet but many others. Even Earth in time."

"Yes, Master!" Snow's look was again that of the fanatic.

"Who are these people with you?"

Snow laughed. "The old man was

my assistant in my laboratory in Earth—”

“That’s a lie!” shrilled old Birch. “It was my laboratory, you infernal liar!”

“The girl is my sweetheart. I want her. It was to win her I brought her to this planet Circe, as we call it. This other fellow I projected from Earth hither, but unfortunately he became enlarged, as you see him. He—”

“Snow, if you’re planning any tricks—” began Tony.

“Can you protect me, Master?” squealed Snow, backing away as Tony strode toward him, and looking like a tiny ape fleeing from punishment.

“I can!” hissed the voice from the tree.

“Then save me!” shrilled Snow, dodging agilely between Tony’s legs.

Suddenly Tony found himself gripped by the tentacle of the cannibal tree that was nearest him. Simultaneously he heard cries from Celia and old Birch. He struggled madly to free himself, but was slowly dragged to the wall and imprisoned so tightly that he was unable to move a foot.

Snow’s raucous laugh rang out: “That was quick work, Master!”

“Yes, I have had several centuries to practise it,” responded the hissing voice. “It is that that has given me the mastery over these savage men. Thou art safe now, learned doctor.”

“I shall be glad to work under you, Master,” said Snow, with affected humility. “You have lived long; perhaps you have solved the secret of immortality?”

“Truly, I discovered the elixir of life, my son,” replied the voice, “and have drunk of it, but whether it confereth permanent immortality or not I know not. When I am in my Earth shape, I shall at least be able to become as a young man again. But what do we do with these people?”

“The girl I want for myself,” answered Snow. “The old man and this fool who has become a giant, I do not

need. I think it would be a good plan to disintegrate them and shoot their atoms into space.”

“Listen to me,” cried Tony, still struggling with the tentacle that held him. “Do not trust this man. He is a liar and a rogue. He is heartless. He—”

Snow’s tinkling laugh filled the cavern. “Talk is cheap, Master,” he said, “but we cannot afford to let our enemies escape us. That man knows everything that I have taught him. If he goes free, he will pursue us to take vengeance on us.”

“Still,” whispered the voice, “it is not right to kill. ‘A life for a life,’ says the Book. Is there no other way? If he swear never to attempt to follow us, it may be he can be returned to Earth with the old man—”

“Can you afford to be merciful? Think of your seven hundred years of imprisonment without a body!” cried Snow.

“It is true!” answered the voice in a wailing whisper. “Yea, it is true. Let them die, then. Thou and I, my son, shall rule this planet first, and then the other planets. With my arts and thine we shall become the lords of human destiny.”

“You can’t trust him!” shouted Tony. “Don’t you understand that he will trick you? Do you think he is going to share this power with anyone?”

“Seven hundred years!” whimpered the voice. “Seven hundred years!”

Snow turned to Tony. The look on his features, in the pale phosphorescent light cast by the creepers, was more diabolical than ever.

“Well, Betts, it looks as if your goose is cooked,” he said. “I’m going to shoot you and old Birch into the ether now, as soon as I’ve examined the instruments and ascertained that they’re in working order. I think I projected everything. When they are

gone, Master," he added, "I shall return to release you."

There came an almost inaudible rustle from the tree.

## CHAPTER VIII

### THE FUNGUS

A LONG time had passed, for the pale reflection of the amber glow, seen dimly from within the cave, had faded to night. The creepers that held the three prisoners had not, however, relaxed their grip, as in the case of the first cannibal tree that Tony had encountered.

Whether this was a different species, or whether it had changed its habits due to its existence in perpetual darkness lit by phosphorescence, the fact remained that the three were as closely bound as ever.

And the night was wearing away, too. Tony had already guessed that, owing to the rapid revolution of Circe, day and night were shorter than on Earth, but he had attempted no computations. He only knew that outside the cave Snow was busy with the apparatus that was to launch him and Birch into nothingness.

Sometimes he dozed, held firmly in the clutch of the tentacle, but there were intervals when he spoke to the Voice in the tree, appealed to it, tried to reason with it, offered himself to set it free from its long captivity, warned it against Snow.

There was never an answer. Perhaps a sort of unconsciousness had supervened, perhaps the Voice was awake only by day—or, again, Tony's appeals might have fallen upon deaf ears. There came no answer.

Sometimes Tony talked to Celia, listened to her assurances of eternal love. When she told him quite calmly that she would carry out her threat to kill herself as soon as her father and he were gone, Tony could not find it possible to try to dissuade her.

Old Birch talked, too. In the face of imminent death, he seemed to have recovered his poise and presence of mind. He spoke to Tony mostly of their work at the laboratory, regretted that it could not be carried on when they had been upon the eve of great discoveries. He spoke of his faith in a hereafter.

"If that faith is justified, Tony," he said, "we may be sure that the eternal laws rule even on this forlorn planet. 'Heaven is as near by water as by land'—who was it said that, Tony?"

He talked to Celia, too, in a calm, detached way. It was astonishing how calm they all were in the face of the approaching catastrophe.

"But I cannot reconcile it with my conception of the eternal justice, Tony," he said, "that Snow should triumph. Even now I believe that, at the last moment, God will intervene. Otherwise, it would seem that evil, and not good, is the dominant force in the universe."

Tony calculated that day must be close at hand when Snow came staggering inside the cave. His face was alight with triumph.

"Well, Betts, I've fixed it," he cried. "At dawn you and this old fool go to explore the mysteries of infinite space. Dawn, the death hour, Betts. Just like an execution, isn't it! I almost wish I could accompany you two—with a return ticket, of course, for I am consumed with curiosity to know just where you will wind up, and whether you will ever regain human form.

"Do you know what I think, Betts? I think you two will be converted into comets, although the largest comet known contains less matter in its billion miles of tail than is to be found in your little finger. But there seems to me to be a curious analogy between the infinite rarity of a comet's tail and the infinite rarity of the electronic

spray into which you will be converted.

"Yes, Betts, I see you and the old professor chasing each other's tails through the confines of space." He burst into insane laughter. "But I've still got a little fixing to do, Betts," he added. "Of course, you noticed that the projecting mechanism has become enlarged in proportion to the lessened gravity on Circe?"

Tony hadn't thought of that. The apparatus had seemed to him identical in size with that on Earth. But he had been looking at it through the eyes of a giant. Of course, he realized now that it had taken on the exact proportions he had himself assumed.

"So there will be no difficulty in getting you into the cylinder, Betts. But you were a snug fit, and I've had to enlarge it a little to accommodate the Professor as well, though he only reaches to your knee. It was a simple thing baffled me, Betts—the lack of a screwdriver. But I found a species of hard flint that served the purpose.

"Just a little adjustment, and at dawn you two start on your journey. Two comets in the sky! What a discovery they'll be making on Earth tomorrow!"

He roared with laughter, and it was quite plain to Tony that Snow was now hopelessly deranged. His mind, long on the verge of insanity, had broken down completely under the stress of his unexpected triumph.

"You've got another half-hour," he continued. "So make your wills, and say your prayers, and bid Celia good-bye. Tomorrow we shall celebrate our honeymoon together, eh, old man in the tree?"

There came no answer from the tree, and Snow staggered toward the entrance. Suddenly he turned. He rushed at Tony. He hammered at him with his fists, but the highest he could reach was a little above his knee, and his blows fell harmlessly upon the muscles of the leg.

He raved and cursed, he shouted incoherent blasphemies, while Celia shrieked and her father cried out indignantly. Then, as suddenly as it had arisen, the fit of madness passed. He drew back, and, shaking his fist at Tony, made his way toward the entrance again.

"Half-an-hour and you die!" he yelled, and disappeared outside.

Stupefied by this outburst of brute ferocity, neither of the three spoke. It was Tony who spoke at last, and for the last time he addressed the Voice.

"There is still time to release us," he said. "You will regret putting your trust in that madman. Can you not see that he is mad? Do you suppose that he will set you free?"

For a moment Tony thought he heard a faint, whispered answer, but that was all. And time was passing. Already outside the cave there was the faintest glimmer of the amber light.

Another Circean day was at hand, the day on which he and Birch were to die, the day on which Celia was to hope to die, to escape the madman who claimed her.

Tony put forth every effort in a desperate attempt to free himself from the creeper's tentacle. A mad effort that racked every muscle and sinew in his body. An unavailing effort. At last he stopped, panting, helpless. There was no farther hope. There was nothing more to do. And in five minutes Snow would return upon his task of vengeance, no doubt with the assistance of the savage giants.

Tony looked across at Celia. "Good-bye, my dear," he said. Tiny though she was in comparison with him, there seemed nothing incongruous in the words.

"Good-bye, Tony," she breathed in answer. And that was all, save for the increasing yellow glow that streamed into the cave.

**T**HERE was an intolerable itching of Tony's wrist. He had felt it for some time. He looked at it. The wrist was covered with a fine greyish powder. So were his hands. As Tony's glance fell upon them, he saw the minute globules visibly swelling.

They became peas, they split and threw out tendrils, they changed into little blood-red spikes. Tony knew what they were now. The spores of the fungus, so feared by the giants that they kept it in bamboo canes.

Somehow, just at the moment when the temperature within the cave was changed by the approaching dawn, the exact degree necessary for them to germinate had arrived.

But where had they come from? The answer flashed into Tony's mind. Those spores had been adhering to his clothing ever since he had been spattered by them when he stood beside that first fungus just after he awoke on Circe.

He had been carrying them about with him, millions of them, and they had been awaiting the precise degree of temperature necessary for their germination.

With that the desperate hope of liberty came into Tony's mind. He tore the fungi from him and began hurling them at the creeper.

It writhed as if in agony, then slowly it unclasped and hung like a dead thing against the wall. Tony was free!

It had been a matter of seconds, and already the fungi were swelling to the size of cabbage heads. Tony seized some of those that were still in the spike stage and ran across the interior of the cave to where Celia and her father were fastened. He hurled the loathsome fungi at the tentacles, to which they attached themselves. The tentacles drooped. Celia and old Birch were free!

But within the forty seconds in which this had occurred, the fungi had increased enormously. Some were

already bursting and scattering spores, but these spores, in turn, as if to seize advantage of the right temperature, were already swelling into spikes.

Long, blood-red tendrils threaded the creepers, huge cabbage-heads of the same color were hanging everywhere from the leaves and branches. And the continuous process of growth and decay gave them the appearance of a moving mass, running up the vines that extended from the great trunk at the back of the cave.

There sounded a shout behind Tony, Celia, and Birch. Snow was coming into the cave, borne on the shoulder of one of the giants. Four other giants accompanied them.

**A**T THE sight of the captives free, Snow uttered a fearful yell. At the same moment Tony precipitated himself upon the giant who carried him. And the fight that followed would have delighted the soul of Homer.

Five giants against one, but Tony had lost nothing of his former strength and skill as a boxer. The blows he dealt seemed to paralyze his opponents, who ducked and squealed and grunted, and flailed their immense fists as they strove to crush him.

Tony sent them reeling right and left, but he couldn't break through—for one thing, there were Celia and Birch, lost in the struggle, and he had to save them. Frantic with the fear that they might have been crushed underfoot, Tony fought blindly, striking desperate blows, and calling them by name.

Until of a sudden he discovered that the amber glow had disappeared, and the light from the phosphorescent creepers was growing dim.

Now he was fighting in darkness, and now he no longer knew where the cave's entrance was. No answer came to his cries, because they were



drowned by the bellowing of the giants.

They had ceased to fight, but they were screeching like beings in mortal agony. And the dark was closing in!

Stumbling to and fro, crying in vain for Celia and her father, Tony had the feeling that he was an insane man in hell. There was no exit any longer. Something had happened, but what it was Tony could not imagine.

Sometimes he stumbled against the body of one of the giants; then he would batter it with his fists, but there came never a return blow. Sometimes he flung himself madly against the cavern's wall, bruising himself badly, and beating insanely with his fists at the insensate stone. And it was growing darker!

Then, high above the bellowing, there rang out a strident shriek. Snow's shriek! Again and again, a piercing cry of utter agony that was to linger in Tony's memory for ever more on earth. Again and again, drowning the dull moaning of the giants!

Suddenly, like the expiring flare of a dim torch, a sheet of light shone out upon one side of the cave's wall. It came from a mass of the creeper, which, already dying under the assaults of the fungus, now hung in long, shredded patches toward the ground. By that light Tony saw a scene of inconceivable horror.

The fungus, multiplying enormously, covered the entire interior of the cavern in great globes of scarlet. Each instant a hundred of these globes were bursting, and each instant new spores were germinating, new spikes were thrusting themselves out, new globes were being added to the obscene mass, which resembled some monstrous growth and was extending by accretion into the interior of the cave.

The creeper, torn from the wall by the weight of the parasite, was hanging in long strips; the long tentacles

of the cannibal tree, with their leathery tufts of leaves at intervals, drooped limply. But the tree itself, the stock from which the creepers derived their strength and sap, was fighting—fighting like a man!

**M**AN-LIKE, it had torn its roots bodily from their anchorage in the rock bottom of the cave, and, staggering drunkenly, it was advancing, as if with the dim notion of flight. The huge trunk was walking like a man, a drunken man.

The huge disks of suckers upon it were opening and closing convulsively. And, drawn to it by a single tentacle that had somehow survived the assault of the fungi, was Snow!

Shrieking in hideous fear, Snow remained, pressed to the moving bole, which, with a score of the suckers, was drawing the lifeblood from his body. From twenty gaping wounds it spurted, while, immovable as if in a vise, Snow threshed his arms and screamed.

Already his screams were growing fainter. As the phosphorescence from the creeper died, they ceased. Another patch of the weed flared up. Snow now lay motionless against the trunk of the moving tree, which was still continuing its career toward the entrance.

But there was an added horror that Tony now took in. For the giants had been attacked by the same fungus, which was spreading all over their huge forms and forming excrescences upon their heads and limbs, and, as if paralyzed by fear, or resigned to the inevitable end, they lay about the floor of the cave, moaning feebly, but offering no further resistance.

Tony saw all this—and then he saw Celia's tiny figure detach itself from the darkness of one wall, and run toward him, holding another tiny figure by the hand. And her cry rang like music in Tony's ears, as she called his name.

In the last light of the creeper, Tony somehow found her. He caught her and her father up into the crook of one arm, and, by instinct rather than consciously, staggered toward the entrance.

He found it—and he knew now why the light of day had been shut off. Beside the entrance hung a thick tendril of the cannibal tree, already dead, and the fungus had completely covered it, and budded out so as to shut out the amber light of day without.

Holding Celia and her father to him, Tony forced a passage through the loathsome mass. It yielded, it broke off in horrid masses; it clung to him and seemed as if consciously to retard him. Then he was through, and the dull yellow glow of the little sun had never seemed so welcome.

The instruments still stood on the plateau, but there was no sign of the remainder of the giants anywhere. Tony staggered on, reached the duplicate of the cylinder, set Celia and her father down, and dropped unconscious.

## CHAPTER IX

### RETURN TO EARTH

**“IT WAS** God’s mercy,” said Celia, **I** three weeks later, “that the Voice refused to listen to you. Had it done so, we should have had to bring it back here, to restore it to human form; we should have had another problem on our hands, instead of being rid of Snow and all his experiments.”

“I am inclined to think,” said Professor Birch, “that the Voice’s failure to respond was due to weakness caused by the materialization of the hand. We must not judge too severely.”

“Who was he?” asked Celia.

“I have my own opinions as to that,” said Birch. “I am inclined to believe he may have been the famous English necromancer, known as Friar

Bungay, who lived somewhere about the period that he mentioned. A more fearful fate than his can hardly be imagined. But thank God he is dead, and has finally passed far beyond the malign influence of Circe.”

“You think he did die?” asked Tony.

“I think that the destruction of the tree destroyed him. Although the atoms of his body were so far dissipated that he could hardly be said to be corporeal, still, he must have drawn some sort of vital fluid from some living thing. I believe it was the cannibal tree, and that its destruction by the fungus was his own end.”

The two men fell into silence. Celia had risen from the table, and they did not wish to pursue the conversation in her presence. For a week after their return to Earth the girl had lain in a state of coma. They had begun to fear she would never recover when things had taken a turn for the better.

Still, they never referred to Circe or their journey there unless she began the conversation.

And, indeed, of their return to Earth they had only a dim recollection, so anxious was Nature to conceal those memories of horror. They knew that, after laboring for a whole day, and the next day, and part of the next, they had succeeded in reproducing Snow’s method.

They had aligned the cylinder with Earth, and Tony had sent first Professor Birch, and then Celia on that desperate journey. Afterward he had dispatched himself. And when he closed his eyes inside the cylinder, he was convinced that they would never open again.

But Tony had worked better than he knew. His calculations had been so nearly perfect that he had awakened to find himself being nursed by Celia and the Professor in an abandoned trapper’s cabin, no more than fifty miles to the north of the observatory!

They had lived there in the owner’s



Shrieking in hideous fear, Snow was lifted by a single tentacle.

absence, until the three were sufficiently recovered to take up their tramp southward. And their absence from the observatory had never been discovered.

And Tony had awakened to find himself the dimensions of a man again!

They never spoke of that, and there were other things they never spoke of. But they had had to speak about Snow. They decided to report to the Canalaskan Government that he had left on a scientific journey into the Arctic, and expected to be gone six months. It was easy to manufacture evidence; and when Snow failed to return it would be supposed that the icy wastes had claimed him as a victim.

Only with hesitation, and after long intervals, as the days passed, and the horrors of Circe gradually grew fainter in their minds, did they refer to things that had puzzled them.

**“T**HAT fungus,” said Professor Birch—“I wish I understood more about its life-cycle. There is, of course, no reason why a life-cycle of about a minute should be impossible, and yet you stated that you saw one growing in the open. With such amazing fertility, why had it not already overrun the whole of Circe?”

“I think it was pure luck on our part,” answered Tony. “The fungus could only flourish at an exact temperature, which happened to be fulfilled when the warmth of the risen sun struck into the cave.

“It is possible,” he added, “that like many of our earth organisms, it has a second life cycle, when it attacks man, in contradistinction to vegetable life.

“I am inclined to think that when it succeeds in finding a human host it is enabled to reproduce itself with tremendous rapidity. You will recall that those three giants who kept the spores in the bamboo cane evinced considerable fear of it.”

“Which brings me to another point,” said Birch. “Can you offer any theory as to why it attacked and destroyed those giants and yet left us unscathed, when we were equally exposed to it?”

“I think that is not a difficult matter,” answered Tony. “Inasmuch as there are three main variations in the blood composition of even the white race of the human family, it is obvious that our blood differs chemically, to some extent, from that of those giants.

“They were susceptible; we are not. Why is the Negro largely immune against yellow fever, the Jew against tuberculosis, and the Eskimo, on the other hand, like many primitive savages, particularly susceptible to the common cold, or such a disease as measles?”

“As to the latter, it is generally supposed they lack the immunity acquired through generations—”

“Which is pure bunk,” replied Professor Birch severely, “for, as you know perfectly well, my dear Tony, there is no transmission of acquired characters.”

Professor Birch was gradually becoming his own self. And, as the days grew into weeks, gradually the old life at the observatory was renewed. Circe sank into the background, and, with Snow’s instruments removed, and cast over the side of a cliff, to rot there in eternal snows, the three were able to look back on the episode as a disordered dream.

A month had gone by when Tony surprised Professor Birch with the information that he had decided to leave him.

“Leave? Leave us, Tony?” demanded Birch. “Why, I thought you were a fixture here. I thought—” He stopped and gave the young man a searching look.

“All the same, I am thinking of taking a year’s leave of absence from duty, and travelling,” answered Tony,

"and under the circumstances I can hardly hope that you will hold the position open for me."

"Well, think it over a few days longer, Tony," urged the Professor.

"I hear from father that you are thinking of leaving, Tony," said Celia a day or two later.

Tony mumbled his assent. It was the first time they two had found themselves together in the observatory for many a long day.

"Why?" asked Celia bluntly. Then, softly, "I think you will admit I have the right to be interested in your answer, Tony."

Tony gazed into Celia's eyes, and read what he saw there with amazement. Was it possible that she still cared—even though she had reached only to his knee on Circe—in spite of the humiliation of that physical alteration?

Celia answered his unspoken question. "You haven't very much faith

in me, have you, Tony!" she said reproachfully.

"Celia, do you mean to say you—still care?" cried Tony.

"Isn't it rather for you to tell me that?" responded Celia.

And suddenly the doubts and memories of past weeks were removed, and for long, blissful minutes Tony and Celia forgot all save themselves.

A little later, Professor Birch, absorbed in some mathematical calculations, looked up impatiently as the door of his study opened. Tony and Celia stood on the threshold.

"Well, Professor, I'm leaving you tomorrow," he said. "I'm taking Celia with me."

"Eh?" snapped old Birch. "What do you mean, Tony?"

"We're going to signal the Vancouver-New York heliosphere and take a trip to the World Capital. But we'll be back in a month. You see, it's to be our honeymoon trip, Professor."

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# IN THE NEXT ISSUE

# REVOLT ON

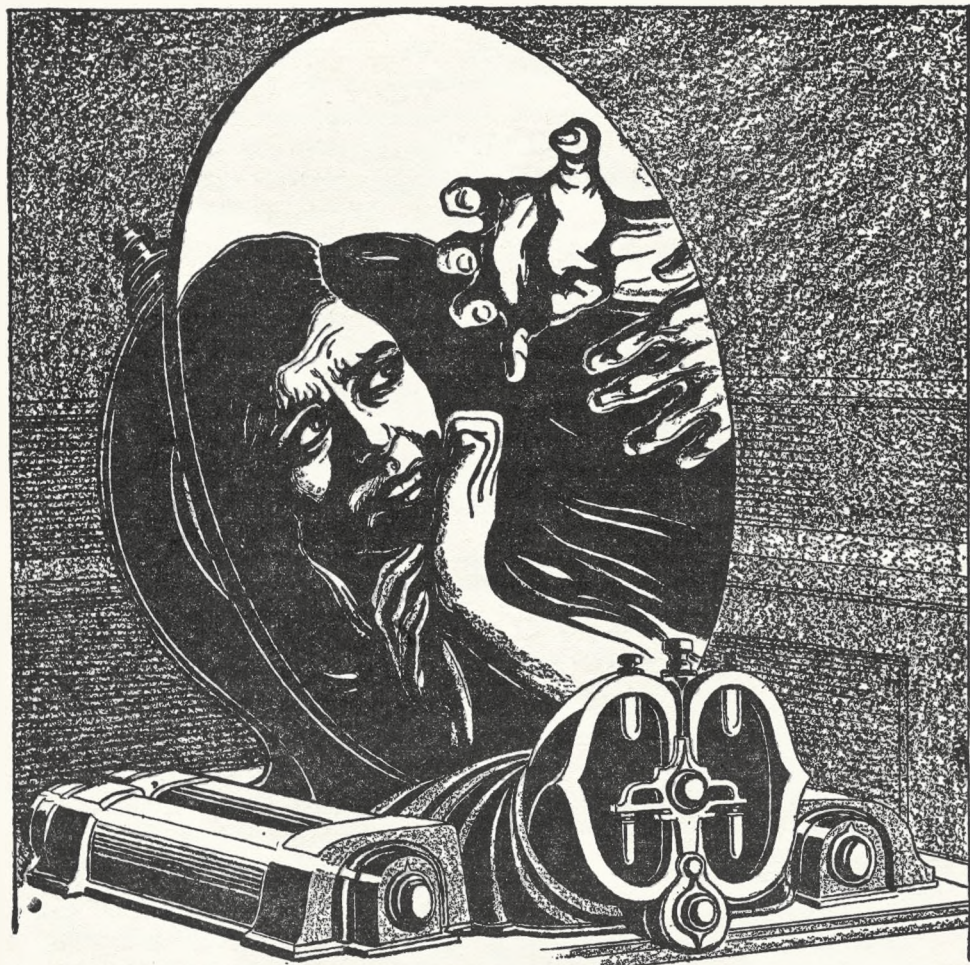
# INFERNO

BY

VICTOR ROUSSEAU

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# Mad Marionettes

## A Complete Novel

By ARTHUR J. BURKS

### CHAPTER I

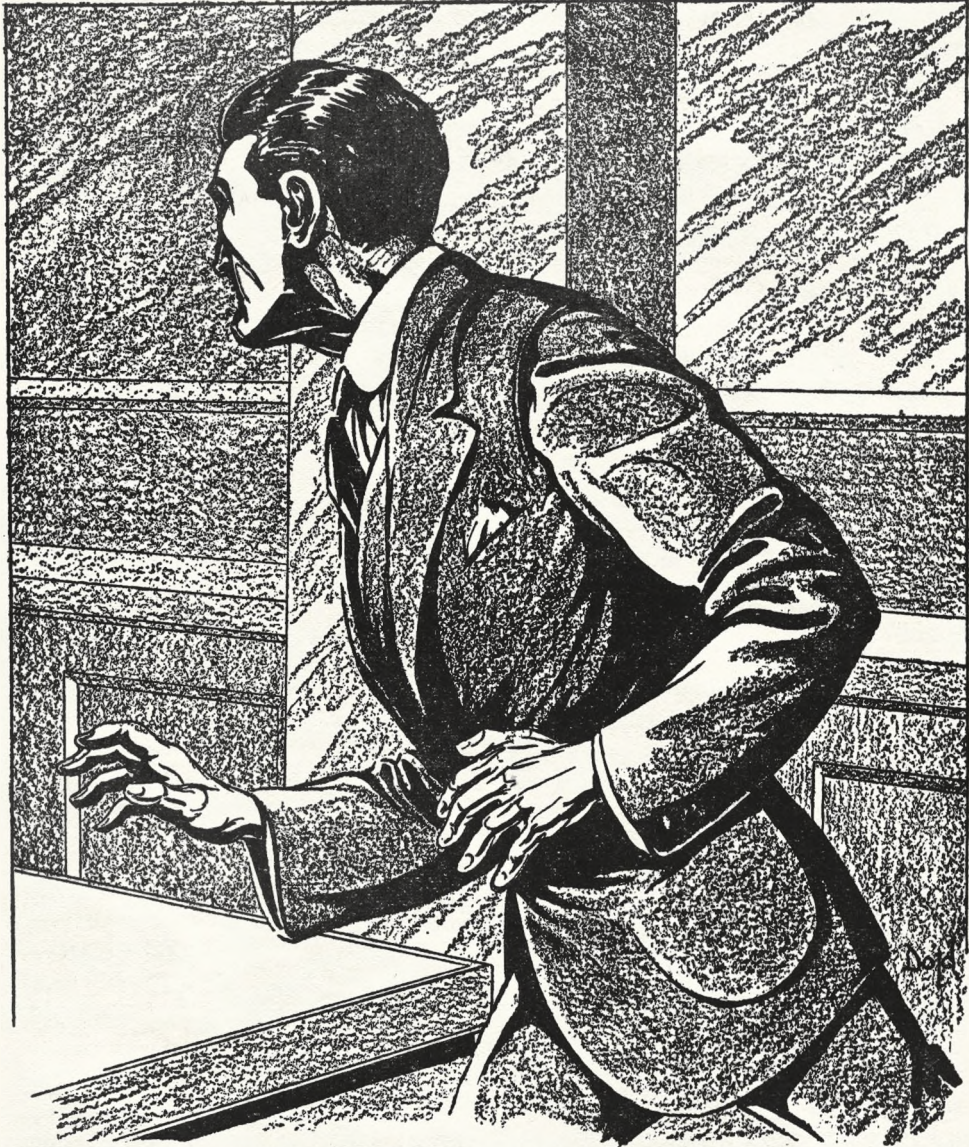
#### IN THE YEAR 2000

**H**AD there been any newspapers in the Year of Our Lord 2000, those newspapers would have blazoned forth to the world the story of the greatness of New York City. Dropping down from the Passenger Air-Lane, which was at an elevation

of 50,000 feet—all air traffic had been assigned to various heights by traffic regulation—Rolda came in his own private air car, of the striated markings, known to every living person in the city old enough to know and notice.

As Rolda dropped down to a landing on the Flatling Building, in which he had his offices, he looked for the

*A strange voice came each night over the audiphone . . . . always at a certain hour. It foretold the destruction of a great and beautiful city. Rolda, a man of the Year 2000, was at the mercy of the unknown. How to combat this evil? Read this amazing story and learn how it all came out in the end.*



The person visible in the visi-dial was in the power of the unknown.

thousandth time at this city which, in its way, had been a fulfillment of a dream of his own.

The Hudson River had disappeared

forever, save where it poured into the Ocean beyond the Rampart. The City's expansion had required every inch of space, and the river had been

spanned from its mouth to far north of Albany, by a solid arch of massive masonry so ponderous that the vast arch in turn became the foundation of hundreds of buildings.

They reared upward to bring their rooftops even with the remainder of New York City's rooftops. Buildings with foundations at normal ground level were five hundred stories high. This was governed by law, so that the rooftops were even, and could be used to handle the air traffic, buildings being designated by their names in huge letters on their roofs.

Modern New York stretched from well westward of the center of the State of New Jersey to the center of the state of Connecticut, and from the Rampart—a solid mass of masonry extending out to sea beyond the Narrows—to what had once been Albany.

A massive, monstrous city. Newspapers had given way to the audiphone and visi-dial, over which one could be heard and seen by anyone anywhere with whom one wished to converse.

Streets had vanished under the mountains of masonry. Taxicabs, trolleys and subways had given away to Electro-subcubes of various sizes, which worked up and down in cylindrical shafts, and horizontally in myriads of tunnels built at Ground level.

Sky-cars had taken the place of the airplanes, from which they had evolved, most of their motive power being derived from an anti-gravitational compound. Save for flanges on the sides of the cars, to provide greater maneuverability, no wings or airfoils were necessary.

All these things were, directly or indirectly, part of the vast dream of Rolda, the architect-scientist.

**F**IVE minutes after he had landed on the roof of the Flatling Building, Rolda had taken his seat behind his desk in the room directly beneath

the Flatling roof, where he grimly awaited the message that, for three weeks, had come exactly and without fail at three o'clock in the morning.

He waited in fear and trembling for a strange reason: the Unknown whose voice he would soon hear would not himself be visible in the visi-dial, and not since the invention of that instrument of television had any living person been able to use the audiphone, with visi-dial in "practical" position, and yet remain invisible.

## CHAPTER II

### VOICE OF THE UNKNOWN

**R**OLDA stiffened as the familiar buzzing sound came out of the tiny instrument on the surface of the desk before him. His hand almost trembled as he pressed the little button which caused the instrument to rear its head until the circular shining face of it became the visi-dial of the audiphone. He knew even as he performed the habitual gesture that it was useless—and that each time the impossible happened it came just that much nearer to unnerving him.

There were other little individual sounds, too. Tiny clicking sounds which informed him that his friends of the News Dissemination Bureau were on the job as usual, and just as eager as usual to try and ferret out the identity of the man who hid himself in such an impossible manner.

Who was the man whose voice came so silkily, so sardonically jeering, over the phones at exactly three o'clock in the morning? The man whose face was never seen, despite the fact that it was known by all the world that no man or woman could use the audiphone, with the visi-dial in position, and yet prevent his features from being visible to the person whom he or she addressed.

Still—

The Unknown did it, at exactly the same hour each morning, until it had



become a sort of mad ritual to which Rolda reacted in much the same way with each repetition, though he approached his desk each time with increasing dread. For though the message of the Unknown was different with each monotonous repetition, yet, always, there was that jeering note that caused Rolda to be stung to the quick. For all the time he had been the power behind the nominal powers that ruled the destinies of Modern New York, no one had ever jeered at him, because all, from the highest to the lowest, knew that no man, however great the brain which was his, could rightfully jeer at Rolda.

But by now the buzzing had increased until Rolda knew that in a second or two the voice of the dreaded Unknown would reach him.

Suddenly, conversationally, as though the invisible someone believed himself speaking with a very dear friend, the voice came:

"Good morning, Rolda! You never disappoint me, do you? I always know that you will be there, with fear in your face which you try to hide. Why are you afraid of me, who is only a voice?"

"Your egotism is in revolt every morning at three o'clock, because you are afraid that a mere voice will somehow take out of your hands the invisible strings by which you cause your mad marionettes to dance! For shame, Rolda! The great Rolda, who rules the biggest country in the whole world because he rules its biggest and mightiest city—afraid of a voice!"

Always, no matter what the Unknown said, somewhere in his discourse was a reference to "mad marionettes"—a weird reference to the millions of men, women and children who lived, loved and had their being—almost—at the will of Rolda, the scientific genius of his time.

Rolda, whose vision had created a dream city on the shores of the Atlantic that was a miracle beyond any

miracle! A miracle that had come true, and that had made the hair of Rolda prematurely gray, because the city had been builded out of his very heart's blood, out of the intangible essence of his soul! Rolda the invincible—

**W**HOM the Unknown dared to mock! Who was he?

Rolda wished with all his soul to know, yet his pride forbade that he ask the question. He could not lean forward and demand:

"If you are as fearless as you would wish us to believe, why not show us your face? What is the secret of your invisibility? How are you able to elude our every effort to discover your identity?"

No, he could not ask such questions. He felt that when he stooped to ask he would cease to be Rolda, would somehow place himself irrevocably in the power of the Unknown. So he stared at the blank visi-dial, apparently unmoved, and inwardly fought for self-control. To the casual observer, had there been any such, he was merely a man who rested in a chair, with nothing on his mind.

There was a hint of insanity in some of the messages, yet Rolda was certain that the hint was deliberately included, for a purpose. If the Unknown could leave behind his words the belief that the message was the work of a madman, he would have a certain advantage over Rolda—because Rolda knew that the Unknown was not insane.

No insane man could possibly have used the audiphone, with the visi-dial in position, without showing himself to the person addressed. But this man had been doing the impossible night after night for three weeks. No, he was not insane.

He was the shadow of catastrophe, speaking through the jeering lips of an invisible someone. An odd way to put it, yet the way Rolda had put it

to himself, time after time, when he tried to puzzle out the secret—and had uniformly failed.

For the twentieth time Rolda stared at the visi-dial. But he could see nothing, save a section of a room somewhere, a room in which was located the instrument over which the messages were invariably sent. The same room. Always the same room. The same easy chair, visible straight ahead.

And the outline of the visi-dial of the sending party, absolutely blank. Had the sender been invisible entirely, he could not so surely have effaced himself, and yet sent his messages that always spoke of the "mad marionettes." As this idea came to Rolda he all but stiffened. All but betrayed the fact that it frightened him. All but leaned forward as though to stare more intently at his own visi-dial.

Perspiration broke out all over his body when, as though in answer to his very thought, as though he had spoken it aloud into the instrument, the Unknown spoke a few words before falling silent.

"No, I am not invisible, really! I am a man, as you are a man, but I am a greater man than you are! You suspect that, Rolda, and it frightens you! That is part of the plan, for I do you the honor to give all due credit to your genius. Our people would not think of invading your city, with Rolda in full command of all his faculties—and his sublime self-confidence! So I am breaking as much of your faculties and your confidence as I can!"

**T**HE voice faded out and Rolda leaned forward, pressing the button which returned the visi-dial to its place, made it merely a part of the surface of his desk.

"So," he said softly, "they begin to bare their fangs, whoever they are! First it was 'I,' and now it is 'we.'"

This silly performance, which isn't really silly because it is part of a ghastly tragedy to come—is all calculated, even to the words spoken by the Unknown, and his reference to the mad marionettes."

Rolda stood up, he was only eighty years of age, but tonight for some reason he felt old. And no man was old at eighty. Not now, when people lived almost as long as they wished to live.

"Whence comes this hinted catastrophe? Who is preparing the torch to set off a world holocaust? And why do they strike at me in this mysterious manner?"

He answered himself:

"Because they know my power and wish to break it, or weaken it to the point of breaking. That means they fear what I can do in case of the hinted 'invasion' mentioned by the Unknown—and if they fear me they fear with reason, and my best weapon against them is to refuse to allow fear to touch me!"

And Rolda smiled. His face was pleasing when he smiled. His high brow smoothed out, and his white even teeth flashed, while his lips seemed to ripple with mirth. But even as he smiled away his fears he looked ahead to tomorrow with a quail of doubt, knowing that at three o'clock, as tonight and all other nights for the past three weeks, the sardonic jeering of the Unknown would again come out of the audiphone—but the speaker would remain invisible on the visi-dial, as though he were invisible actually.

Rolda sat down before the desk, pressed the button that returned the visi-dial to "practical" position, and was in an instant the almost machine-like, wholly efficient scientist—the man whose dreams of beauty and efficiency had made New York a city second to no other city in the world.

A brief signal to the News Dis-

seminators brought answering signals over the audiphone and, one by one, the faces of the News Disseminators themselves became visible to Rolda. Their homely but loyal faces gave Rolda a feeling of confidence he would not have admitted for the world. After the uncanny invisibility of the Unknown, it was a boundless relief to discover again that there was nothing wrong with the phones or the visi-dials in New York.

"Clive! Galen! Bennett! Bouchard! Catene! I've had the first hint tonight of what it's all about! I suppose, as usual, you were unable to cut in and catch anything of what the Unknown said? I thought so.

"Well, you boys divide these tasks among you, then be here at my office at fifteen minutes before three tomorrow morning. I've an idea that I shall then be able to tell you something definite. I want you here because, at that hour, I wish every visi-dial in New York to be darkened, every audiphone to fall silent!

"Clive, you will look after the details of the visi-dials and audiphones. Galen, you will prepare for me a full report of our strength in case of a potential war. Bennett, arrange with the Committee of Commerce so that any Avenue of Transport, either Aerial, Subterannean or Epigeal, may be cleared at a split second's notice, at a mere signal from me in this office.

"We must be ready and able to move in any direction instantly, without a possibility of hindrance. Bouchard, arrange with the Audiphone and Visi-dial people to merge their interests at once under one head, whose word on any subject pertaining to either organization will be final—after mine! In this way all Avenues of Communication may be under control and ready for use by me when, and if, needed. Catene, arrange for the Hudson to be cleared of all traffic within the next half hour."

The answering voices, mere brief affirmations of inexorable commands, droned away into silence and for a moment Rolda hesitated again. Then he signaled once more.

"Mareta," he said to the exquisite girl whose face immediately appeared on the visi-dial in answer to his signal, "please meet me at the Hudson Landing in half an hour, prepared to take a ride of exactly one hour. I need you badly!"

The visi-dial returned to its place at pressure on the button. Rolda rose and stepped to the wall opposite his desk, preparatory to stepping into his private Electro-subcube. He paused in the very act of ringing for his conveyance as a sudden burst of laughter echoed and re-echoed through the room.

No words—just laughter.

But he recognized the laughter, though he had never before heard it, as the voice of the Unknown! It came from his desk audiphone; yet he knew beyond a shadow of doubt that he had left the audiphone at the "off contact" position, and that the phone should have been utterly silent!

Not even his thoughts were hidden from the uncanny intelligence of the Unknown!

## CHAPTER III

### THE TUBE CARS

THE Electro-subcube was Rolda's own improvement on the ancient automatic elevator of almost a century before. It was now in general use all over the world, since the various improvements of scientists of any country upon any discovery of value to the human race were immediately considered as belonging to the whole world.

The idea of patents had been abolished for the good of the world as a whole—and this abolition was perhaps the one valuable thing that had come out of the various Peace Confer-

ences the world's governments had been holding intermittently since the close of the Great War.

Loss in money was made up to the scientists by the governments using their inventions and improvements; but there was a growing danger in the lack of power to patent. For history proved that war came inevitably, when least expected, and that right now war was thoroughly capable of coming again. It would be a ghastly war, too, for various scientists had perfected unmentionably volatile poison gases, many of them capable, used in infinitesimal quantities, of destroying the average city with the ease of blowing the breath against a windowpane.

Diseases could be spread at will—the vilest diseases known to mankind, and diseases had even been invented—if one may use the expression, for express use against an enemy in time of war. These inventions were international property, and in case of war, must be combatted by each of the participants. It required little imagination to realize what a horror the next war would be.

Rolda thought of this as he rode down in his Electro-subcube.

His own office was in the top of the Flatling Building, so named for the original Flatiron Building that had long since been torn down, and the top floor of that building was exactly five hundred stories above ground level.

The Electro-subcube was large enough to accommodate several individuals usually, but Rolda's was his own private cube, in which he took a justifiable pride, and therefore only large enough to accommodate Rolda. As with the obsolete automatic elevator, it worked in a shaft; but this shaft was cylindrical, and into it the cube fitted almost perfectly. Run by electro-magnets, it was an efficient machine. The speed could be as slow

as slow, or it could be faster even than it would have been with its weight subject entirely to the pull of gravity.

Rolda always enjoyed the drop in the cube to the ground level. There were even times when he wished that civilization could be miraculously returned to the days of automobiles, subways and surface cars.

However—the abolition of streets, alleys, pavements had to be to make this city of Rolda's dreams come true.

His desire for freedom of action had several outlets. One was speed wherever possible. The fastest speed obtainable was in the Electro-subcubes, his own especially, and when he stepped inside his, his many subordinates, in their offices all over the city, would have held their breaths in fear at the chances he seemed to take with his life—which was far more precious to the welfare of New York than it was to Rolda himself.

He knew that throughout all Avenues of Transportation the signal had gone that Rolda was en route to the Hudson Landings, and that he could choose whichever route he wished. His private Electro-subcube, with its striated markings, was known to every person, and he would naturally have right of way over all other cubes.

However, as he dropped to Ground Level, and to the monster tunnels that led off in all directions to various Sectors of Control of the city, it was hard to believe that a cube, a single cube, could possibly have right of way through such a horde of other cubes.

Through the windows of his cube Rolda noted the dense traffic in the tunnels at Ground Level. Thousands of the cubes were in use, and they traveled with express train speed. They seemed always in danger of collision, but collision never occurred, because of the fact that the magnets set in the exact center of each Electro-subcube were all exactly alike and thus repelled one another, making contact impossible.

In five minutes after he had left the Flatling Building, Rolda stepped from the Electro-subcube on the Hudson Landings, choosing the Landing below Battery, where Mareta was to meet him. He stood there for a moment, while the breeze that played perpetually up the monster tube which covered the length and breadth of the Hudson, rising to a height of four hundred feet above the surface of the water, cooled his heated brow.

At Rolda's feet his own tube car rested easily on the surface of the water. He had sent no orders for it to be in readiness. It was always in readiness, for those who manned it could never know for a certainty when Rolda might need his car. Rolda looked at his watch.

Mareta would arrive in less than a minute. He strode forward to the edge of the landing, looking like any other New Yorker in his dignified grey business suit, but even then he was acutely conscious of one thing: if a bullet from somewhere should slay Rolda, the very pulse of New York would be paralyzed.

"Why the devil do I have such morbid thoughts today?" he asked himself. "That laughter certainly upset me. I need Mareta today as I have never needed her. I can't lose my grip, but probably would if it were not for her."

**T**HEN Mareta herself stepped out of a cube that had just arrived, and smiled a greeting at Rolda. She was a beautiful, intelligent woman. She was a comfortable person to have around. He loved her—though he did not know it, nor did she, though each knew his need for her.

She gave him her hand. They stepped into the tube car, so-called because it was the type of water-car used exclusively under the Hudson Tube, and silently the car backed away, then shot out into the river.

Rolda smiled as they seated themselves, remembering something.

When he had ruthlessly decided on creating the city of his dreams he had fully intended to obliterate the Hudson River, by building above it on foundations reaching down to bedrock on the river bottom. But the people, in this one instance, had loudly and firmly opposed him. And so the high arched tube was the result, and now he was even glad that he had allowed the voice of the people to override him.

"Well?" said Mareta softly.

"The voice again," he told her. "I don't know what to make of it yet; but I've finally been given a hint. It's the first attempt on the part of some outside power to break my nerve, and thus render me incapable of making decisions which may be important in case of war. I'm a little frightened, and need to be reassured. That's why I sent for you at this time of the morning."

"They won't break you, Rolda," said Mareta softly, laying a cool hand on his uncovered head. And somehow, as the simple words fell from her lips, he knew they would not break him. She believed in him. She made him believe in himself.

He pressed his lips to the speaking tube, spoke to the engineer and pilot of the tube car.

"I'll take the controls, Bigelow," he stated.

Instantly a thin column, that appeared to be of aluminum, thrust upward from the floor of the cubby at their feet, halting before Rolda. There was a metal disc atop the control column, and in its face were set the control buttons which Rolda knew by heart.

"I need plenty of speed, today, Mareta," he told her.

"As you like," she replied. "I am never afraid when you are at the controls."

**H**E WAS like a boy with a toy as, pressing the proper button for speed on the surface, he hurled the tube car up the river at express train speed. The bottom of the car scarcely seemed to touch the water, and the wake behind, as Rolda looked back, grinning, was almost imperceptible.

Now Rolda pressed another button, and the tube car rose from the surface of the Hudson easier, and far faster, than any bird. This simile came to Rolda and he smiled again. Mareta had been born since the perfection of modern New York, and had never seen a bird save in a cage.

Meanwhile, back in the office of Rolda, the room he had left was in total, absolute darkness—darkness seemed to possess only this one room—and out of that darkness came perpetually a satisfied chuckle. The chuckle, now and again, became a laugh—the same laugh that Rolda had heard just before leaving.

Behind the desk, in Rolda's chair waiting, where not even Rolda could have seen him in the darkness, was the shape of a man; but only the sense of touch could have located him. A smallish man, with a high forehead, a massive brow, and piercing eyes. Dressed in sober grey, another New York business man. But the Unknown was not that. He was the one man who planned the total destruction of New York, and New York's civilization—not because his country—he himself was indifferent about it, but because he was a stickler for carrying any scheme through to fruition—he hated modern New York with a hatred that could find outlet in but one way: a war of destruction to the uttermost limit. As he sat there he mumbled certain words, in a language that few people in New York would have understood, yet which Rolda would have understood had he heard; and had he heard, Rolda would have gasped in fear and horror.

## CHAPTER IV

### THE DRAGNET

**W**HILE the Unknown was sitting in what appeared to be total darkness in Rolda's office, a tiny monopter, whose two wings scarcely seemed large enough to be wings at all, rested on the roof of the Flatling Building. There were other planes there, among which the little plane was dwarfed to insignificance, which was why, perhaps, no one seemed to notice it.

Yet if the Unknown were the person most dangerous to the welfare of Modern New York, that plane was perhaps the most dangerous machine, for it held within it the secret of how the Unknown was able to talk with Rolda at will over the audiphone, with the visi-dial in position, and yet remain invisible.

And the Unknown, enjoying a jest of his own, sat in total darkness in the office of Rolda and chuckled to himself.

The sound of his own chuckling drowned out the sound of a rising Electro-subcube, and the Unknown did not know that he had a visitor until the wall door opened silently and someone entered.

"Mother of Moses!" came a voice through the gloom. "What the devil is wrong with this room? I can't even see my hand before my face! Rolda! Rolda!"

Out of the total darkness from Rolda's desk, came instantly a voice.

"That Catene?"

"Yes. What the devil is wrong with the lighting system in this office?"

"Catene, eh? Well, young man, you have just committed the unpardonable sin! You have intruded yourself upon the presence of the Unknown!"

The voice which Catene had thought, though somewhat doubtfully, to be the voice of Rolda, changed completely, and was the voice that Rolda had heard so many times over the

audiphone, and a cold chill coursed along the spine of Catene as he heard. Something told him that he walked with death, and that he was powerless to avert destruction.

But he fought for a bit of time.

"What's wrong with the light?" he asked.

"The lights are on," came the amazing answer, "and I can see them very plainly. Even with a flashlight in your hand, turned full on, you could see nothing in this room. That makes it very easy for me to kill you because, you see, I can see very plainly. I have merely brought my darkness with me!"

There came a gasp from Catene. He was a big man, a born athlete who kept himself fit, and there was no fear in him, save that fear which seems to be the heritage of every son of woman—fear of the unknown. The appalling darkness numbed his faculties, almost paralyzing him.

But courage fought against fear, and he realized one thing: that this man whom all New York was seeking was here, close enough to touch, and he, Catene, might become famous by bagging him.

He started to stumble forward, moving as silently as a cat.

"Never mind, Catene," came the voice of the Unknown. "I can see you very plainly, you understand, while you can see nothing at all. Your hands are extended toward me, and your right foot is now rising from the floor! Does that not prove I can see you?"

"Yet you can see nothing at all, though the matter is simple. I bring my own darkness with me, as I told you. And just because I know you'll never live to tell about it, I'll give you a bit of information for which Rolda would all but give his precious life to know.

"My mission is to destroy New York utterly, to leave no stone upon another, and upon its shattered founda-

tions to rear a new city, which shall be a monument to a new type of civilization of which Modern New York is entirely ignorant. For what government am I working? Well, save to say that its tentacles reach through all the Urals, through all Siberia, even into Manasorowar and Golokwa, Afghanistan and Beluchistan—almost through the entire world, I will say nothing—"

"My God," cried Catene, hurling himself forward as though shot from a catapult. "You are a representative of—"

But he got no further.

No light flashed in the darkness of the room. No orange flames spewed through the impenetrable pall of abysmal gloom. But the sound of an explosion went rocketing through the building—and one who heard it could fancy an outstretched hand, holding a Lethal Tube, from whose muzzle had just spewed one of the deadliest projectiles known to science—an alenite bullet that exploded on contact.

Nobody else could have seen, of course, but the Unknown, and he saw what his projectile had done. It had merely touched the forehead of the charging Catene, and so deadly had been its impact, so nearly instantaneous its action, that even after the explosion, the legs of Catene moved forward toward the man seated behind the desk.

But only part of the trunk of the body of Catene was to be seen—that part of it below the ribs. The rest had vanished, so numbingly swift that the top of the trunk, where it had been severed, had not yet started to bleed. A split second, and all that was mortal of Catene, minion, subordinate and friend of Rolda, crashed solidly to the floor of the darkened office, and lay still in a widening pool of blood.

A sardonic chuckle came from the throat of the Unknown.

"That should serve as a warning," he said softly.

Calmly he stepped to the door giving onto the roof, calmly he closed the door behind him. He strode straight across the roof, paying no heed to people who seemed to be interested in the other planes on the roof, and paused beside the tiny one already mentioned. He looked about him. The roof of the Flatling Building was a hive of industry. Planes of all makes and sizes were dropping down to the roof, disgorging passengers, taking off again—going about their own portion of the vast, massive aerial commerce of a huge modern city.

The Unknown stepped into the pit of the little plane. He knew from long experience that a wanted man did best in a crowd. But when he climbed into the sky, and Rolda came back, and the dragnet was thrown out, he knew that all the Americas would be combed to find the man who had killed Catene.

**M**EANWHILE, back in the room he had just left, the darkness which had held sway had totally dissipated. It had simply melted, within a minute after the departure of the Unknown who, as he had put it—"had brought his darkness with him." His apparatus for the dissemination of this darkness was simple. He wore it on his person, and exuded it mechanically, like a giant squid. The secret of it, however, was one of the things that Rolda must solve if he were to solve the secret of the identity of the Unknown.

Now, in Rolda's office, fully alight again, the appearance of Catene was ghastly in the extreme. All of his body above the waist had simply vanished, utterly and completely. The legs that had carried him forward, even when he had been dead, for a few paces, were twisted in queer postures on the floor.

He wasn't nice to look at; but nobody came to look, for in the con-

fusion on the Flatling roof, none had heard the sound of the shot—nor would anyone have heard, had there been no noise at all, for the office of Rolda was sound-proof, as it had to be because of his nearness to the noisy traffic of the Air Lanes.

Outside the tiny monopter took off and shot for the skies at three hundred miles an hour. It had vanished completely, almost straight up above New York City, weaving its way in and out, unerringly, through the sun-blotting aerial traffic of the skies.

It was gone completely when Rolda, with Mareta by his side, stepped from the Electro-subcube door. Their visit here was prosaic enough. He had asked her to breakfast. Now he took one step into the room, then whirled and with his body blocked off Mareta's view of the dead Catene.

"Back, Mareta! You must not see!"

She stared into his eyes for a moment. Then gently she placed her hands on his shoulders.

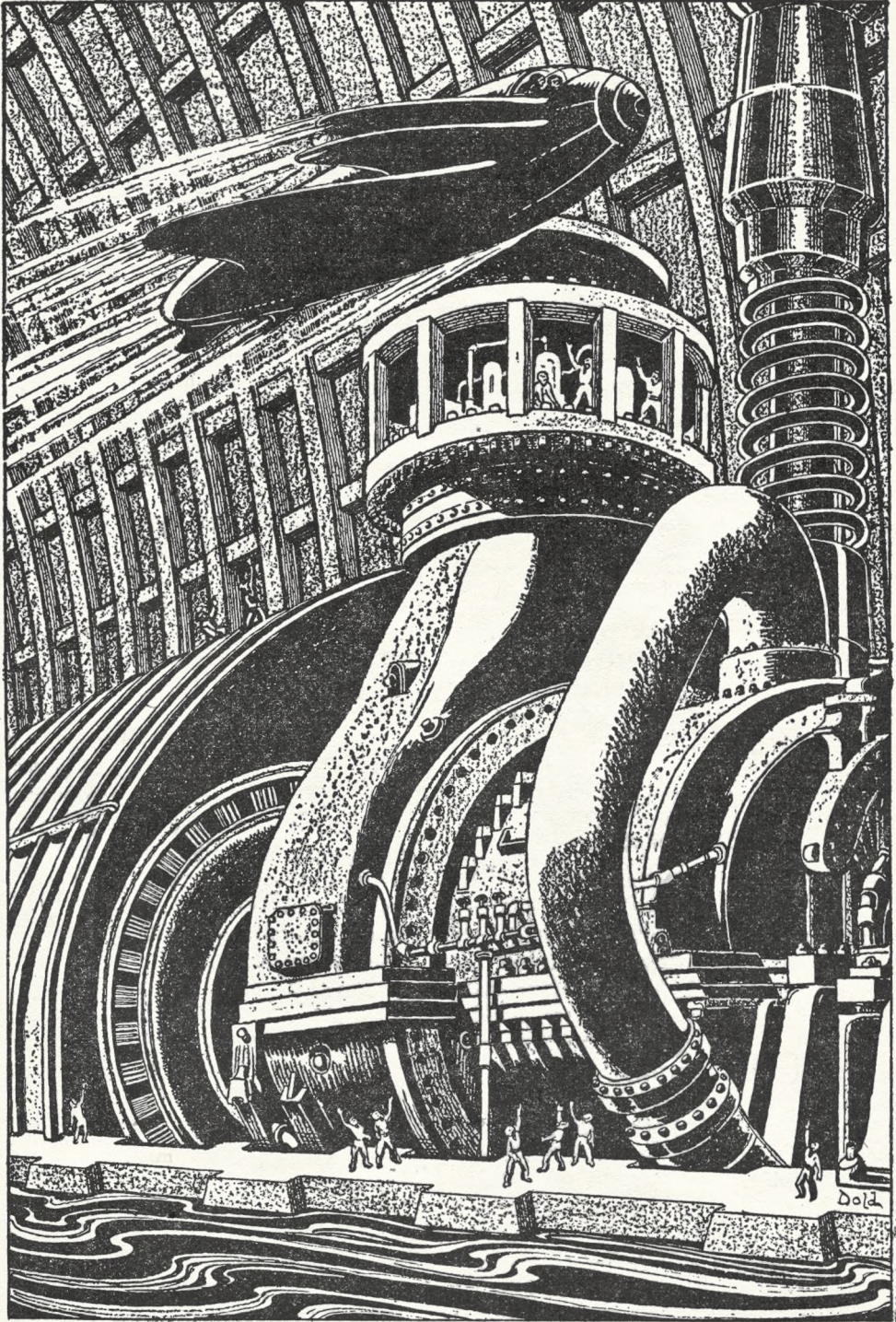
"The Unknown came here for you, Rolda," she said. "And he would have been waiting here for you had not Catene blundered in and seen him. He may even be somewhere around yet!"

Perspiration broke out on the face of Rolda.

But he fought off his growing fear, exchanged chairs with Mareta, and set the audiphone and visi-dial to "practical." One minute after finding the body of Catene, the minions of law enforcement were seeking everywhere for the person of the Unknown. Rolda knew the approximate size of the man by a very simple means. He had guessed that Catene had surprised the Unknown in Rolda's office, and had attacked him. The Unknown had thrust back the desk chair—to the length of his own arms—to meet the attack.

The chair had been thrust back no further than Rolda himself, with his comparatively abbreviated arms, would have thrust it on quitting his





Rolda hurled the tube car up the river

desk. A simple problem in mathematics, as Rolda saw it.

Even as he finished giving his orders to the various heads of departments, the audiphone broke into the ominous murmur which always, heretofore, signaled that the Unknown was preparing to speak.

Soon came his words.

"It is useless, Rolda! Your intelligence is not sufficient to trap me!"

"But my activity," snapped Rolda, answering back for the first time, his eyes narrowed as he noted the blank inexpressiveness of the visi-dial, "has caused you to speak to me twice in the same day. Are you worried?"

Through the audiphone came a snarl of rage. Rolda's face twisted into a grin. The thrust had told on the egoism of the Unknown. He started to set the audiphone and visi-dial instruments at "off contact" when, in the very act of so doing, he suddenly desisted and leaned forward.

"Mareta!" he said. "Mareta! I'll beat him yet. I saw a shadow—a mere shadow of a shadow, on the dial!"

## CHAPTER V

### PHANTOM OF THE SKY

**W**INGS in the planes of Modern New Yorkers were scarcely necessary, though still used for their utility in the matter of maneuverability. But some of the lesser scientists of the city, acting upon Rolda's suggestions, had perfected a compound, for lack of a better term, which was almost anti-gravitational.

In quantities it was almost as scarce as radium and its use would have been expensive in the extreme, had any great amounts of it been necessary to send the planes aloft. That the stuff had not yet been perfected to the satisfaction of Rolda was proved by the use, still, of rudimentary wings in planes.

Rolda leveled off his monopter at a height of twelve thousand feet and

looked proudly down upon the roofs of New York City. He smiled, wondering what the people of less than a hundred years ago would say if they could come back and see how their greatest city had grown.

**B**UT as he circled above it, his eyes just now admiring the sweeping curve of the artificial shoreline, where the massive concrete Rampart kept back the waves of the Atlantic and formed foundation for many buildings which, before Rolda's time, would have been hundreds of feet below the surface of the ocean, he was thinking of the almost nebulous thing that threatened the peace and safety of the city.

The Unknown and his veiled threats. What would Catene have had to tell Rolda had he lived? He had learned the identity, and much of the mission, of the Unknown, else he would not have been killed.

Rolda knew the nature of many of the bombs which every government in the world now manufactured, ostensibly for commercial use, yet which were capable of appalling destruction of life if used as weapons of warfare, and in his mind's eye he could look down and see the destruction which would visit New York if some of the bombs he knew about were dropped upon the roofs of New York, say from the height he himself now flew.

The bombs would crash through to Ground Level, and even beyond.

Roofs would crash in, buildings would crumble—and through all the hivelike structure of New York would go the unbelievably deadly fumes of the gases used in the construction of the bombs, or capable of being used in them in case they were utilized as weapons of war.

And, most precious of all, more precious even than the city of his dreams—Mareta. He thought of her in the path of one of those falling monsters of destruction—

And the thought drove him utterly mad.

His monoplane managed a speed of close to four hundred miles. He began to duck and dive and twist, among the countless other planes aloft, seeking for a plane of a certain shape.

A shape which would remind him in turn of a certain shadow which had flashed, infinitesimally, across his visual when the Unknown, down there when he had been giving instructions to the minions of law enforcement, had said: "Your intelligence, Rolda, is not sufficient to trap me!"

"With all due respect to you, Unknown," said Rolda softly, "I beg leave to disagree. But if I don't trap you, and you get home—well, the fate of New York and its people, of Mareta and myself, is in the hands of Almighty God!"

Even as he spoke the words, which were almost a prayer, the man who flew the odd monoplane—who had taken it off ahead of Rolda from the roof of the Flatling Building—had seen the plane flown by Rolda and recognized its markings as the striated insignia of the power behind the Powers who dictated the affairs of Modern New York.

If Rolda were slain—

## CHAPTER VI

### BLACK DESTRUCTION

ALMOST before Rolda was aware of what was happening, the plane he sought dropped out of the sky beside him. He stared across at it, trying to make out the features of the pilot. But it was impossible. The man was almost hidden, as to features, by the helmet which covered his head like a cowl. His goggles were of a strange shape, and they were huge things which just now reflected redly the light of the rising sun.

Rolda studied the plane of the Unknown. Its whole outer surface glowed as redly as the man's goggles, shining

and glistening as though it were made of wood capable of taking an unusually high polish. But Rolda knew that it was not of wood, though the metal of which it was constructed he could only guess.

For a minute, flying side by side, these two men—neither of whom could foresee it at the moment—who were destined to fight bitterly and to the death for supremacy over the world, studied each other across the abyss between.

Then Rolda motioned, peremptorily, bidding the Unknown go down to a landing. At the same time he pressed a button in the side of his closed cockpit which caused two ugly guns to snap into place on either side of the pit, and a foot or so above it—guns which could be whirled to fire in any direction at the will of the pilot.

The Unknown saw those guns snap into place. They were fired by compressed-air, and were capable of hurling a thousand bullets almost within the space of a heartbeat. They could have blasted out of the sky any plane that flew the skylanes of the Americas, any plane in the world—provided that plane were not a fighting plane, all of which were equipped to battle against just such guns as these.

But the Unknown, airily waving his hand, refused combat, and carried the fight to Rolda in a terrible manner.

He dived away from Rolda, with Rolda following close behind, yet losing second by second in the race for the rooftops of Modern New York. Rolda had never seen a ship with the speed and maneuverability of the plane flown by the Unknown.

A gasp of horror burst from his lips as the form of the enemy plane began, nebulously, to change. A cloud of what appeared to be black smoke poured from innumerable vents all about fuselage and stubby wings of the Unknown's strange sky-ship.

That cloud possessed a strange cohesion, in that it did not play back-

ward from the enemy plane as that plane dived, but remained with it, undisturbed by the terrific air currents caused by the dive—as though the black smoke were part and parcel of the plane itself.

The Unknown paused for no ship that flew the skies. There were hundreds of New Yorkers aloft in their little planes, and to dive directly down were to collide with many of them—yet the Unknown did not in one iota swerve from the ghastly directness of his dive.

The black smoke, that seemed even to move ahead of the plane, as though to show the way, sputtered forward a bit more as the enemy ship was on the point of colliding with one of the New York ships—and that plane merely vanished from the sky, as though it had never been!

As certainly and as surely as the torso of Catene had vanished from the hips and legs of Catene! The plane merely disintegrated, and horror possessed Rolda as he noted the awful result of that disintegration.

For out of the plane fell its pilot, tumbling over and over, somersaulting. Rolda noted only that it was a body—

**“DAMN you!”** he shrieked. **“Damn you! Damn you!”**

He shook a futile fist at the back of the Unknown. His guns went into action when for a second the way ahead was clear enough for him to make sure that he would hit none of his own people who were aloft in the various skylanes—each of which was at a certain level assigned by traffic regulations—and he knew beyond a shadow of doubt that his projectiles had struck squarely the body of the enemy plane.

It did not swerve in one iota. Nothing happened to it; but to right and left several New York planes seemed to break into bits, to fall apart in the air, and their wreckage to go tum-

bling down the sky, keeping pace with the somersaulting bodies of their pilots and passengers.

From this Rolda knew another dreadful thing. His projectiles were useless against the plane of the Unknown—and the projectiles which had struck that plane, ricocheting off, had destroyed half a dozen of the planes of his people! Useless then, and a waste of life for his own people, were the compressed-air guns.

He had but one weapon that was possible for use against the Unknown. If he could catch him, he could crash his own plane into the glistening plane of the enemy.

“A sort of gas,” he muttered, thinking of the black cloud that almost hid the enemy from view, “that remains about that plane. It destroys on contact, anything it touches!”

He used every infinitesimal bit of power he could manage to increase the speed of his own dive. His dive was a whistling shriek, fast almost as one of his own projectiles. He fully intended to crash the enemy, yet that other plane drew away from him as though he were standing still.

Every pilot guessed the intention of Rolda, for every pilot, every person on the rooftops below, had seen the fall of the planes Rolda had struck with his ricochets—knew that Rolda was trying to crash the cloud-covered plane below him.

And they had seen what it meant to come into contact with the Unknown, for behind him now as he dived fell the wreckage of every plane which had passed close to him on the roofward dive.

But one, who was to remain as unknown forever—save by tedious process of elimination—as the Unknown himself, took his life in his hands, and came up from below to engage the diving plane of the black smoke.

Straight into that black smoke he flew—and vanished!

His collision with the black-smoke

plane caused not even a ripple of activity. The smoke-plane did not even swerve from its course. The only result was a broken, battered hulk that might once have been a man, catapulting downward toward the roofs of New York.

Behind that plane of the black smoke trailed the wreckage of over a score of New York planes, out of each of which had fallen the bodies of pilots and passengers. The black smoke disintegrated the planes, anything inanimate, but did not affect the bodies of human beings—and as Rolda, screaming like a madman, and with tears of unplumbable sorrow on his cheeks, following the plummeting black plane—tried to guess the composition of the black smoke.

**T**HE plane of the Unknown still dived. It was within yards of the rooftops. Because he simply must live on now to combat this evil, if the Unknown struck and lived on, Rolda lessened the speed of his dive. The blurred expanse became less blurred, and by the markings on the roofs he was able to see that the Unknown was diving directly toward the roof of one of the buildings adjacent to that occupied by Rolda himself.

People were fleeing in all directions from this ghastly black destruction that came out of the skies.

Then the Unknown struck, and Rolda went almost numb with the awfulness of it.

For when the smoke plane touched the rooftops, it vanished, straight into the building, and only a vast yawning hole remained to show where the black plane had struck. Somehow Rolda understood, as he sank down, landed, and leaped from his monoplane's covered pit, that the black smoke that had wreathed the plane of the Unknown had opened for the Unknown a way through the very masonry of the buildings of New York, and that the contact with roof-

tops had not even lessened the speed of the Unknown!

The hand of terror seemed to have suddenly, with that awful impact, gripped tight the throat of New York. New York had fallen as suddenly silent as though it had been slain! As Rolda paused on the rooftop of his own building, there came no sound—save one—to his straining ears.

Throughout New York, running erratically this way and that, went a sound that was oddly like the wheels of thunder a-race across the skies. The rooftops shook and trembled under his feet.

"Almighty!" he whispered, and the words were a prayer. "With that plane he is able to travel not only through the sky, blasting down everything in his pathway—but he can pass through the walls of buildings, can go either up or down in them, leaving havoc behind him, without causing himself the slightest discomfort."

Nothing, for all of a minute, save that rolling sound like the crashing across the vault of the Heavens of the musketry of thunder. It rolled down the city toward the Rampart, fast almost as the fall of the plane had been down the sky.

Then the voice of the city, maddened, terrified beyond terror, frightened beyond fear, rose aloft to drown out even the sound of the smoke-plane that seemed literally to be boring through the buildings of New York, with the speed of an express train, and with the surety of a mole burrowing through soft earth.

Rolda ran swiftly into his own building, raced into his office.

As he went he wondered whether Mareta had been in the path of the black-smoke plane. It had crashed through the roof of the building next to the north of the Flatling Building, occupied by the offices of Rolda. But Mareta, he recalled, he had sent home before he himself had set off on the trail of the Unknown.

"If only," he muttered, seating himself at his desk and adjusting audiophone and visi-dial, "I knew what Catene knew the instant before he was destroyed."

**B**UT that knowledge was not to be his for a long time.

Swiftly he sent out the emergency call to each of his various Disseminators of News—to Clive, and Galen, and Bennett, and Bouchard.

Even before they could answer, however, that ominous buzz to which he had become so accustomed during the weeks just past, sounded in his audiphone. He slipped back in his seat, his starting eyes staring at the visi-dial, in the "practical" position.

The voice of the Unknown came, but his features did not show in the visi-dial.

"Hello, Rolda," said the voice conversationally. "What do you think of the manner in which I pull the strings of your mad marionettes? What do you think would happen if twenty planes like mine went berserk over New York, among the skylanes? What if fifty, a hundred—a thousand? Take say, well, a thousand such planes, and turn them loose in your skies for half an hour, and within the very heart of your buildings for another hour, and what would there be left of New York and its people, below and aloft?"

"It is something to think about, and there are such planes, in numbers I do not even hint at, because you would not believe. Some day, and that soon, they will be here—after I have gone for a time.

"It is useless to try to oppose me, for I shall beat you every time. I have unlimited power. If you do not believe me, look deeply into your visi-dial, in which my features are not visible, though I stand in the room whence I am addressing you. In my power at this moment is something that is more precious to you—though you are such a fool you do not yet

realize it!—than all New York and her millions of population."

Rolda, his eyes bulging, while his heart stood still with the numbing sense of catastrophe, stared at the visi-dial, and at the face which, drained of all color, a mask of horror and of helplessness, stared out at him.

"Rolda, do not consider me in your plans," said the lips of that face, and those lips writhed and twisted like tiny serpents, as though the speaker were suffering the soul-torments of the utterly damned.

It was the face of Mareta!

## CHAPTER VII

### NEWS BULLETINS

**O**F COURSE the voice over the audiphone, the voice of the Unknown—a name which all New York united in calling the man—had been news since the very first time it had been heard. For it had marked a sinister beginning to an instant feeling, universally experienced, that catastrophe would soon pour its bitter vials upon Modern New York.

Now, however, New York was horribly a-buzz with details. Had it been a day of newspapers, the headlines would have shrieked to high heaven. And since the day of newspapers had passed, the Disseminators of News had addressed the public in headlines, instead.

#### UNKNOWN SLAYS CATENE IN OFFICE OF ROLDA!

This had been a catastrophe in itself, for Catene was one of the Disseminators, and to the public he was as one of themselves, almost as one of the countless families which occupied the vast and awesome City. Had each family lost from its own circle one of its best beloved, there could not have been more lamentation.

That had been the beginning—and the name of Rolda ran through all the

stories. If never before, the public now realized the vast importance of Rolda, the dreamer and scientist.

**ROLDA ORDERS SEARCH FOR UNKNOWN!**

That dealt only with his orders to the Disseminators who, as gatherers of news and broadcasters of same, held within their craniums more information than any other men in the city, and therefore were the best qualified to do detective work. But the public had not been informed of the shadow of a shadow Rolda had seen on the visi-dial, that had sent him aloft to battle alone against the Unknown.

The public, however, knew the plane of Rolda, and Rolda had scarcely flown off the roof of the Flatling Building than the public received the announcement.

**ROLDA TAKES UP PURSUIT OF UNKNOWN!**

Already the names of Rolda and the Unknown—if that designation might be said to have been a name at all—were being indissolubly joined together, as though Fate herself might be anticipating. For Rolda knew now, as the cries of the stricken city rose to the zenith, and beyond, that nothing save the destruction of himself or of the Unknown, could end the struggle destined to be waged between them.

There would be armies, perhaps, massed behind them—millions of men; yet they would be the actual combatants, as actually as though they had stood face to face with ancient rapiers in their hands and labored to slay each other.

Then Rolda found the Unknown, or was found by him—and New York craned its neck and watched the one-sided struggle above her rooftops, and saw the wreckage of many planes come tumbling down.

Bouchard broadcast the story of that battle.

**“THE** foes meet and salute. They are measuring each other. Rolda signals for the Unknown to come down to a landing! The Unknown dives down. A cloud of black smoke billows about the plane of the Unknown! The plane is in flames, though Rolda has not fired once with his guns. No, it isn't in flames!

“Great Heavens, that black smoke which hints of flames has nothing to do with flames. It is part of the plane itself, a mantle to cover it and protect it from harm—a cushion of destruction enwrapping the plane, making it invincible, so that no obstruction can stay its mad dive!

“Nothing like it has ever been seen before. Rolda is helpless. He fires. His projectiles ricochet off the fuselage of the smoke-plane—and crash half a dozen New York planes down to destruction. There goes another New York plane, in collision with the smoke-plane of the Unknown. That makes twelve, almost in as many seconds. The plane of the Unknown approaches the rooftops of New York. In a matter of seconds he will crash in and be killed! There he goes! He's . . . . aaaaahhhhhhh!—”

And there ended the strangest and perhaps the most dramatic of the news bulletins. The public needed not to be told thereafter what was happening, for the mad burrowing of the black-smoke plane through the buildings was known to all New York, and no details were necessary.

They traveled from mouth to mouth, and from audiphone to audiphone, until all New York was held in an abysmal paralysis of fear and horror. The thundering crash of that strange plane, that had become a projectile that could be fired through the very heart of the city itself—and once fired could renew itself in flight and continue on, turning and twisting, and spreading the utmost havoc in its wake—would be heard, waking and

sleeping, dreaming, as long as life lasted for any person who heard it.

But bulletins from the actual avenues of passage of the smoke-plane were not available for several minutes after the thunder of the mad plane's passing had died away. Then they began to pour in to the centers of distribution, and were broadcast by the Disseminators still left alive.

The average room or office in any of the buildings was perhaps twenty feet in width, the same in length, and perhaps ten feet in height. There were hundreds of these rooms to each building, and thousands of buildings reaching from Albany to the Rampart, so that—actually—New York was one huge building, with a single roof, in which the millions of New York's population lived like bees in a hive. For the uniform height of New York was five hundred stories.

And the smoke-plane, striking a roof a few miles south of what had once been Albany, until New York had swallowed the old capital, had set a course southward, passing with express-train speed through room after room, destroying everything in its path, sparing neither men, nor women, nor children—and naturally the dead did not broadcast, and it required a little time to complete the tally of them.

But when the lists had been compiled the loss of life was appalling.

Then the final straw . . . .

#### MARETA IN THE HANDS OF THE UNKNOWN!

If Catene were almost a member of each and every New York family, and Rolda were, in effect, the head of each and every family—then Mareta, who stood at the shoulder of Rolda like a soldier, was the guardian angel of each and every family.

And the cries and lamentations of New York ceased as though by magic, as though the dead had buried their dead and bidden the bereaved to cease

their wailing. After that appalling sound, however, and the cessation of sound that followed it, there came a new kind of sound, starting as a murmur almost impossible to detect, then rising, savagely, gaining might as it mounted, until a new voice possessed the vast city.

Had the voice of the voiceless city been articulate in words, this would have been the burden of the most savage mob paean ever known to the city.

“LET US SEARCH EVERY NOOK AND CRANNY OF NEW YORK FOR THE UNKNOWN. If he eludes us we are undone. If he destroys Mareta let him be destroyed in the most horrible manner conceivable in the mind of man!”

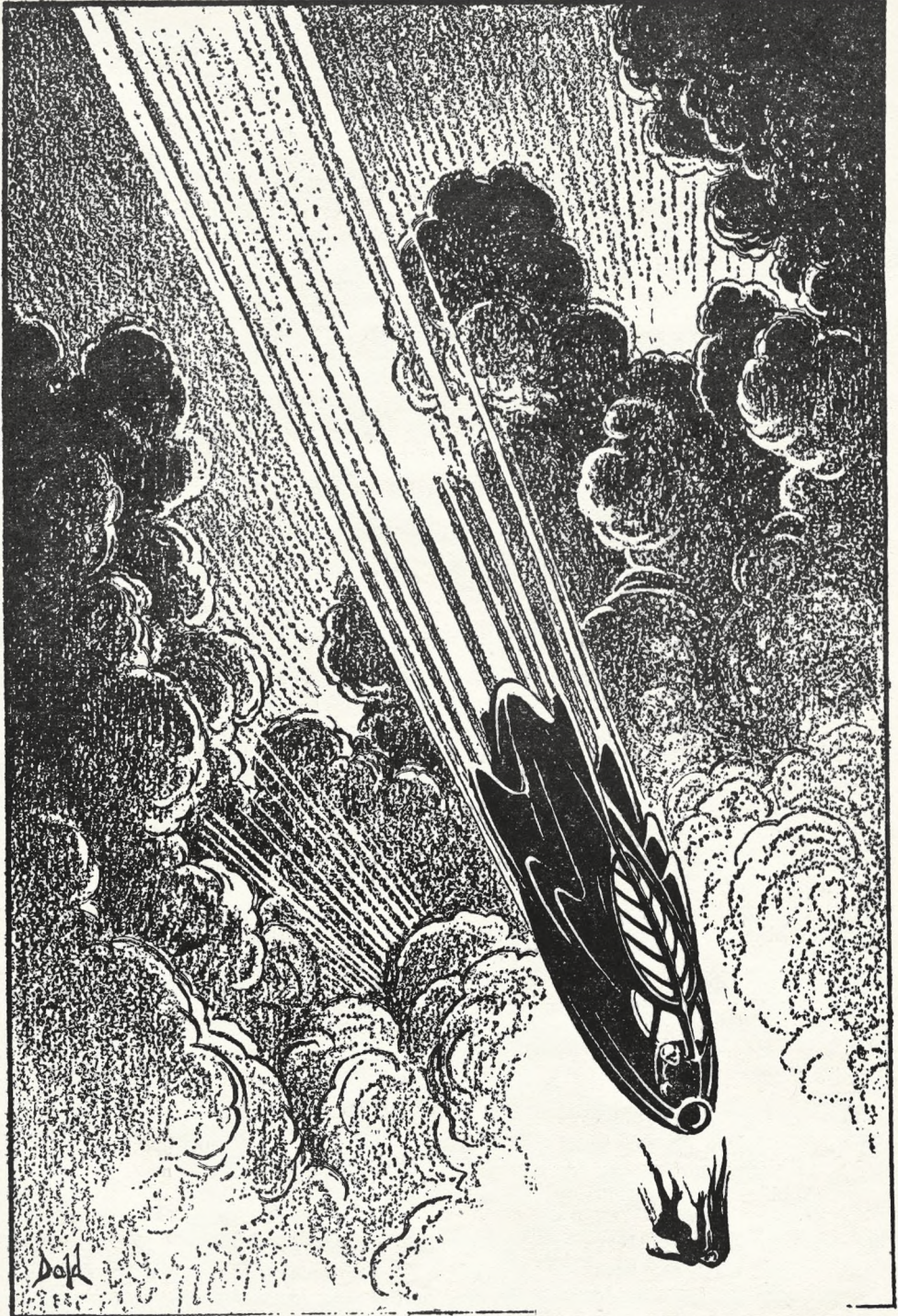
Rolda, hearing the voice, signaled to his News Disseminators, and ordered that the whole city fall silent—that all audiphones be cleared of sounds, and all visi-dials of pictures—and himself, in a few brief words, instructed the city to find the Unknown and work its will upon him.

He had scarcely ended his brisk orders when that ominous humming sound again burst from his audiphone. He stiffened, waiting, listening—and out of the audiphone—while the visi-dial remained blank—came a low chuckle of insane amusement.

“SO THE great Rolda finds it necessary in the end to call for help! Well, it shall not avail you! I shall escape you, no matter what you try! But it must be amusing to you, as the Master Mummer, to pull the strings which actuate your marionettes, working them into a mob frenzy. Your ‘mad marionettes’!

“It irks you when I call your people that, yet right now you prove to me, and to yourself that your people are, after all, but puppets, bowing, bending and posturing at the will of Rolda! Yet see what one man who is an





Down and down shrieked the plane of Rolda towards Mareta

enemy can do to your scheme of things! See what he can do—”

The voice died out of the audiphone, ending in a chuckle that faded slowly out.

The millions of New York's population, by searching every nook and cranny of their own rooms and offices, were closing the net about the Unknown. Fear was on them all that the Unknown would slay Mareta when the chase came too close.

But he did not.

Half an hour after the Unknown had spoken his last word to Rolda, a savage terrible cry rose over New York—

Up-flying, breaking through the massive concrete of the gigantic Rampart that was a barrier between New York City and the Atlantic Ocean—breaking through as a flying fish breaks the surface of a tropical sea, the smoke-plane of the Unknown shot into the sky and circled away.

The black smoke slowly vanished from about the plane as it climbed madly toward the heavens, and the red of its fuselage was plain before the eyes of every person on the roof tops, and aloft in planes. That red glistened in the sun, and everyone noted how apt was its color.

For the color was the color of newly shed blood. It symbolized the blood that had already been shed.

Two miles above New York City the red plane, now no longer wearing its mantle of ebon smoke, leveled and set a course.

Up after it, like a projectile from a compressed-air gun, or from the muzzle of a Lethal Tube, darted the plane of Rolda.

And while still a thousand feet below the plane it would have cost him his life to attack, a somersaulting bundle dropped from the red plane, just as the red plane set a course dead into the east.

New York gasped in horror, knowing in its great composite heart that

the somersaulting bundle was the falling body of Mareta—the soul-savior of Rolda.

## CHAPTER VIII

### THE DOOM WARNING

**R**OLDA saw and understood, and knew on that instant that the life of Mareta was more precious to him than the lives of any of his people—though it should not have been, since she was but one. Yet at the moment he felt that nothing mattered save Mareta, who was plunging down to death from a frightful height, from the plane flown by the Unknown.

Rolda sent his plane into top speed, and was diving toward the line through which Mareta must fall to reach the ground, or rather the rooftops of New York. His speed was as great as hers from the beginning, though he was a great distance from her when she started her mad somersault down to destruction.

He did not note that the red plane was circling, so that its pilot could watch the mad attempt at rescue—the mad attempt to do the utterly impossible.

Down and down shrieked the plane of Rolda, toward the line through whose length, to reach the rooftops, Mareta must fall. Now he was diving parallel with her, and perhaps a trifle faster. There still were four thousand feet through which to fall. Did Mareta retain consciousness to put forth the effort only she could put forth to save herself? Was she still conscious at all?

Now he was right beside her and body and plane were falling together. He could see her face, as she fell head downward now, like a falling stone. Her eyes were looking straight into his, and there was not so much as a hint of fear in them! Her confidence in him was easy to read. She knew he would prevent her from smashing her body to a mass on the rooftops, now dangerously close below.

Little by little, while plane and body fell a thousand feet, he edged over against her. Her face was contorted for the first time as she put forth a mighty effort. Her hands, fingers widespread so that her dainty hands were like talons—were stretched out to fasten somewhere in the smooth surface of the plane flown by Rolda.

Rolda must swing wide a door to allow her to come inside the pit, but he was afraid, terribly and awfully afraid for a moment or two. The downward rush was so terrific that to open a door—leaving an aperture to catch the winds which bore so savagely against the fuselage, might cause the plane to rock away, out of reach—when it might be impossible to jockey it back before Mareta struck the rooftops.

Her fingers clutched at the compressed-air guns—and Rolda just remembered with an inward shout of rejoicing that he had not returned them to “inactive” position. Her hands closed about the smooth metal of the barrels—and Rolda swung wide the door. For a second or two the knuckles of Mareta were white with strain as she fought to maintain her hold on the guns, while the Rolda plane danced and bucked down the sky.

He caught her with a surge of strength that would never release her.

Inch by inch, as she released her hold on the guns, he dragged her into the pit—then zoomed in a mad inverted parabola for the skies.

**M**ARETA smiled at him softly, apparently unmoved by her unbelievable experience, and between them, as their plane climbed, they managed to force shut the door. Rolda turned to her—

“No,” she said frankly, anticipating his question, “I was not afraid, for I recognized your plane the moment you started, and when he tossed me from the red ship I knew that you

would somehow manage to rescue me!”

He could not hear the roar, the mad riotous roar of rejoicing, which flooded outward and upward from New York when the people saw that he had succeeded.

He got on the trail of the red plane, which by now was far out over the waters of the Atlantic.

“I know the man,” said Mareta quietly. “He is a representative of a government which is creating a stronghold in the heart of the Ural Mountains from which it is intended to launch an attack of conquest against all the world.

“His name, which he told me and laughed, because he did not know I would live to repeat it, is Serge Alexoff. He will lead his government’s armies in the World War of Conquest—and New York is to be the first city attacked, because it is intended to be the seat of government of the Western Hemisphere, and as such will be his country’s subsidiary world capital.”

Rolda gasped. His lips were a straight, firm line. He shook his head.

A buzzing sound came from the audiphone, the ominous signal of the Unknown, whom Mareta had called Serge Alexoff.

For the first time since he had been ferreted out—or rather since he had had a voice by which to be identified—the Unknown allowed his enemy to see his face.

The face was the face of a Slav. A strong, eaglelike face, ruthless, savage—. The lips were too red, the lines of the lips as harsh as steel, the eyes blank of emotion.

“There is no need to follow me, Rolda, for you will not overtake me, and if you did you would die. I have shown you our—*my*—power. And I come again soon, with an army at my back. An army that travels in the sky, on the ground, and under the sea, and we shall possess your country utterly.

"Your good friend Mareta has told you about me, as far as she knows it. I am really glad I failed to destroy her. You need her. She makes you strong, and strong you are the better, more efficient antagonist. I do not care to match wits with fools.

"There is no need to report this conversation upon your return, for I am at this moment showing my face in every visi-dial in New York, and my voice issues from every audiphone. If you should, during my absence, learn the secret of the black smoke, and the darkness with which I surrounded myself at will, understand this: that it shall not be used against you when I come again.

"It lacks the destructive qualities of various other compounds which are our secret knowledge in the heart of the Urals. When I come again, with my people at my back—Not even the

hand of your God can stay me! We shall meet again!"

Rolda turned back to New York as the red plane vanished ahead, dropping over the curve of the world to disappear. He was very calm. With Mareta by his side he entered his office, stepped to the audiphone, set the visi-dial at "practical," spoke a few brief words to the people of his dream city.

"If you follow my leadership," he said calmly, "Alexoff shall fail!"

A moment of silence when he had finished, as though even the roar of commerce had fallen mute to hear the reply of a nation, speaking from the heart of its greatest city.

"We follow, Rolda—while life lasts—to the uttermost!"

Nine words, a mystic number. They reached, in time, the mighty stronghold in the Urals—and the minions of Moscow made ready.

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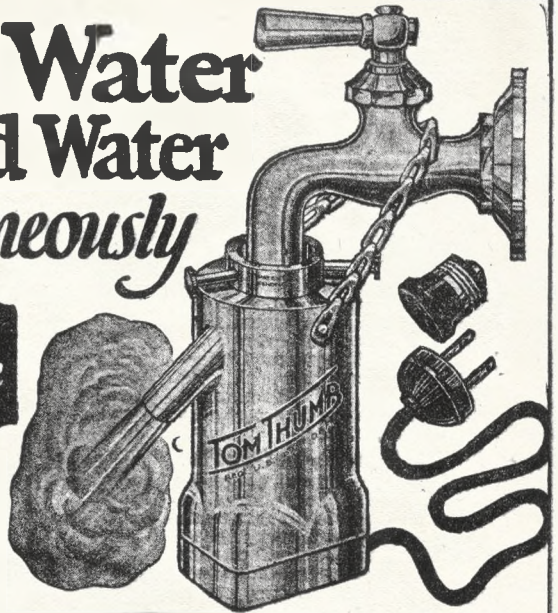
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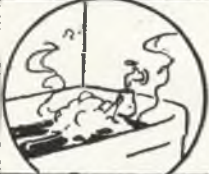
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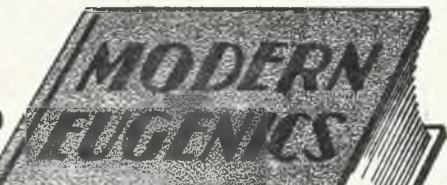
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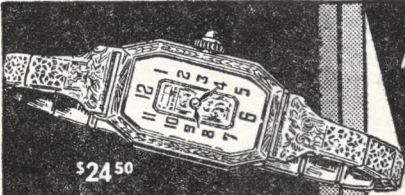
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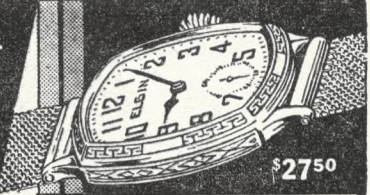


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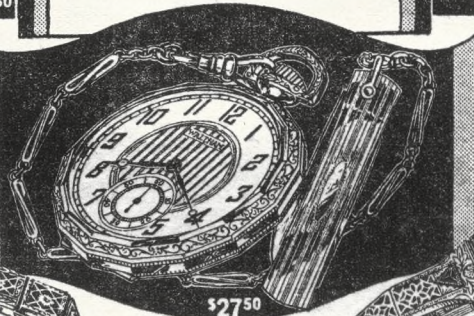
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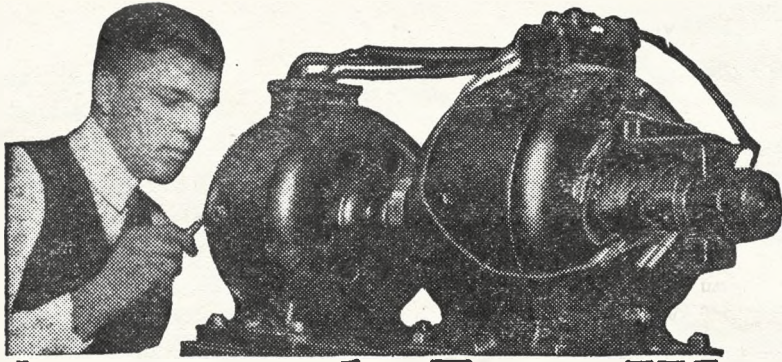
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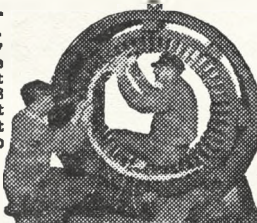
Lack of experience—age, or advanced education bars no one. I don't care if you don't know an armature from an air brake—I don't expect you to! I don't care if you're 16 years old or 48—it makes no difference! Don't let lack of money stop you. Most of the men at Coyne have no more money than you have.

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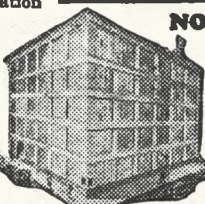
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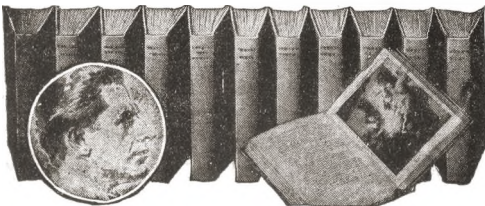
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