

NOV. 1950

FANTASTIC NOVELS MAGAZINE

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FANTASTIC

Novels

MAGAZINE

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by **FRED MacISAAC**

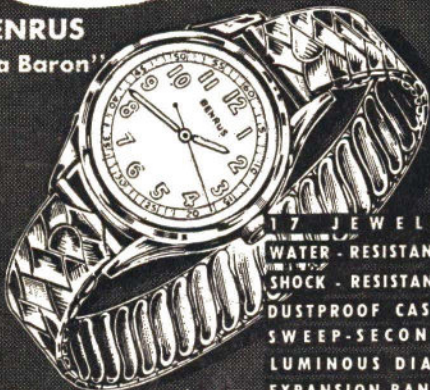


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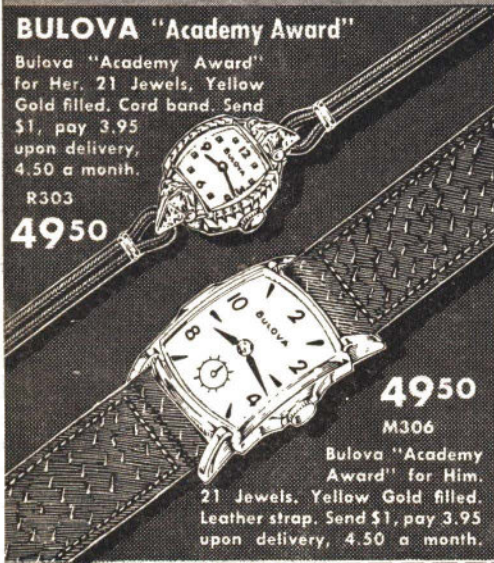
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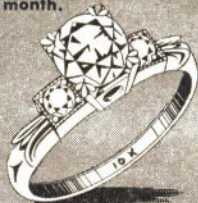
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25¢

FANTASTIC

Novels

MAGAZINE



Vol. 4

NOVEMBER, 1950

No. 4

Book-Length Novel

THE HOTHOUSE WORLD.....Fred MacIsaac 12

Huddled within their glass-cage city they lived, the last survivors of the Ice-Age cataclysm. . . . Only one man dared the hostile world of freezing death without, in a wild despairing fight to turn back the clock and save the smouldering embers of mankind's forgotten courage. . . .

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Novelette

CROSS OF MERCRUX.....Harry Walton 94

The city that Time had forgotten . . . a house of forbidden mystery . . . a doorway where life and death were brothers . . . a story of two parallel worlds behind the streets of old New York!

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Cover by De Soto. Inside illustrations by Finlay and Bok.

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LOOKING FORWARD

One of the most distinguished names in Fantasy is that of the late Arthur Leo Zagat, and among his best stories were those which appeared in the *Argosy*. Older readers and many of the younger ones who were reading that magazine in the thirties will remember "Drink We Deep" and "Seven Out of Time" with pleasure, but there are many who have not yet had the opportunity to read these classics. Next issue will feature the first mentioned story with extra fine illustrations by Virgil Finlay. The story is set in the Helderbergs, a range of hills in New York State which are rich in the early folklore traditions of our country and as scenically romantic as any beauty spot in the world.

The letters from the readers about "Earth's Last Citadel" and Virgil Finlay's illustrations for the story, were very gratifying—and here they are.

Yours Fantasticly,
Mary Gnaedinger.

MIGHTILY PLEASED

Dear Mme. Gnaedinger:

Having but recently removed myself to New Jersey, I hope that I can just have enough time to sneak this epistle in for the Nov. ish of F.N.

First of all, I was mighty pleased with the entire contents of the July issue, but the most welcome and wonderful offering was Mr. and Mrs. Henry Kuttner's "Earth's Last Citadel." I strongly believe that it's sometimes *only* yarns and tales like this which either help to perpetuate an air of uniqueness and *difference* about SFantasy or which are responsible for bringing SF to notoriety amongst those who are sworn detective and Western addicts.

(Continued on page 8)

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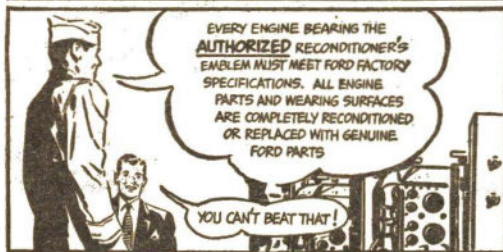
"NOT ME," FRED COMES BACK.
"THE FORD-AUTHORIZED RECONDITIONER SHOULD GET IT."



I STOPPED TO TELL MY MECHANIC FRIEND, FRED, HOW FRISKY MY FORD IS SINCE I GOT MY RECONDITIONED ENGINE.

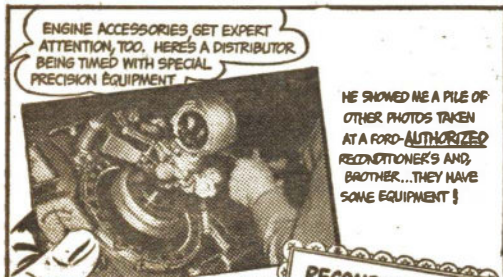
SEE THAT EMBLEM? THAT'S WHY YOUR FORD'S GOT SO MUCH PER. IT'LL STAY THAT WAY TOO, FOR THOUSANDS OF MILES TO COME!

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LOOK FOR THE AUTHORIZED RECONDITIONER'S EMBLEM ON THE RECONDITIONED FORD ENGINE YOU BUY

FANTASTIC NOVELS

(Continued from page 6)

Next along the agenda, "Death's Secret," by Schoolcraft, takes a few honors as a fine yarn, but don't do the Egyptian theme to the bone in your selections. We have had a fairly good taste of it lately, and anything with the Egyptianesque or Orientale flavor to it is of most delicate importance, and when too much of it goes around, it would be similar to loading up a child's stomach with a quart of ice cream when he can only take half a pint. Whereas, take the "lost civilization" or end-of-the-world type of story: One can imbibe that in generous amounts.

And while on the subject of the latter theme, I certainly trust that the Anti-Caveman Yarn League has not influenced you in any way, dearest editrix, as I've noted rather a scarcity of this form of composition within the confines of F.M. and F.F.M. of late. I find it good when I can read four or five good ones, at least, every year, since you'll find most people wishing to get away from it all by escaping into the imaginary lands of an author's story which depicts regions and worlds "wherein men are men and women are women", or where sinew reigns over a l and everything else.

There'll be a need for such stories so long as red blood courses its way through the veins of all people. A good recommendation for a fine future presentation would be Waterloo's "A Son of the Ages."

"The Soul Trap" by Chas. B. Stilson, was like all of his past efforts, namely, par excel ent. If you can dig up any of his serials that appeared back in the Munsey days, don't disappoint us then. "Lost—One Mylodon," by Elmer Brown Mason, was a fine short—one of the best shorts, to my knowledge, that you've brought out in a long time. Interior illos were fine, as always, and better than average SF mag artwork. However, with the exception of the main pics for the title pages of the Kuttner and Schoolcraft yarns, all others were below Finlay's possible abilities. I certainly long for the Finlay of early days when there weren't as many thunderbolts, bubbles and nova flashes as there are in his presentday sketches. Lawrence, also, has been far below average and nothing close to the Lawrence of five or six years ago. Paul, as always, is something of a refreshing stimulant with his altogether unique style, and of all presentday SF artists, Paul is in a superb class of his own; but let's see much more of the old master; how's about it?

I happen to have a couple of rare collector's items for either exchange or for sale to the highest bidder. They are: H. P. Lovecraft's "The Outsider and Others" . . . "Marginalia" . . . "Lurker at the Threshold" C. A. Smith's "Lost Worlds." I also have copies of Merritt's "The Ship of Ishtar" . . . "Face in the Abyss" . . . "Creep, Shadow" . . . "Dwellers in the Mirage" . . . the complete version of "The Moon Pool" and its sequel, and "The Metal Monster" (these are not magazine or pocketbook versions). In exchange, I'll be only interested in acquiring copies of F.F.M. and F.N. prior to '43. Astoundings and Unknowns prior to '45.

(Continued on page 10)

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(Continued from page 8)

early *Weirds* from '23 to '30, *Science Wonder Quarterlies*, *Wonder Quarterlies*, *Amazing Annuals* and some *Startlings* and *Thrilling Wonders* prior to '42.

In books, I am only interested in better-than-average items, and as I have over a thousand STFantasy books in stock, the ones that anyone wishes to list have to be of various titles of special interest to me. Of course, I'll either settle for the highest bid in money or for the best deal that can be offered in a swap. I'll answer all letters promptly, as is my habit, but would appreciate a 3c stamp for every letter, though it can be overlooked if the querier hasn't any.

Before ending this round for the month, I'd like to have everyone note that American Science-Fantasy Society chapters are being formed in major cities across the country. As of now, the A.S.F.S. has over 100 members and associate members and is allied with two well known organizations as well, the Circle Letter Club and United Scientific and Cultural Organizations. Our services are numerous, ranging from a low-rate SF book service to a manuscript and publications dept. for amateur writers. Our intention is not only national but international benefits to STFantasy followers from all over, and our primary purpose is to create a world-wide brotherhood of STFantasy fans with chapters and lodges wherever possible. Those who are interested in joining are cordially invited to write in for information and added details on membership, facilities and services.

I am fervently awaiting the coming of Stilson's "Polaris and the Goddess Glorian" in the Sept. F.N., the last of the "Polaris" epics.

Stfantastically yours,
REV. CALVIN THOS. BECK

7112 Blvd. East,
Apt. 2-C,
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"A VERY GOOD STORY"

The first thing I noticed when I picked up the July *Fantastic Novels* was that Lawrence was back. I trembled with happiness (or clumsiness)—and tore the cover so that I had to buy a second copy of the mag. In the spell of joy at Lawrence's return, it was worth a second quarter to get a whole copy of the cover!

The novel, "Earth's Last Citadel," is a very good story; it reminds me irresistibly of Merritt's style of writing. However, it is scarcely old enough to be labeled as a classic.

Stories of Egypt have always fascinated me, so it's no wonder that "Death's Secret" claims a high second place. "The Soul Trap" is also an excellent story. Stilson created a mood of mystery and expectancy with such lines as "... the poplars whispered endlessly to their neighbor pines 'When? When? When?' which permeated the whole story. "Lost—One Mylodon" is by Elmer Brown Mason, which fact is all the recommendation it needs. It shows, even more than "The White Gorilla" and others, that Mason is a poet of no mean ability.

I would like to see Otis A. Kline's *Mars* and

Venus novels; also Farley's "Radio" novels, Cummings' "The Man Who Was Two Men", Leinster's "Darkness on Fifth Avenue" and "City of the Blind."

In regard to H. J. Desmond's request for "The Blue Pagoda" in F.N.: that is the title of Hannes Bok's sequel to Merritt's "The Fox Woman", is it not? Therefore it would be unavailable to F.N.

Sorry to learn that there is little possibility of R.E. Howard's stories in F.N. or F.F.M.

Let's have a few Finlay covers and some poetry with Bok illustrations. Let Saunders confine his covers to *Super Science*, and bring Callé's talents into F.N. once in a while.

Long live the Pop Pubs fantasy group!

ROBERT E. BRINNEY

561 W. Western Ave.,
Muskegon, Mich.

LISTS OF OUR FANTASIES AVAILABLE

Is there any possibility of your printing Frank Aubrey's "King of the Dead," and "Queen of Atlantis" and "The Devil Tree of El Dorado" in the near future? I think these stories would be excellent choices for your publication. They appeared in very early *Argosies*.

In case you publish this letter I would like to announce that I have made up a bibliography of F.F.M., F.N. and A. Merritt's *Fantasy* magazine. This list is free to any fans and collectors who write in for it.

Yours for continued success,

CLAUDE HELD

372 Dodge St.
Buffalo, 8, N. Y.

Editor's Note: Frank Aubrey's stories will be considered, but a number of later classics have been scheduled for the near future. Those you mention go back to the beginning of the century or before.

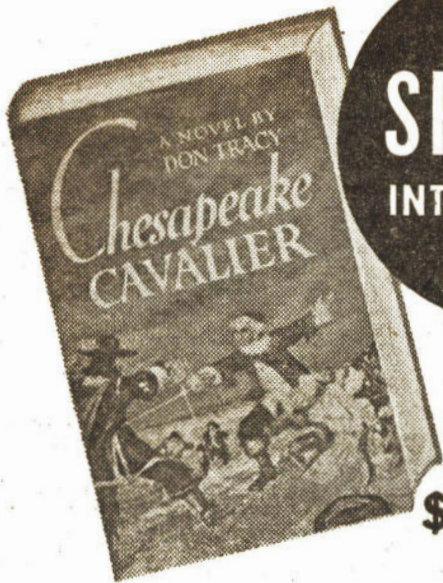
MOORE-KUTTNER EXCELLENT

It is quite difficult and perhaps a bit unfair for me to attempt to rate the stories in the July issue as to relative merit. Difficult because they were all quite good; unfair because of my partiality to novels. At any rate first place to "Earth's Last Citadel," despite dated propaganda and a rather sickening description of the heroine. She sounds as though she would make a pretty little bric-a-brac to put on one's mantel to chime out the hour (with her bell-like voice). Nice thing to have around the house and all that, but after all—

However, these are only very minor flaws in an otherwise well done and enjoyable story. It is a far cry from their brilliant classic "Fury", but excellent none the less.

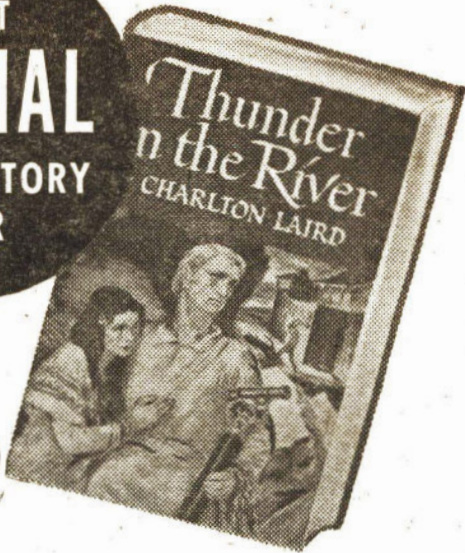
Second place honors to "Death's Secret," which worked up very smoothly to its exciting climax. Third, Mason's short—quite amusing except for the annoying vernacular employed by the narrator. I see Lawrence has been following Li'l Abner. Unfortunately one of the four stories has to be last. "The Soul Trap" was an intriguing little tale. Had it been in the same issue with "The Devil's Spoon" or "Nor-

(Continued on page 93)



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THE HOTHOUSE WORLD



By Fred MacIsaac

CHAPTER I

THE NEW WORLD

THE TONE of the telegram was so urgent that I wired Professor Judkins at once that I would gladly come. I was pleased that the erratic scientific genius had remembered me, George Putnam, out of all his former students, to send me that insistent appeal to drop everything and come to Newton University by the first train, if I still had any interest in his experiments.

So I packed a few things in haste and boarded the train at one fifteen on that sunny afternoon of May 22nd, 1951.

It happened that this had come at a moment when I was free to indulge him.

My fiancée, Ruth Reynolds, had left New York for a visit of three or four days with her father. I had sold out my holdings in the market the previous day and placed in my bank a sum of a little over fifty thousand dollars. I was a month past my twenty-eighth birthday, full of pep, happy as a fellow has a right to be and bubbling over with the milk of human kindness. I was delighted to be able to gratify the wish of poor old Job Judkins.

Judkins had taught biology in my day at Newton and he still held the chair though he was in receipt of a liberal pension which enabled him to pursue scientific investigations and turn over the lecture business to a lot of understrappers. He was a shaggy, leonine man, whose hair and beard were long because he grudged the barber the time necessary to trim them. He was physically insignificant except for his massive head, for he forgot to eat most of the time. His mind was like a razor, his scorn for

Huddled within their glass-cage city they lived, the last survivors of the Ice-Age cataclysm. . . . Only one man dared the hostile world of freezing death without, in a wild despairing fight to turn back the clock and save the smouldering embers of mankind's forgotten courage. . . .

lazy ignorance was immense, and he, for some strange reason, liked me.

I was no shark in his subjects, but I think I comprehended them better than most men in the class of 1943. It was his vicious sense of humor which first attracted me; even when I was the victim of it, I was amused.

He used to insist that I was nothing but a magnificent animal with a small but fairly good mind. He admired my physique because his own muscles were flabby as a girl's, and he actually went to the stadium to watch me play fullback for Newton during my last game in my senior year, which I considered the greatest compliment he could pay me.

When I was in school I used to drop in at his seedy lodgings once in a while and the old boy professed to be glad to see me and tried to explain to me, in elementary language, some of his advanced notions. The regret of his life was that he happened to be born in an age when science was in its infancy, and that he would never know what the human mind was capable of achieving.



What went on in Judkins' laboratory was a matter of grave concern in the university and in the village.

"Do you realize, Putnam," he said one night, "that human beings have been on this earth something like fifty thousand years and it is only within the last fifty years that they have begun to understand Nature and their own possibilities?"

"How about Aristotle and Euclid?" I asked, to bait him.

"Bah! Good little minds. Curious children. They knew nothing and their reasoning was based upon fallacies. You, a young, powerful, ignorant savage, at the age of twenty-two, are better informed and more logical in your mental processes than any philosopher or scientist of antiquity or the Renaissance. You know more than Bacon and Copernicus and Erasmus, through your good fortune in being born in this age instead of theirs, although you are mentally incompetent compared to them. You can reason dully upon sound hypotheses; those poor chaps were making brilliant guesses in the dark."

"Well, I'm living in the Twentieth Century."

"But suppose you were living in the Twenty-first or the Twenty-second century? Einstein gives us an inkling of what's to come. Putnam, I would sell my soul, provided it was worth anything, for a chance to know the developments of the next hundred years."

"I suppose it would be interesting," I said with a suppressed yawn.

"Interesting?" he shouted. "Interesting! Why, we haven't a word to express it. You are forty-five years younger than I am and you'll probably live a half a century longer. You'll see something, but not much. I expect a few decades of scientific inactivity to follow the great development of the last quarter of a century."

I followed him into the big room at the back of his house which was part museum and part operating chamber. I knew that Judkins was a vivisectionist of some sort, and that what went on in Judkins' laboratory was a matter of grave concern in the university and in the village. I didn't want to see some dreadful experiment.

Upon this night, however, he showed me a dead fish. The thing was about two feet long and was in a glass case where it was apparently suspended in air. I couldn't see any support for it.

"You think it's dead," he sneered. "That fish is as alive as you and I. And to-night I am putting him back in his own element."

"How long has he been like that?"

"Three months," said the professor. He took the cover from the glass case and

immediately the fish dropped to the bottom. He took a tube containing some sort of gas, applied its end to the opening of the case, replaced the cover and immediately the fish rose again. To my astonishment it began to quiver, its eyes glittered, its tail and fins moved and it came back to life!

After a moment Judkins removed the cover, lifted the fish and dropped it in a tank of water a few feet away. The creature began to swim; but, after a moment, it turned over on its back and floated to the surface quite dead. The rage of Professor Judkins, at that, was perfectly horrible. Where he had picked up the profane expressions which he poured out upon the unfortunate finny being was a mystery to me. I withheld my laughter, and sneaked out of the laboratory without his noticing my departure.

That was the last experiment of his which I was privileged to witness. Two or three times before my graduation I dropped in and had a chat with him and I called on him once or twice afterward when I went down to Newton for class reunions. The old boy didn't seem to have a friend in the world, and was aging fast. His eyes were wilder and his whiskers longer and his body more emaciated at each visit.

I asked him about his experiments but he wouldn't discuss them. "They march," he would say with a shrug. "Some day, perhaps, I shall invite you to see a demonstration which will not be a fiasco. The fish will live."

"Well, what of it?" I asked, to get a rise out of him.

"What of it? What of it?" He glared and then laughed queerly. "Your mind is atrophying in the business world. Do you still keep up your athletic training?"

"I'm in great shape. Play a lot of tennis and squash and run a great deal. Football, of course, is impossible. I'm playing the game of business."

"Well, don't neglect your body. Don't follow my example, my boy. What good is a great mind in a miserable dwelling?"

I REACHED Newton at four in the afternoon of May 22nd, and found the professor at home. He was nothing but skin and bone; his beard and hair were positively dirty and his eyes smaller and set deeper under his cavernous eyebrows. He welcomed me cordially, however, and we sat out on his porch and I answered a thousand questions about my personal affairs. His comments were curious. When

I told him that I was engaged, he said:

"Too bad, but after all women are of no consequence."

"I'm glad Ruth doesn't hear you say that," I said, laughing. I told him about my killing in the market and he looked interested.

"Money is useful," he declared. "The principle is wrong, but we must make the most of the world as we find it."

He was interested in my success as a bond salesman for a while and then he changed the subject to physics and chemistry. What little I had learned in college I had forgotten and my ignorance angered him.

"In another ten years you would be useless, useless," he declared. "You had an exceptionally keen mind as a student; your reasoning powers were unusual; you were a mental and physical combination that was extremely rare. Ah, well . . . I'm going to take you to dine at the hotel and I'm going to dress for the occasion. First time I've put on a dress shirt in a decade."

"Please don't do it on my account."

He laughed. "It was good of you to answer my telegram. Presently you will understand why I sent for you. This is an occasion, Putnam. An occasion. Is that

money of yours earning some interest?"

"You bet. I put it in a special savings account which pays four per cent."

"Ah, good. Money will be useful to you."

"By the way, professor, do you remember how, years ago, you showed me a dead fish floating on nothing in a glass case?"

"You fool, that fish was alive," he snarled. "It died when I placed it in the water."

"Well," I laughed, "I often wondered how the trick was done. It seemed to be floating on air."

"It was floating on a gas of my own invention which kept it alive," he said. "I don't care to talk about my experiments, Putnam."

When I walked into the Newton Hotel with the professor we created a sensation. Several members of the faculty were present, and came over and congratulated the old boy upon his get-up. He grinned ironically at them and told them it was a momentous occasion.

During our dinner—which, as usual, he forgot to eat—he sallied off upon a flight of speculation regarding the progress of science during the next few hundred years. Once started on his favorite theme, he was uncontrollable.

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"I doubt if I last five years longer," he said regretfully. "It's like laying down an absorbing novel, Putnam, to pass out of an age like this. Not that I ever read a novel."

"I can understand your interest in science, professor," I said, "but I can't share it. I don't believe that man is any happier to-day than he was in the days of Pericles. I don't think that modern scientific discoveries have given us a greater enjoyment of life. I am going to be married to a girl I love and I have all the money that I need. I am young and healthy and have a zest for living. How could I be happier than I am this minute?"

"Knowledge is happiness," he growled. "You'll come to my way of thinking sooner or later. This damned hotel stifles me. Let's go back to my place."

We started to walk up the hill to the college, but the old man became faint before we were halfway up and I stopped a passing taxi and insisted upon his getting into it. I remember that I sighed and thought that poor old Judkins wouldn't be around to watch the progress of science much longer.

"Come into the laboratory," he said. "You haven't been in it for years, my boy."

I followed him into the room which was six or seven years dirtier than when I had last seen it, and at his suggestion sat down upon a couch near the window.

"Interested in perfumes?" he asked casually as he crossed the room and opened a cupboard.

"I've bought plenty. My fiancée adores them."

"Really? I've been making some experiments in vegetable and mineral odors," he said, "and I think I have produced an entirely new scent. Perhaps your fiancée would like it."

"If you have produced a new scent, you can make millions," I assured him. "I congratulate you, professor, upon going into something more profitable than hypnotizing fishes."

"I do nothing for profit, Putnam," he retorted angrily. "But I suppose you can't understand such a point of view. Here, smell this."

He brought over a small vial and held it to my nostrils with the cork in place. There was no odor.

"Are you kidding me?" I asked. But at that instant the professor pressed the bottom of the vial which caused a tiny hole to open in the stopper and I breathed something into my lungs which froze them and me. A dreadful cold permeated my

system. I tried to rise, to push the thing away, but my limbs were paralyzed. I glared at him, but I could hardly see him. I heard him droning something—

"Fortunate man, fortunate man," he was saying, and then I could neither hear nor see nor feel. I was dying. The madman had lured me here to make me the subject of an insane experiment . . . I must pull myself together, pull myself, pull—

I WOKE UP. I was lying in what seemed to be a cradle or a casket with glass sides. I had a sensation of having pins and needles stuck into all parts of my body and involuntarily I began flexing my muscles. I lifted my head and discovered I was stark naked except for a loincloth of some curious material, and was lying on a hard metal surface. I became aware of faces looking down at me with excited eyes and a vaulted ceiling high above.

"Where's Professor Judkins?" I asked testily. "Give me a hand out of this, will you please?"

There were two men inspecting me, clean-shaved men in white sleeveless shirts. They exchanged glances.

"Perfect," declared one of them, "Absolutely perfect."

"Both mentally and physically."

"Confound it, get me some clothing and let me out of this glass box! I want Judkins, see? And who the devil are you two?"

"Help him," said the older of the two men; then, to me: "Do you feel all right? Be careful not to exert yourself."

The younger man extended me a hand and, though I felt strangely weak, I managed to get upon my feet. I then discovered I was in a tank upon a low table in a room with a stone floor and steel walls and no windows.

"Where's Judkins?" I demanded. "The old idiot gassed me in some way and I went into sort of a trance. Give me a hand down to the floor, and for Pete's sake bring me something to put on."

"Please have a little patience, sir," said the young man who helped me to the floor. "Unfortunately Professor Judkins is not here. This is Professor Ditmar and I am Professor Lothrop."

"I congratulate you, Mr. Putnam," said Professor Ditmar gravely. "Do you feel perfectly normal?"

"Of course. How about clothes? You don't seem to have much on yourselves."

Besides the sleeveless shirts they wore only white trunks which stopped at the

knee. Their bare feet were thrust into white cloth slippers.

"Let me help you to a couch, Mr. Putnam," suggested Professor Lothrop. "I'm sure you need rest."

"I need a porterhouse steak with onions," I declared, suddenly aware that I was very hungry. "Where the deuce am I? I was gassed in Professor Judkins' house. This looks like a museum, hanged if it doesn't."

"You were removed here for safekeeping," said Professor Ditmar. "I am amazed at your condition, sir. This is the greatest moment of my life."

"Safekeeping? How long have I been out? And why the glass case, and why strip me practically naked? Say, has that old devil been vivisectioning me?"

"No, no, I assure you. Lothrop, get him a costume. Now sit down, Mr. Putnam. I can't supply you with a steak, but you may have some broth."

I inspected the pair with more care. Both men were very blond and under medium height. Ditmar had a bulging brow and was past middle age, but his head was without a white hair. Lothrop had opened a coffer and produced a shirt and trunks like his own.

"Why the gym clothes?" I asked as I donned them. "And you have a family resemblance to my fiancée, professor. Are you a relative of Ruth Reynolds?"

He hesitated, glanced at his colleague, flushed and said nervously:

"In a way, I am."

I felt better with something over my torso, and I inspected the room. Against the wall on the opposite side was a long table covered with test tubes, cans, instruments, and queer-shaped boxes. Leaning against the table was what looked like the cover of the glass box. It reminded me of something. By Jove, the hypnotized fish! Could that crazy Judkins have had me in an inanimate state for months like the fish? But the fish had died immediately, and I felt all right.

"Look here," I said excitedly. "Why can't I see Judkins? I demand to know what has happened to me."

"The fact is, Mr. Putnam," replied Professor Ditmar, "most unfortunately, Professor Judkins is dead."

"Dead?" I repeated stupidly. "But he put something over on me. Knocked me out. How long has he been dead?"

"Well—er—some little time," said the professor hesitatingly.

"And how long have I been lying naked in that thing? Days? Months?"

Ditmar nodded.

I glared at him. "Why so mysterious? Tell me something. I presume you gentlemen found out how to release me from my trance. Is that right?"

Ditmar nodded. "We have been the instruments of your deliverance from your long sleep."

"So it was a long sleep." I said uneasily. "How long? Why, my fiancée must be terribly anxious! How long?"

"Longer than I dare tell you, Mr. Putnam. You look to me like a man of great physical strength and strong mentality. You have come out in much better shape than we dared to expect. But—how much courage have you?"

"Have I been unconscious for a year?" I demanded. "He kept the fish three months."

"Fish? I don't understand. . . . I don't know how to tell you."

"I'll tell him," said Lothrop. "He can stand it. Mr. Putnam, you asked me if I were a relative of Ruth Reynolds. I said 'in a way.' You thought I meant a cousin by marriage, I presume."

"Ruth Reynolds," he said slowly and impressively, "was my great-grandmother."

"Why, you damned liar!" I shouted. "How dare you hand me a yarn like that? Your grandmother? She's only twenty-three years old."

"Professor Lothrop is speaking the truth," declared Ditmar. "The lady, if she were alive, would be one hundred and twenty-three years old."

I was watching his eyes and knew he was speaking what he thought was the truth. Either he was crazy or—I was!

"What's the day and the month and the year?" I said with a sneer.

"This is May twenty-second, of the Year of our Lord two thousand and fifty-one," replied Professor Lothrop.

I stared at them and laughed amusedly. It was so utterly absurd.

"If I am to believe you two jokers, I have been lying in that contraption for one hundred years to a day. Sort of a Rip Van Winkle. Well, where are my long gray whiskers? I don't even need a shave."

"Professor Judkins' preserving gas seems to have been much more successful than whatever caused Rip Van Winkle to sleep for twenty years," replied Ditmar with a slow smile.

"We shall have no difficulty in convincing you that you are a hundred years older than when you entered Professor Judkins' house just a century ago. You will find the

world a very different place nowadays."

"But Ruth," I exclaimed. "Oh, my God, she's dead, she's dead!"

"Unfortunately, yes. She died at the age of sixty-two. She married and had children, but she never forgot you. She often came to see you."

"Came to see me? What the devil do you mean?"

"You have been the marvel of the world for a century, my friend. For the first twenty years you were on exhibition in the Smithsonian Institution."

My answer was an oath.

"Of course that barbarity was stopped generations ago. You have been reposing in this steel and stone house, to be viewed by none but men of science, ever since."

I felt of my arms and legs. "I'm not an old man. I'm just as young as I ever was," I declared. "I bet I could strangle the pair of you."

The two professors backed away.

"**C**ONTROL yourself, please," said Ditmar. "I can understand your emotion. A dreadful outrage was committed upon your person. You naturally resent it, but remember we were not born for generations after it happened."

"Oh, I don't blame you," I said listlessly. "I love Ruth Reynolds. I wake up a day or two after seeing her, so it seems, and find that she is dead. All my friends are dead. Everything I had to live for has crumbled away. What the devil do I care about your world? I want to go back. I want to go back."

I was weeping like a child. They suffered my paroxysm for ten minutes and then Ditmar spoke authoritatively.

"Brace up, Mr. Putnam. You're a man and you have to face facts. You've mourned for the old world and I don't blame you. It seems to have been a better world than ours, but you are now in the Twenty-first Century and you are likely to live with us for fifty years or more. You don't look a day over thirty-five."

"I'm twenty-eight, to be exact," I said mournfully.

"Judkins predicted that you would age a year in a century, which would make you twenty-nine physically and mentally. Right in the prime of youth. You'll have friends among us. You will have interests. Your virile viewpoint may be very helpful to the effeminate world in which you have come. I implore you to get hold of yourself, sir."

"All right," I sighed. "I've been a mu-

seum freak for a hundred years, I've been cheated out of the life I was entitled to, and now I must make the best of things in a world where I am hopelessly antiquated and out of date. Well, I'll try."

Ditmar smiled. "This is not such a good world, my friend, and I think you can teach us a lot. Wouldn't you like to know something about the method by which you were preserved with all your faculties intact for a hundred years? The first man in history who has been young at a hundred and twenty-eight!"

"I'm not very curious," I said dispiritedly. "I'd like to know how you brought me to, a hundred years to a day—if you did."

"Thanks to Professor Judkins' formula," said Ditmar. "I have been officially in charge of it for the last five years. Judkins was the greatest scientist who ever lived."

"He was a crazy old scoundrel."

"You won't say that after you have the letter he left for you."

"He left me a letter, did he? I don't want to read it. If I had him here I'd rend him limb from limb!" I shouted.

"Mr. Putnam," said Professor Ditmar earnestly, "I beg you to accept things as they are, since lamenting won't change them, and Professor Judkins is beyond your vengeance. The old man loved you, I assure you, and in projecting you into the Twenty-first Century he supposed he was doing you an inestimable service. Would you like to know the details of your miraculous preservation?"

"Might as well," I said indifferently.

"Judkins, who was one of the greatest scientists who ever lived, invented an invisible but semi-solid fluid in which he immersed you after your heart action had been suspended by an inhalation of a powerful perfume, the secret of which has been lost. This fluid preserved your heart and lungs and other organs as though they were a motor which, though not running, was well cared for and needed only the electric spark to resume. While you floated in this gaseous fluid in a glass case hermetically sealed, your body suffered only one per cent of the normal depreciation. What I mean is that you have aged only one year in one hundred."

I flexed my biceps speculatively.

"Professor Judkins immediately notified the world. He stated that you were a voluntary subject of his experiment. The perfume which suspended your heart action was so powerful that it would operate for

exactly one hundred years, and a premature attempt to revive you would kill you. At the end of a hundred years an injection just about the heart of a fluid which he had prepared would start heart action. You were to be removed immediately from the tank of Jobian gas and welcomed to the Twenty-first Century."

"I hope they electrocuted Judkins," I said.

"No, no. He was tried, of course, at the instance of your fiancée, and the case attracted worldwide attention. The jury was out for weeks, and eventually acquitted him, though there was a great outcry against him from the ignorant masses. You see, he produced a signed statement by you that you wished to undergo the experiment."

"A forgery!"

"If you say so, I presume it was a forgery. However, the excitement of the trial was too much for him. He died a few months later."

Tears started from my eyes as I thought of Ruth, loyal Ruth who had endeavored to avenge me. Poor, sweet, dead Ruth!

"SHALL I tell you something of the events of the last hundred years?" Ditmar went on.

"What do I care? Can I be left alone?"

"Of course, of course. I understand. Perhaps this letter from Professor Judkins may cause you to feel less bitterly against him. He wrote on parchment so you would have no difficulty deciphering it."

I reached out my hand for the long envelope, and then Ditmar conducted me into a room which contained a canvas cot and no other furniture. I lay down and tried to compose myself. I mourned for Ruth and all my friends and the bright bustling cheerful world I had known. As yet I had no shred of interest for the world into which I had so strangely arrived.

I writhed at the thought that I had been exposed in my nakedness in the Smithsonian Institution to be gaped at by the damned public. I shuddered at the thought of Ruth coming to see me in that condition. It occurred to me that if she had come as an old woman, to see me floating in ether as young as the last day we kissed, she must have suffered. I was glad I had not seen Ruth, a blooming flower of a girl, as a withered old woman. Finally she had married, and this young professor was one of her descendants. I hoped she had been happy. I wished I lay in the grave by her side.

To drive away such speculations I opened the letter from that fiend in human form, Professor Judkins:

My dear Putnam:

I firmly believe that you will read this upon May 22d, 2051. Before I ventured to make use of you, I made four hundred and eleven experiments, the last sixty of which were invariably successful; therefore I congratulate you upon an opportunity such as never before has been vouchsafed to a human being.

At first, no doubt, you will revile me. I admit some slight deception was necessary to make you the subject of my experiment. But when you fully realize what is before you, you will bless me as your benefactor.

Today we are in the midst of scientific discovery. Since 1870 one great invention has followed another, each born of what had preceded it. The World War gave science a great impetus, but I sense a pause in our progress. I expect the period from 1955 to 1980 to be comparatively barren in science, but from that time on there will be tremendous activity and amazing revelations. I expect you to be a part of them.

You will be bewildered at first, but you will quickly catch the pace of the Twenty-first Century. Your perfect physical condition made you ideal for my experiment; but I would not be interested in projecting a fool into an age of universal wisdom. You have an excellent mind though you made little use of it in the Twentieth Century. You will have the advantage of my spirit at your elbow, if there be a spirit world, of which I have no evidence whatever. In any event, put vain regrets behind you and go forward fearlessly. You are the most fortunate of men. Farewell!

Job Judkins.

With an imprecation I cast the missive upon the floor, rose and began to pace about. I was ravenously hungry. Since I must live, I would eat. I pounded on the door.

Dr. Ditmar opened it with an anxious face.

"Bring me some food," I demanded, "and then I'll have a look at your Twenty-first Century. I suppose we are in Washington."

"Washington?" he repeated. "Ah, no. We are in the Putnam Community on Lake Champlain."

"Well, that's a nice name. But food first, please."

"It is waiting."

Professor Judthrop entered with a steaming bowl of some sort of soup.

I ate with gusto and immediately felt better.

"Of course you know that your resurrection has created a tremendous sensation," said Ditmar.

"I'm still a sideshow freak, eh?" I jeered.

"And our population has been waiting for hours for a glimpse of you. Would you mind if I conducted you outside for a moment?"

"In these shorts?"

"You are costumed like the rest of us, Mr. Putnam."

"Lead on, Macduff," I said half hysterically.

He led me through an exit, along a narrow passage, and opened a door. Outside the sun was shining brightly, and I looked upon a small park behind which was a village.

At the far end of the park a multitude of people had gathered, pressing against ropes. The crowds raised a shout as I appeared, and I waved my hand at them, which caused them to cheer lustily. "Welcome home, Rip," I thought.

"All day the entire population has been assembled awaiting a sight of you," said Professor Lothrop. "Somehow they feel that your coming will help them. You have been looked upon for years as a sort of Messiah."

"Who, me?" I gasped. Then, "Say, what the dickens—"

For I had discovered that there was a roof over this building and garden and town. A great dome of steel and glass, several hundred feet high, so it seemed, and miles in extent. I looked through glass upon Lake Champlain; and though it was almost summer, and I was warm in my sleeveless shirt, the lake was a sheet of solid ice and an island in the distance was buried under great masses of snow!

"Did you say it was May twenty-second?" I demanded.

Lothrop nodded.

"But the snow? The ice?"

"Outside our hothouse it is always like that," he said gravely.

"I've been on Lake Champlain in summer. This is somewhere else."

"No. Professor Ditmar told you the world had changed."

"It certainly has," I muttered slowly. "How do you heat this huge enclosure?"

"We keep it at summer temperature by our atmosphere, which contains a solution of Jobian gas."

"I—I guess I've got an awful lot to learn," I sighed.

"You can't pick up a hundred years in a few minutes, Mr. Putnam. Do you mind walking close to the ropes and permitting the people to see you?"

"I'm in your hands, professor."

He conducted me toward the foot of the

garden where a dozen people were seated inside the ropes. One of them, a man of about sixty, sat upon a high-backed chair on a low platform. A gray-haired, attractive woman sat beside him.

"That is President Ames of the Putnam Community," said Lothrop. But I didn't hear him. I was running toward a young woman who was standing at the edge of the platform.

"Ruth!" I shouted. "Oh, Ruth, they told me you were dead!"

Ruth Reynolds gazed at me with wide eyes. She turned pale. She rose and suddenly, bursting into tears, she turned and ran toward the roped-off multitude, stooped under the rope and disappeared in the crowd.

Lothrop grasped my arm.

"Steady," he said. "That was my sister Marjorie. She is only nineteen years old."

"Oh, my God!" I groaned. For a second I had believed that I was the victim of a gigantic and wicked hoax. But it was all true. "Ruth" wasn't Ruth. This girl was her great-granddaughter. Things grew black. The faces of the president of the Putnam Community and his suite vanished. I felt myself falling.

WHEN I returned to consciousness, I lay in a soft bed in a queerly decorated room. A young woman sat beside me. She wore gym clothes as I did and as had Ruth's lovely descendant and also the president of the Putnam Community.

"You are going to be all right, now," she said. "I'll call Professor Ditmar."

She left the room and almost instantly the professor entered.

"I have been reprimanded for permitting you to present yourself before the people without first informing you of the existing state of affairs," he said. "It was because your impetuosity carried us away. Please forgive me."

"It's all right," I said sadly. "I scared that child. Imagine having a man of a hundred and twenty-eight years, try to embrace her."

"Your actual age, my friend, is twenty-nine. You have lived a hundred years in one year both physically and mentally. Don't be obsessed with an idea that you are a centenarian. . . . It is absolutely necessary that I tell you some of the things which have occurred since your trance began."

"Shoot," I consented glumly.

"In the first place, the Putnam Community owes its existence to you."

"How can that be?"

"Your fortune was in the hands of trustees and in twenty years it amounted to about a hundred thousand dollars. It was used to build on the shores of Lake Champlain a chapel in which your glass tank should be preserved."

"Just a waste of money," I commented.

"You were moved from the Smithsonian Institution in nineteen seventy-two. Naturally a scientific community grew up here. Many famous scientists wished to observe you daily. A university was started, headed by Professor Liebel of Leipzig. It thrived until the Great Catastrophe."

"Meaning what?"

Professor Ditmar's face grew very grave.

"The collision with Swartzenberg's comet, which was first observed in nineteen fifty-two, and which approached the earth with unprecedented rapidity. It struck us in nineteen eighty-seven."

"Humph. Much of a shock?" It was impossible for me to take these revelations seriously.

"My friend, it destroyed the world as you knew it."

"Come, come, professor."

"When I say 'struck the earth,' I mean that its long gaseous tail engulfed our

globe and first polluted and then practically destroyed the earth's atmosphere."

He was so serious that I began to be impressed, but I was still rather incredulous.

"And how did people breathe?" I demanded.

"They didn't," he said gravely. "All but an infinitesimal fraction of the population of the world was destroyed . . . I know you find what I am telling you unbelievable."

"Well," I said, smiling, "your personality is all that puts it over."

"Two years before the comet struck us," he continued gravely, "Professor Walsingham of Putnam University predicted that our atmosphere would be poisoned by the gases from the comet and the population destroyed. Few believed him."

"Such predictions had been made before."

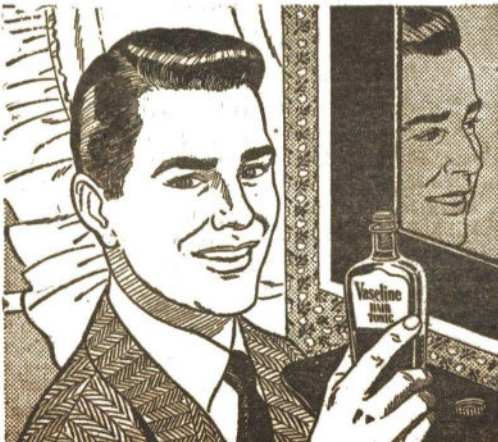
"Jonas Lothrop, however, son of the former Ruth Reynolds, and the richest man in the world, credited the prediction. The impression was that the poison in the air would vanish in a few days or a few weeks and those who managed to survive would again be able to breathe pure air."

"Lothrop came here with his mother, a widow whose only object in life was the protection of your inanimate body until its



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sleep of one hundred years was over. He conferred with Professor Walsingham and provided the funds for the greatest structure the world had ever seen. Work was immediately begun upon what we call our dome. It is a square structure one mile on each side and three hundred feet high in the center. Ten thousand men worked night and day for eighteen months in erecting it while the whole world jeered.

"One thousand persons were invited by Lothrop to spend a few weeks in his enclosure and all of them accepted. They included many eminent scientists, hundreds of people prominent in all walks of life, his friends and their families. Your—shall I say, tomb?—was located in the exact center of the great covering of glass and steel.

"As the time came when the comet filled the sky, the world took fright and thousands of people rushed here and demanded admittance. Lothrop received a cordon of troops from the government and it was necessary to fire upon the mobs to keep them away. The comet was due to collide with the earth on September fourteenth, and it is probable that the place would have been rushed and perhaps destroyed had not its gases overwhelmed the world three days earlier.

"There were fifty thousand people outside the enclosure, held at bay by the machine guns of a thousand troops, when the guests of Jonas Lothrop went to bed upon the night of September eleventh. When they awoke, the plains without were covered with dead. There was not a single survivor, even among the troops. But thanks to the machinery for manufacturing pure air, all within the structure were in perfect health. The Lothrop radio worked all day without receiving a single response. Apparently the poisonous gases of the comet had depopulated the world."

I was tremendously impressed, but still a trifle incredulous.

"Was it much of a shock when the thing struck us?" I demanded.

"There was no shock. Apparently the comet was not a solid body. Food had been stored for two thousand people for one year; such was the foresight of Mr. Lothrop. A herd of cattle, pigs and sheep was in this enclosure."

"A modern Noah, eh?"

"One might say so. Tests were made daily and it was found that the gases from the comet had eaten away most of the earth's envelope of air, as a result of which there came a great cold. You un-

derstand that the sun makes heat by passing through the atmosphere."

"I'm afraid I don't know much about such things," I admitted.

"In this emergency Professor Walsingham, who had been experimenting for years with Professor Judkins' gas, discovered that by mixing a small quantity of it in a diluted form with air, it supplied the lacking quality of heat. Immediately tests were made. It was found that the gas had no deleterious effects upon the lungs, and the problem of survival was solved. Thanks to the gas, a summer temperature was achieved within the dome, though ice and snow formed outside, even in midsummer."

"I am to believe, then," I said grimly, "that the only people in the world are those living in this hothouse?"

"There was a group which copied Lothrop's enclosure upon a much smaller scale in Los Angeles. We heard from them by radio and supplied them with the formula of Jobian gas, which enabled them to survive until twenty years ago. They were wiped out, we fear by the monsters."

"Monsters?"

"It seems there were survivors of the Great Catastrophe outside the scientific communities. Apparently certain animals and men managed to breathe the polluted air and withstand the cold and apparently they thrive on the present exceedingly rarefied atmosphere. Our last radio message from Los Angeles stated that they were being attacked by a horde of horrible creatures."

"You said you had supplies for a year. All this happened sixty-five years ago—if it isn't a fairy tale or a dream."

"We are vegetarians. We grow what we need inside our enclosure by intensive methods. Nothing grows outside, of course. We occasionally see strange animals, but they are almost impossible to catch, encumbered as we are by our insulated costumes and heavy breathing apparatus."

"Then you can go out if you like?"

"Oh, yes, though it is twenty years since explorers have gone any distance."

"Why do you call this the Putnam Community?"

He smiled. "It was named after you, of course, as a compliment to Ruth Lothrop, who died here in nineteen ninety-five."

"Dear Ruth," I murmured.

WHEN the professor had gone I fell into a curious mood. I could no longer have any doubt of the truth of the statements of Professor Ditmar, and, overlook-

ing my own doom, I boiled with satisfaction at the thought of how madly mistaken Professor Judkins had been in his estimate of the Twenty-first Century. Science had shot its bolt. A few survivors of the civilization I had known in 1951 clung to life, living like plants in hothouses, in a cold, dead world. A pale, anaemic race of weaklings these were, though they were kindly and intelligent, and there was one beautiful girl among them—more, no doubt, but I had only looked at one.

Then, too, there were virile things outside, white savages of some sort who had lived on despite poison and temperatures of a hundred below zero. Sooner or later they would break through the glass and end this artificial preservation of helpless creatures. I hoped it would be sooner.

What kind of life would this be for me? I loved hunting and fishing. I loved the bustle and turmoil of business, the uproar and scurry of a great city. I loved theaters, airplanes, prizefights, sea bathing, a canoe on a river, voyages across the Atlantic. Life as it used to be was sweet. Here I was caged like a confounded canary!

I was young. Assuming my body had not aged more than one year in a hundred, I might exist fifty years among these hothouse bipeds.

New York! It was incredible that the great city had ceased to be, and with it had gone Chicago and London and Paris. The world as I knew it had perished and only this gas-nourished parody upon civilization was left. It was too damned bad that Job Judkins had ever invented his beneficent gas. Much better to have let the whole human race go by the board, in which case nobody would ever have brought me back to life.

While I was a sick man mentally, there were absolutely no bad physical effects from my hundred years' immersion in Jobian gas, and my collapse at sight of Marjorie Lothrop was due to shock at realization that the girl I thought to be my sweetheart was her great-granddaughter.

A little while after Ditmar left I rose from my bed, opened the door of the chamber and emerged in a small living room in what seemed to be a cottage. My nurse was lolling on a couch and in a low chair beside her was the young girl, Marjorie, who had run away from me.

The nurse jumped up at once and came to me with a look of concern on her comely face.

"Are you feeling well?" she asked anxiously.

"Perfectly," I said with a smile.

"Won't you introduce your friend and yourself?"

Ruth—no, Marjorie—was smiling at me frankly and interestedly.

"I am Mrs. Lothrop," said the nurse. "You have met my husband who is Professor Ditmar's associate. And this is my sister-in-law."

Marjorie came toward me with a hand cordially outstretched.

"I am so sorry I behaved like an idiot this morning," she said. "I know I look very much like Ruth Reynolds and your romance with her is familiar to all members of the community. Will you forgive me?"

"I have to ask you to forgive me for making a scene," I replied. "My child, you are almost exactly like your ancestor except that her eyes were gray and yours are brown."

"Won't you sit down, Mr. Putnam?" asked Mrs. Lothrop. "You are our guest until the Council makes arrangements for your exact place in the community."

Mrs. Lothrop was a sweet but rather plain young woman with dark hair and a boyish figure. It was odd to be sitting in a drawing room with two well-bred young women arrayed in costumes more suitable for the beach than the parlor, and I was still uncomfortable in garments which in my day were styled athletic underwear.

"Mr. Putnam," asked Marjorie eagerly, "I've wondered all my life—would you mind telling me if you dreamed while you slept? There is one sect among us which believes that your soul was in heaven and that it was a crime to bring you back to life."

"Miss Lothrop," I said gravely, "one hundred years ago Professor Judkins gave me a whiff of what he called a new perfume. The next I remember is finding myself lying on a table, with your brother and Professor Ditmar bending over me. I thought I had been unconscious a few minutes. I'm sorry I have nothing interesting to tell."

"My brother has told us of your grief when you found that my—er—your fiancée—"

The girl's eyes filled with tears and she could not go on.

"It was pretty horrible," I confessed. "I'm going to try to think only of the present."

"We are conversant, of course, with

events of a hundred years ago," said Mrs. Lothrop. "The Palace Library contains thousands of books written in your epoch. We call it the Golden Age," she added with a sigh.

"I love to read about New York," declared Marjorie. "You'll find things very different nowadays, Mr. Putnam."

She was so like Ruth. The animation of her flowerlike face when she spoke, the pretty way she weaved her little hands, the tone of her voice, the sparkle in her eye. She was so like Ruth yet she lacked the extraordinary vivacity and energy of my lost fiancée.

"Tell me something of your community, Mrs. Lothrop," I requested. "Professor Dittmar harrowed me with the horrors of the past century and I stopped him before he reached existing conditions. From what I saw, you live in a beautiful little—er—"

"Hothouse," finished Marjorie. "I hate it."

"**W**ELL," said Mrs. Lothrop with a warning glance at Marjorie, "our hothouse, as the child calls it, is one mile square. It contains five hundred houses of the bungalow type, the museum, the Palace, and the street of shops. We have a population of three thousand which is the limit that the community can support. We are governed by a Council of which President Ames is the executive officer. Theoretically we are a socialistic community, but you will learn about that in due time.

"We are compelled by law to devote six hours a day to such labor as is assigned to us. Two-thirds of the population are food-producers, the other third manufacture, sell, do housework, serve as scientific workers or police or perform such special duties as the Council sees fit."

"That is certainly socialism."

"Circumstances forced it upon us. Each person receives a daily ration and draws clothing, medicine and whatever is needed from the community chest."

"Well, that's the ideal of great thinkers from Plato down to Bernard Shaw," was my comment.

"It's horrible," declared Marjorie.

"Be silent, child. We have recreations. There is a theater, weekly dances, certain public games, a pleasant family life."

"Films? Television?"

"Oh, no. Such things went out with the Great Catastrophe."

"There isn't even love any more," declared Marjorie. "We draw our husbands

by lot, Mr. Putnam. I come up in next month's lottery."

She burst into weak sobs, covered her face with her hands, and for the second time in our brief acquaintance fled in tears.

"Why, that's abominable!" I exclaimed angrily. "Mrs. Lothrop, it isn't possible."

Marjorie's sister-in-law lowered her voice. "I must warn you, Mr. Putnam, to exercise the utmost discretion. Many things here will seem strange to you. You must hide your thoughts, refrain from criticism. Your very existence violates our laws because you bring our population to three thousand and one."

"But I thought—you said—Isn't it a free socialistic community?"

She approached me and whispered in my ear:

"It is a hateful tyranny! Now let us talk of something else."

"Well," I said after a moment, "I don't understand how you keep healthy. My impression was that the air was composed of nitrogen and oxygen. I don't know how you can mix it with other stuff and still breathe."

"There were always other gases in atmosphere. For example, argon, and water vapor and even ammonia. The Jobian gas, present in minute quantities, heats the air and, as we have been breathing it for more than half a century, it is evident that it is beneficent. Otherwise, we should all have perished of asphyxiation long, long ago."

"Like Judkins' fish," I added.

Professor Dittmar and Professor Lothrop entering at this moment, interrupted our conversation.

"Well, well," said Dittmar cordially, "so you are yourself again. I hope the ladies have entertained you."

"And astounded me," I said smiling. "I'm learning more about the new world every second."

"Laura," said Lothrop anxiously, "I hope you haven't been indiscreet."

"If I have been," she replied, "I am confident I can rely upon Mr. Putnam's discretion."

"You are invited to dine with the Council to-night," said Dittmar, "and you are expected to make abdication."

"I don't understand."

Dittmar seated himself. I had a strange craving, had been bothered by it for a quarter of an hour and now identified it.

"I wonder if I might have a cigarette," I demanded.

The three good people laughed simultaneously.

"Tobacco, my friend, no longer exists," declared Ditmar. "And we have no substitute for it."

My face fell. "That's extremely bad news. . . . What did you mean by my abdication?"

Ditmar addressed the others. "Leave us please. I must speak privately to Mr. Putnam."

Lothrop and his wife retired, and then Ditmar seated himself in a chair beside me and began to speak in a low tone.

"The land upon which this community is built was purchased with your money and was held in trust for your awakening. Of course property rights vanished with the Catastrophe, and this land would be as valueless as the rest of the waste spaces if it were not for the improvements made by the Putnam Community. However, Jonas Lothrop was your chief trustee, and he forced the members of the community to agree that your rights should be respected.

"Furthermore, Professor Judkins, in his will, left to you the proprietorship of his scientific discoveries, including Jobian gas. Thus you own the air we breathe."

"But it's absurd!"

"So the Council now believes. In a burst of gratitude, your ownership in the gas was confirmed by those whose lives it saved, and it is so stated in the constitution of nineteen ninety. You understand that the general impression was that you would never come back to life. In making you the proprietor of the community, the founders thought that they had thus prevented any attempt in the future to establish proprietary rights by unscrupulous persons. I may say, incidentally, that Lothrop and myself were forbidden to make the injection which brought you back to life, and we are in great trouble."

"But the whole population assembled to see me."

"Naturally, since for generations they have been looking forward to this day. President Ames expected that we would come forth and announce that you could not be resuscitated."

"Well," I said slowly, "I suspect you did me an ill service. Why didn't you obey orders?"

"We are scientists," replied Ditmar. "You had lain in coma for a hundred years while the world crashed about you. You were the greatest experiment in human history. We would have been false to everything we held dear if we had not ascertained whether human life could be restored after a century of suspension. It was worth our lives to prove that Professor Judkins was not in error."

"Shake," I commanded. "You're an old-fashioned scientist. Now you say the idea is that I abdicate my rights in the land and the air. Well, they are no good to me. You can breathe all the Jobian gas you want to."

"I—I hoped that you would insist upon your rights," muttered Ditmar. "But actually you have no choice."

"Am I correct in assuming that your Council is rather high-handed?" I asked him.

"The Council is a name," replied the professor. "John Ames, in all save title, is an absolute monarch. I put myself in your hands, Mr. Putnam. A party in our community has been foolishly hoping that your resuscitation would mark the dawn of our liberties."

"But what can I do?"

"Nothing, of course. They are armed, and we are not. You are only one man. You must do what the Council tells you to do."

"Suppose I refuse to abdicate these ridiculous rights. What happens?"

"By law, our community cannot exceed three thousand persons. Children born in excess of that number are put outside.

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"The devil you say! Look here, professor, you don't mean to tell me that such methods are in vogue in the Twenty-first Century?"

"Arrangements have been made to put the child outside at nightfall, but if you refuse to abdicate I am asked to tell you that the child will be preserved instead of you."

"**W**HAT do you mean by 'being put outside'? Murdered?" I asked.

"You will be pushed through a door in the inclosure and exposed to death by cold and strangulation in the outer world."

"Humanity hasn't become any sweeter in a hundred years, I perceive," I said bitterly.

"Executions of this sort are extremely rare. Frankly, I don't think the Council dares to take any such action. We are downtrodden and oppressed people, but I am sure there would be a rising. The people are celebrating your 'resurrection' at this minute."

"What form does this tyranny take?" I asked him then.

"Practical slavery. We are supposedly a social community. Actually we are enslaved for the benefit of a few score of families who do no work and enjoy the fruits of our labor. We are serfs."

"We are allowed hardly enough to eat; we live in congested quarters in small dwellings; we are spied upon, and for the least infraction of orders are put to punishment labor. Meanwhile the Palace crowd feast and roister."

"But surely you, a professor—"

"My standing is no better than a day laborer, Mr. Putnam. We are serfs, though theoretically all within the Dome are equal members of the community."

"How long has this sort of thing been going on?"

"About a generation. Ames' father began it. For twenty years the son has ruled over us with an iron hand."

"Miss Lothrop said something about a marriage lottery."

He nodded. "Women become marriageable at the age of nineteen and men at the age of twenty-five. Names of bachelors and maidens are placed on a list and are drawn out monthly and mated according to lot."

"Damn it, how did such barbarism ever begin."

"About twenty years ago there was a period of great despair, and men and women refused to marry and have children. They wanted the race to die out. Compulsory marriage began then, and the drawing method was introduced as the fairest. Originally persons dissatisfied with their allotted partners might exchange by mutual consent, but that didn't work well and was abandoned."

"And you call yourselves civilized!" I snorted.

"I make no such claim. In another hundred years we shall have sunk completely into barbarism. Already knowledge is dying. We have very few skilled artisans nowadays. If a breach is ever made in our inclosure we shall not be able to repair it, and the community will perish."

"But marrying a girl like Miss Lothrop by means of a lottery—"

"A lottery which isn't even fair," Ditmar snapped. "The ruling clique manipulates it. Marjorie will be drawn by John Ames, Third. He wants her. Everybody knows that, and she despises him."

"Maybe I'll have something to say about it," I muttered. "When do I meet this despot of yours?"

"In two hours. Dinner must be over by dark. We have no artificial light."

"But the room in which I awakened was lighted."

"By diffused rays of the sun. Electricity was abandoned twenty-five years ago. We rise at dawn and go to bed at dark."

Conducted by Professor Ditmar and Lothrop, I left their cottage two hours later. They lived in a small cement house one story high which was located in a street only a dozen feet wide, cement paved and lined with similar structures.

We walked to the main street, which was twenty feet wide and lined by one-story shops. There were no sidewalks, as there were no vehicles. We converged to the center of the town, a hundred yards distant, and debouched upon the plaza where I had made my appearance earlier in the day.

During our progress we encountered scores of people who stared at me curiously. Some of them spoke to my escorts. Men and women alike were clad in white sleeveless shirts and white shorts and wore either sandals or slippers. I observed that the men were uniformly small of stature like both Ditmar and Reynolds, and their faces were amiable but weak. Some of the

women were very pretty, and I saw no ugly women.

In the center of the plaza was a stone building about forty feet high which resembled a small town public library of my day. It had been my living tomb, erected at the suggestion of my long dead sweetheart, Ruth Reynolds. The vault of the steel and glass inclosure passed above its pinnacle at a height of a couple of hundred feet.

On the opposite side of the square was a large building, obviously old and suggesting a university structure. It had, they informed me, been the administration building of Putnam University. The other buildings had been razed long ago to obtain building material for the town. The Administration Building was now the Palace of the community, where resided President Ames and the Council.

We ascended gray stone steps, and as we arrived before the great door, it opened and a man clad in blue livery, left over from my own time, bowed us in.

"This way, gentlemen," he invited.

We followed him into what had once been a large office, but which was now a drawing-room. It was furnished with a Persian carpet, and with walnut chairs and divans of the type familiar to my youth. An ebony concert grand piano stood in a corner, several good paintings hung on the walls, and the room had an air of refinement tinged with a trifle of decay.

"We will leave you here," said Professor Ditmar. "We are not invited to dine with the Council. Mr. Putnam"—his voice broke—"you are our last hope. And I fear there is not the slightest chance for us—or for you."

Slowly and sorrowfully the two scientists walked out, leaving me to face the rulers of this queer survival of civilization.

CHAPTER II

DESPTS OF A DYING WORLD

I WAS alone only a few minutes when there entered a man in evening dress, by which I mean the dinner jacket, white starched shirt, high collar, black tie and black trousers of 1950. I had but a glimpse of him in the morning when I had made a spectacle of myself. I saw now that he was what we used to call a Boston type; tall, spare, long of face, with a firm jaw, a prominent nose, a high forehead, hard eyes of very light blue, a tight mouth

and a light gray mustache. His hair was iron gray.

"You are welcome, Mr. Putnam," he said in a suave tone and without smiling. "As President of Putnam Community I extend to you the greetings of our people and congratulate you upon your revival."

Had I not been forewarned I should have been taken in by his manner. He made the impression of a scholarly gentleman and it was hard to believe that he was a brutal tyrant.

"Thank you, sir. I must apologize for my conduct when I first came back to life—"

"It has been explained and forgotten," said Ames suavely. "I am looking forward, sir, to long chats with you about the world as it was in your day."

"I have no difficulty imagining myself back in 1950 when I look around this room and see you in dinner clothes. I admit being uncomfortable in these sketchy garments."

"Unfortunately there are only five of these costumes left to us and they are worn by members of the Council upon important occasions. We have found what you are wearing practical for all ordinary events. I wear them myself most of the time. Sit down, sir."

We seated ourselves and again I felt keenly the lack of the hospitable cigarette.

"I was born after the Great Catastrophe," Ames said, "but I grew up among people who knew the world as it was. I have no trouble understanding the bewilderment in which you find yourself. As you know, this Community bears your name. As President of the Council I manage affairs in your interests. Ditmar no doubt has told you that."

"I am afraid not, sir," I said discreetly. "I was too much interested in details of what had happened in the world at large."

"Well, I thought he might have done so. We are three thousand people forced by fate to live under glass in an area of one square mile. It will be a long time before you are fully conversant with all our circumstances or understand our enormous difficulties. Have you given any thought to your status among us?"

"I can't say that I have."

"You will be unusually favored," he said with a ghost of a smile. "For at least a year you will have no duties save one which will interest you greatly. Our Community would like very much to have you write a history of your times and your personal impressions of the—to us—historic characters with whom you knew."

"I'm not an experienced writer, sir."

"What we want are first-hand impressions. As we are situated, we live only in the past. Our own history during the past half century is one of profound peace and little event. We are, perforce, a little community practicing pure socialism. All within the Dome are free and equal, each devotes all his efforts to the common weal."

He clapped his hands suddenly. "Ask my family and the members of the Council to enter," he commanded the liveried servant.

I rose as Mrs. Ames entered the room. She wore an evening dress of yellow silk which was obviously ancient, and cut quite low. Around her neck was a pearl necklace. She seemed to be about fifty years old, but she was well preserved.

She came to me with both hands outstretched.

"You marvelous man!" she exclaimed. "How we are yearning to talk to you and hear all about your experience. You certainly do not look one hundred and twenty-eight years old."

I winced, though my years sat lightly upon me.

"My son," said Ames dryly. I turned to a young man arrayed like myself in white shorts. He was about twenty-five or six. He was about five feet seven in height. His eyes were black, his nose was prominent like his father's, his skin was sallow and his mouth self-indulgent and brutal. His mother had been a handsome woman but he inherited none of her good looks. He was low-browed and arrogant, and he looked me over superciliously.

"So you finally got out of your box," he said with a sneer.

I ignored him and turned to the members of the Council who were in ill-fitting evening clothes and looked as uncomfortable in them as waiters.

"Mr. Putnam, these are Messrs. Bolton, Holmes, Murphy, and Stein," said the president of the Council. I shook hands with each in turn.

I liked Murphy and Stein. Bolton and Holmes were on the stripe of President Ames, cold, unsympathetic, and obviously his creatures.

"Where is Helen?" demanded the President. "Oh, you are late, my dear."

The girl who entered was striking. She wore an evening dress of red satin with the short skirt of 1950 or '52. Her arms were bare and the gown was cut very low. Her hair was jet black, her skin dazzlingly white, her eyes were greenish blue, her

nose rather broad and her lips full and voluptuous. When she smiled she was very beautiful. In repose her face was sullen.

"My daughter, Helen," said Ames. "This is Mr. Putnam, my dear."

"I suspected as much," she replied with a laugh. "I've seen you often in your glass case, Mr. Putnam. We don't grow arms and thighs like yours in two thousand fifty-one."

"Helen, you are indiscreet," chided her mother.

"Mr. Putnam ought to come up at the next drawing, father," said the girl. "What a prize he will be!"

"Be silent, Helen," commanded her father. "My dear, take Mr. Putnam into the dining room. Everything is ready."

I offered Mrs. Ames my arm and we passed through a door which a servant threw open into a long, narrow refectory. The table was set for nine and was resplendent in napery and silver. Ames seated himself at the head. He placed me at his right and Mrs. Ames sat at my right. Helen sat opposite her father's left, the son was beyond his mother, and the members of the Council occupied the other places.

To my surprise an excellent white wine was served and the food was beyond my expectations because it included a roast chicken.

Evidently vegetarianism was not practiced by the rulers of the Community.

Conversation was chiefly a matter of questioning me about my life in the old world, and particularly regarding the personality of Professor Job Judkins. Helen embarrassed me by asking questions about Ruth Reynolds and how much she had looked like Marjorie Lothrop. Although eager to secure information regarding present affairs in the community, I had no opportunity.

THE dinner was exceedingly satisfactory but I missed coffee at the end of it.

"At least," said Ames, when I asked him if it was impossible to grow the coffee plant, "this community lacks the drugs which cursed humanity of old. Tea, coffee and tobacco cannot be produced here. They were harmful and we do not regret their passing."

"I observe that you still have alcoholic beverages."

"A very small quantity of wine is produced and used only at state functions. The common people drink water. It is best for them."

"Have you springs or wells?"

"They have long since run dry," he replied. "Fortunately there is an unlimited supply of ice and snow without our enclosure which provides for irrigation and drinking."

The servants were already clearing things away when the President rose.

"If my family will excuse me, we will adjourn to the Council Chamber," he said. "Come, gentlemen."

I made my adieux to the ladies. As I shook hands with Helen she whispered, "Don't let them bully you. Stand up for your rights."

We entered a small room which no doubt had once been the board room of the university. The original round table was there and big chairs, whose leather was in bad shape. The five men seated themselves at the table and I was asked to take a chair at one side.

"Now, Mr. Putnam, to business," said Ames brusquely.

"I'm ready, sir."

"Your presence here, while welcome, is in a way embarrassing. I shall be frank with you. The founders of our Community were rather sentimental. Thanks to the Jobian gas which was your property, their existence in a barren world was made possible. They had before them the menace, always present in a democracy, that the wrong kind of person would secure control of the Community, so they invested all rights in a man who lay in a glass case in a condition which might or might not be death.

The land upon which the great Dome was erected belonged to you under old property laws which no longer prevail. They confirmed your right to it in our constitution, heedless of the situation which would arise should you be restored to life at the end of the period provided for by Professor Judkins. May I ask what your attitude is going to be?"

"Friendly," I said, meeting his gaze squarely.

"I am glad to hear that. I expect that in you we shall have a strong supporter of the government. However, there is a difficulty. By an Order in Council of Two Thousand and Thirty, the population is strictly limited to three thousand souls. You lift it above the legal limit. Unfortunately a child was born this morning, but the elimination of this child will reduce the population again to the legal three thousand."

"You mean that the child may be murdered?" I asked bluntly.

He looked annoyed. "I said 'eliminated.'" "Well," I replied, "the council is in session. I suggest that you lift the limit to three thousand and one."

"Impossible," he snapped.

"Gentlemen," I said, "you have brought me here to make some sort of concessions. That is obvious. I refuse to discuss anything unless you pass such an order."

"Indeed?" said Ames coldly. "It is possible, Mr. Putnam, to eliminate you."

"Very good. I agree. I certainly didn't want to wake up in your two-penny world. This newborn child will never know another. I remember things as they used to be."

Murphy sighed. "In the Golden Age. . . I am in favor of the new order in Council, Mr. President."

Ames was silent. His eyes were malevolent.

"Eliminate me, Mr. Ames," I urged. "It will settle your problem. And, from what I have seen of the spinelessness of the Community, you might get away with it."

"They are celebrating his coming all over town," said Stein. "I suggest we pass the order proposed by Mr. Putnam."

"Very well," said Ames, making his decision. "Mr. Holmes, put that order through. It is moved, seconded, and carried."

Tension in the Council relaxed. It was my first victory.

"Now, Mr. Putnam," said the President, "your signature to this document is required. It provides that in return for your establishment as a member of the Community, you make over to the Council of Putnam Community your ownership of Jobian gas and the land upon which the Community stands."

"Let me see it," I requested. I ran my eyes over two sheets of foolscap written in longhand.

"I'll have to take this under advisement," I said blandly. "It seems to be what used to be known as a unilateral contract, entirely one-sided."

"It will hold in the courts of this Community," said Ames grimly. "Sign it immediately, please."

I stiffened at his dictatorial tone. "What happens if I don't?"

"You will be treated as a rebel and put outside," he asserted.

"I have already told you that I would as soon be dead as live in this tomb you call a Community. I refuse to sign. Put me outside."

There was consternation in the Council.

Holmes rose, went around the table to Ames and whispered in his ear.

"He has defied me," said Ames aloud. More whispering.

I swept my eyes around the table. "Men, listen to me," I commanded. "So far as I know, Mr. Ames is an admirable executive and the government is just. I have some slight appreciation of the problem of keeping three thousand people in order, in a space so congested. I have no desire to take over a job which is probably too big for me. I have to live here and I prefer order to chaos. It may be that I shall decide to turn over to you the rights which you admit are vested in me, but I am signing nothing now.

"No doubt you have the power to eliminate me just as you were going to murder that baby. My position is that I invite death. You can do your worst! I think you are all dead and you don't know it. If my life depends upon signing that document to-day, take my life. I won't lift a finger to defend myself. The next move is up to you."

"They won't kill you, my boy," said Murphy. "The people—"

"Be silent, Murphy," rasped Ames. "Mr. Putnam, there is something to be said for your point of view. You must understand that my government has power to carry out any measure it sees fit, but I have no desire to be unjust. It is intolerable that this Community should be your private possession—"

"Why? It seems to be yours at present."

Murphy had hard work suppressing a chuckle.

"I act legally through the Council," Ames retorted. "As I was saying, I have no doubt that when you are familiar with conditions you will realize that my methods are the only ones possible. Your abdication is necessary; but you will come to recognize that yourself. Now I am going to house you in the palace for a few days—"

"Imprison me? Is that what you mean?"

"Certainly not. You will be free to come and go. You will be escorted all over our limited territory and given every opportunity to familiarize yourself with conditions, and in one week from to-day you will freely sign over your alleged rights and accept an honored position among us."

"Well, that seems perfectly fair."

"Very good. The meeting stands adjourned. Come with me."

He led me to an upper floor, conducted

me to a chamber, shook hands cordially and advised me to retire within half an hour.

"Darkness will be upon you if you linger," he said. "We rise at dawn and retire at nightfall, and thus have no artificial light problem."

I found myself in a square chamber with two large windows which looked down upon the plaza. There was an old-fashioned double bed in the room, a dresser with a cracked mirror, and upon the floor there was a small oriental rug. All relics of before the Catastrophe. It was twilight outside.

I seated myself upon a rickety chair and reviewed events of the most exciting day of my life. I was already beginning to take an interest in the world of 2051. I had friends. Ditmar, Lothrop, his wife and his sister I considered my friends. Helen Ames was the sort who raised ructions in the days of old—since the days of Helen of Troy. I wondered what kind of ructions she could raise in this staid community.

I hated Ames. The fellow was cold-blooded, selfish, arrogant and ruthless. He had seized power in this remnant of civilization and proposed to hold it. He would stand no more nonsense from me than he had to. Yet I had been able to bluff him and his Council to a standstill. It was evident that the people of the hot-house were not so completely cowed that he could murder the man who had slept a hundred years, and get away with it.

What the deuce had Helen meant when she said I must be put in the next list? . . .

That fellow Murphy wasn't hand in glove with Ames. Something might be done with him and possibly Stein. . . . The evening clothes were rather funny. . . . Ames and his Council lived well; about as well as any rich man in 1950. Ditmar said that he and his class hardly received enough to eat. Well, maybe I could change all this sort of thing.

It was getting dark slowly. I undressed and climbed into bed. It was a good bed. Although I had slept a century, I was sleepy. And so ended my first day in the year 2051.

DAYLIGHT woke me. I had slept heavily for eight or nine hours and felt refreshed. Search revealed a bathroom behind one of the doors which opened on the left. It was a white tiled bath, its fixtures and appointments differing in no respect from those to which I had been accustomed. The tiles were cracked and

chipped, however, and the water ran unsteadily through the pipes. I thought the plumbing was the original installation which had been repaired from time to time.

After resuming my sleeveless shirt and shorts I realized that I should shave and, finding an electric bell beside the bed, I pressed it.

In five minutes a servant entered bearing a tray which contained an apple and a glass of water.

"Is that all I have for breakfast?" I asked in dismay.

"It's the regular breakfast ration, sir," he replied.

I would have bet a hundred to one that Ames and his tribe did better, but I did not speak my thought. "How about shaving things?" I demanded.

"I will fetch them, sir."

He returned almost immediately with soap and an old-fashioned safety razor.

"No shaving cream?"

"I don't understand, sir. Here is soap."

I shaved. It was evident that this community was sliding backward. One after another the conveniences of the old civilization had given out, and their plan of life had stifled invention, as the advocates of the capitalistic system had always predicted of a communistic organization. I began to experience the zest of a discoverer and explorer in this new world. Having eaten my apple and drunk my glass of water, I opened my door, descended to the ground floor and finding a servant seated in the hall asked him to open the front door.

"I cannot do that without orders, sir."

"But I was told I could come and go freely."

"Good morning," said a cheerful soprano voice. Helen Ames was coming down the stairs. In her trim white costume, her superb figure was more evident than it had appeared in evening dress last night, and her cheeks were pink and fresh and her black eyes were glowing. I had already observed that her smile was radiant.

"Good morning, Miss Ames. I am anxious to go out of doors."

"Why not?" she replied. "You haven't seen much of our little country yet. Would you like me to take you about?"

"I would appreciate it very much."

She nodded to the servant, who unlocked the big front door, and we went forth. Yesterday I was in a condition of bewilderment; now all my faculties were working and I saw much that had escaped me.

The little plaza was circular, and the streets of the town opened from it like spokes of a wheel. They ran only a hundred yards and then feathered into open country. I marveled again at the great glass and steel framework. In my time there was no structure of such magnitude in the world.

"I can't conceive how that covering was ever built!" I exclaimed.

"Oh, we don't think anything about it. I suppose you didn't devote much thought to the heavens in your day."

"I can't understand where they got the steel and the glass."

"Jonas Lothrop purchased it and had it brought here. Still, it was a job for fifty thousand men working ten years. Let's see, you went into your trance in nineteen fifty-one. I believe they had made great advances in production of steel and glass by the time of the Great Catastrophe. You want to remember that most of the great minds of America were in the group which founded this community. Which way do you want to go?"

"You lead," I requested.

We crossed the plaza. It contained a number of peach and pear trees, was crisscrossed by gravel paths, and had stretches of well kept lawns. There were a number of pretty flower beds, mostly tulips.

We entered a street opposite, passed rows of small one-story houses jammed close together, and in a few minutes arrived in a region made up of kitchen gardens.

We had met nobody on the street, but we found the gardens thronged with men, women, and children in the business of weeding and hoeing and caring for the growing things.

"This is the life of Putnam Community," she said bitterly. "Working like mad to grow things to eat so we can go on working like mad."

"Even so, I can't understand how you can produce enough."

"All the thought of the nation has been devoted for generations to making six turnips grow where nature intended to produce one. However, we are overpopulated. Father has been considering for several years a plan to reduce the population to two thousand but he hasn't dared to put it in force."

"The other thousand might object," I said, smiling wryly.

"Oh, they haven't much spirit, poor things. Beyond the fields, in this direction, are the fruit orchards. We have

found a way to get two crops a year of temperate zone fruits. We get two crops of wheat as they did in California in the old days, and we have succeeded in growing cotton."

"Have you any cattle?"

"A hundred head. Originally we had sheep but hadn't grass enough to feed them. Fortunately we don't need wool in this climate."

"I am interested in your method of producing Jobian gas."

"The Laboratory is on the other side of town. The process is a secret known only to the Council and the Superintendent of the Plant. While we control the supply of gas, we are not likely to have trouble with these swine."

"Really, Miss Ames," I said. "Do you so name your fellow socialists?"

She laughed shortly. "You are a very intelligent man, Mr. Putnam. I have heard how you faced the Council last night. You must realize already that this is an absolute monarchy and my father is the king. I am the princess."

"More beautiful than old-fashioned princesses were wont to be."

"Do you really think so?" she asked eagerly.

"No question about it."

"A princess must marry," she said significantly. "And you are old enough to need a wife."

"About a century too old," I said, embarrassed.

"Nonsense. Your name and mine will go into the next list. I think we shall probably draw each other."

"You are referring to this marriage lottery? I think it is abominable."

"It would be if it weren't possible to control it," she replied boldly. "You are physically most unusual, Mr. Putnam. Were you notable for your strength in nineteen fifty?"

"I played football in my college days," I said.

"Well," she said candidly, "you are the first man I have ever seen that I wanted. I told father so last night."

"Miss Ames," I said, much troubled, "the day before yesterday, or so it seemed to me, I loved a girl very much. I am still mourning for her."

"I know," she replied unfeelingly. "She died an old woman about sixty years ago. You'll soon get over that."

"Well, I'm not over it yet and I am not going to be drawn in a lottery next month by any girl," I replied hotly.

"MY DEAR Mr. Putnam, you can't help yourself," she asserted. "You must realize that your position here is fraught with peril. We Ames do not propose to permit you to remain in this community unless you are closely allied with us and our interests are your interests."

"It was suggested last night that I might be eliminated," I said dryly.

"You stumped them by not caring whether you lived or died. Of course that was a pose."

"On the contrary. I consider the world into which I have come a very dreadful place. I prefer to be out of it."

"Marriage with me will cause you to change your mind. . . . What are you looking at?"

I was gazing across a field where I saw a mournful spectacle. Marjorie Lothrop, her brother and her sister-in-law and Professor Ditmar were all squatting along a row of potatoes busily weeding.

"I want to speak to my friends," I declared.

"No, no, it is forbidden to interrupt the people at their work."

"But young and delicate women—"

"It is healthful labor. Everybody takes his turn at it."

"When do you take your turn?" I asked significantly.

"I? How dare you? I, of course, am exempt."

"You'll find out I dare a lot, Miss Helen Ames. I wish to speak to my friends."

"You'll only increase their hours of labor if you do," she warned.

I hesitated. Marjorie looked up and I waved my hand to her. Immediately she bent her head over her potato row and ignored my salutation.

"She's a stupid little beast," commented Helen Ames.

"I beg to differ. I like Miss Lothrop."

"Well, you'll have to get over that," she said. "Come on."

"I don't understand why men of science are set to manual labor," I said angrily as I followed her.

Helen smiled. "You are responsible for that. For years the two professors have been assigned to the guardianship of your building, and to teaching. They are now being given a taste of what everybody else in our community has to do."

"Except the Ames family," I reminded her.

She tossed her head. "Our business is government."

"Well," I said guilefully, "that, of course,

is the most important business of all."

She smiled brightly. "Of course. We have our work, and it is not easy in a community seething with discontent."

"I have seen no evidence of force. Have you police or militia?"

"We have a hundred Guardians of the Peace," she informed me.

"Armed with machine guns, I suppose."

She grasped my arm. "Do you know how to make firearms?"

"No. I used to sell bonds for a living."

"There are a few revolvers and rifles in the community," she informed me. "The idealistic fools who founded it banished firearms and destroyed all information regarding their construction. Our weapons are sixty or seventy years old and father thinks they would be more dangerous to those who discharge them than to those at whom they are pointed. Besides, there is no ammunition."

"Still, if you have these weapons it ought to be easy to construct new ones."

"We have no mechanics worthy of the name. We can't even make steel any more. We are practically defenseless against the Monsters if they ever make up their minds to attack us."

"Then with what do you arm your guards?"

"They have swords and spears which are adequate enough to keep down these rabbits. Our control of the powerhouse which supplies the gas is really all we need."

We walked for an hour about the countryside. I had seen cultivation in Italy where fruit, grapes and vegetables were grown in tiers, and I found this system improved upon by the ingenuity of the Putnam farmers. They even had a small forest of oak trees from which a limited supply of wood for construction was available.

It appeared that the hothouse dwellers were very advanced in all that was essential to their needs, and the production of what they did not need had been completely abandoned generations before. For example they had a cement factory, a canning plant, a cotton mill, an electric plant for operation of their atmosphere factory, pottery works, and a small model dairy.

Years before they had a lighting system and a radio sending station, useless now since there was no one with whom to communicate. The fuel problem had forced the abandoning of electric light. As a matter of fact, for a small community, artificial lighting was not necessary. The Romans and Greeks of old had risen at dawn and retired at darkness, and thus dispensed with the necessity of illumination, though they made occasional use of torches and oil lamps, materials for which were not available here.

Aviation, of course, had perished with the destruction of the rest of the world, and the extreme cold resultant from the rarefaction of the atmosphere.

I was interested to learn from Helen that they still possessed insulated costumes, something like diving suits, which enabled them to make forays outside, though for years such expeditions had been abandoned except to procure ice for their water supply.

We circled the countryside and reentered the town by the same street down which we had gone—and then the Holmes incident occurred.

A YOUNG man came out of a shop and confronted us. He was nearly as tall as I, very blond, with blue eyes, a nose with a bump in it, and an exceedingly arrogant manner. He carried in his right hand a walking stick and he wore the customary abbreviated whites.

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"Good morning, Helen," he said brusquely. "So this is the reanimated mummy."

"Mind your manners," she retorted angrily. "Mr. Putnam, this young man is Horace Holmes, son of the member of the Council."

"Not very polite, this Mr. Holmes," I said, smiling at the girl and ignoring the man.

He lifted his eyebrows. "He speaks," he commented in apparent surprise. "A perfect automaton."

"I will not permit you to insult Mr. Putnam," she retorted.

"How does it happen that this gentleman isn't working in the fields?" I inquired. "Is he also exempt?"

"The families of the Council are all exempt," she informed me.

"That must be changed. This young man looks to me as though he could pull a lot of weeds," I said cheerfully. "And he doesn't look good for anything else."

"Why, damn your insolence!" he shouted. "I have a mind to chastise you."

"Horace!" exclaimed the girl. "You brought that upon yourself. Now permit us to pass."

"No, no," I replied. "I would like to see the young man chastise me. How do you propose to go about it, Mr. Holmes?"

"In this way," he cried, beside himself with rage, and he aimed a vicious blow at me with his stick.

Catching the stick in my left hand I drove forward with my right and planted my fist against the point of his prominent jaw. Naturally Mr. Holmes crashed to the ground, completely out, as they usually were when I hit 'em.

I became aware that a half dozen people, mostly women, were staring at us, white of face.

"What have you done, what have you done?" wailed the girl, who dropped on her knees beside the young idiot and lifted his head in her arms.

"Just knocked him out. He'll come to in a minute or less."

"You don't understand! To raise your hand against a member of the family of a Councilor is an offense punishable by elimination."

"This is a very pretty social democracy. I acted in self-defense."

I heard a low murmur from the spectators who immediately made off when Helen Ames glared at them.

"But he has a right to use his cane," she declared. "Oh, he is opening his eyes."

"Want any more, young fellow?" I demanded genially.

"You scoundrel, for this you will be put outside," he snarled. "Helen, you are a witness to the offense."

"Bah," she exclaimed as she rose. "I saw nothing and heard nothing and there were no witnesses."

"Not necessary," he retorted as he climbed unsteadily to his feet and favored me with a malevolent glance. "My word is sufficient."

"Not against mine," she retorted with spirit.

"So, you are already infatuated with the brute," Holmes sneered.

"Good morning, Mr. Holmes," she replied haughtily.

"Just a minute," I requested. I picked up the stick which I had dropped upon the pavement and broke it neatly across my knee. "Now, good morning, Mr. Holmes."

We left him speechless with rage and venom while we walked toward the plaza.

"That young man didn't seem to like me," I said softly. "Why?"

She flashed me an eloquent glance. "It was practically arranged that he and I would draw each other at the marriage lottery next month. No doubt he heard of my indiscreet remarks last night."

"I don't know why you call it a lottery," I said, "since you draw whomever you please."

"But don't you realize how absurd it would be if a common man drew a girl from the aristocracy? We have to guard against such accidents."

"Then you admit there is an aristocracy. Why don't you give yourselves titles—dukes, earls, counts, et cetera?" I asked satirically.

"Father wishes to preserve the forms of the old order; that's the only reason."

"I see. Just as the Roman emperors preserved the fiction of a republic for centuries. How many noble families are there, and what makes them noble?"

"Let's see, there are about sixty families in the inner circle—two hundred and forty persons in all," she said seriously. "They are the group which supported my grandfather when he overthrew the old order headed by Francis Lothrop, Jonas' son."

"And now the descendants of the man who built this Dome of yours and preserved the lives of all your ancestors are forced to work like peasants in the fields."

"Francis Lothrop was impossible. He was given a chance to come in."

"Well," I said decidedly, "I like Professor Lothrop and Professor Ditmar and Mrs. Lothrop and her sister. So they are going to be excused immediately from manual labor."

"Impossible. It is punishment labor."

"Due, I suspect, to the success of their efforts to restore me to life," I said dryly. "Trouble is about to start in this interesting community unless these people are removed from the fields, Miss Ames."

She placed a hand on my arm. "Please, I implore you, don't anger my father."

"Young lady, did you ever hear of Samson?"

"Certainly. We are not ignorant people here, Mr. Putnam."

"Well, Samson pulled down the pillars of the Philistine Temple regardless of the fact that he buried himself in the ruins. And I am fairly strong. Bear that in mind."

She laughed scornfully. "What can you do? If I choose I can testify against you for striking Horace Holmes. While father hesitated to put you outside yesterday, he will have no choice if you are convicted of striking a patrician—"

"So that's what you call yourselves privately."

"That is exactly what we are, and our existence depends upon the enforcement of the laws."

"Well, go ahead and testify. I am now going in to demand the release of my friends."

"Let me do it," she said, melting suddenly. "Father will do anything I ask. And of course I am not going to testify for Horace Holmes. I hate him."

"There were at least six spectators of the blow," I reminded her. "He can round them up."

Helen laughed. "He will never find them. Nobody could be found who would testify against you. The fools believe you are a Messiah sent to free them. That is why father wasn't very much pleased at your resuscitation."

I STUDIED the girl. Without undue vanity I had to recognize that she was in love with me, and that until she was convinced that she couldn't get me for a husband, she would do nothing to harm me. She had plenty of spirit, though, and was capable of being very nasty and revengeful. Until I got my bearings she ought to be an invaluable weapon for me.

There was no doubt of her beauty. She was alluring, too. I thought she had more

red blood in her than anybody I had seen in this community of damned souls. But I loved Ruth Reynolds. It was only a few days, according to my reckoning, since she and I had last kissed. And there was a counterpart of my beloved who was one of the oppressed in this community.

"Well," I said placatingly, "I can understand how you could influence any man. I leave it to you to secure the release of my friends. What did you have for breakfast?"

"Why, really," she replied laughing, "what an abrupt change of subject. I had toast and an egg and a glass of milk."

"Well, tell your father that I don't care much for apples. From now on I want the regular bill of fare which is the perquisite of the occupants of the Palace."

"I think that might be arranged," she said thoughtfully. "I want you to keep big and strong."

She was certainly a frank creature! But I suspected she was not as aloof and cold-blooded as her words. Privately I reflected that I was going to need muscles, if there were ever need of a Samson rôle. Parting with Helen I returned to my room, pulled a chair to the window, and looked down upon the village.

Poor old Judkins with his visions of the magnificence of the future! This community differed in no essential detail from one of those medieval Italian states, Florence, for example, where a few rich families tyrannized over the masses and oppressed them for their own aggrandizement. The difference was that art had flourished in Florence, and there was no artistic life here. The comparison extended even to the means utilized for oppression: soldiers armed with spears.

Yet this was an Anglo-Saxon community. Most of the names I heard were New England names. Probably descendants of college professors drawn from Harvard and Yale and Amherst and Dartmouth. The English spoken differed in no respect from my day except for the absence of our short-lived slang.

Aside from the necessity of manufacturing their mixture of oxygen, nitrogen and Jobian gas, they had lost completely the science of the Twentieth Century. As things were going, I gave Putnam Community another fifty years before it was eradicated from within or without.

After a while I went downstairs and wandered from room to room until I entered the library. During my progress I encountered no one save a servant or two.

Servants in a socialist democracy, indeed!

There were two or three thousand books in old-fashioned stacks at the back of this very large room and there were leather chairs placed near four large windows for the convenience of readers. I wandered through the stacks and recognized many well remembered volumes, but what I searched for was the history of the poor old world between the time when I went into oblivion and the Great Catastrophe.

I found it at last. Wattle's History of the United States. The date was 1978. The volume had suffered somewhat from the fingers of time, but it was well printed on good paper and perfectly legible. For the next two hours I was lost completely to my surroundings.

There was excitement enough in the history for a hundred novels.

Judging by the volume which I was reading life in the United States changed little. Wattle's history ended in complacent ignorance that the world would be destroyed by contact with a comet within a very few years. After I had replaced it upon the shelf I sought in vain for the literary output of the Putnam Community. Apparently, for the first decades the brilliant individuals within the great Dome were too busy scratching a living to produce poetry, novels or histories, and their children apparently were not interested in either literature or art.

As I was turning away from the stacks, the door opened and Mr. Ames entered.

"Good afternoon, Mr. Putnam," he said coldly. "I am informed that you exercised your knowledge of the obsolete and brutal art of boxing to inflict injury upon young Holmes this morning."

"He struck at me with a cane," I replied. "Naturally I knocked him down."

"It is an offense punishable by being put outside," he stated. "My daughter denies the statement of Horace Holmes and there are no other witnesses. Therefore, no action will be taken; but I must warn you in the most solemn terms never again to raise your hand against a member of the Community."

"I shall always defend myself," I replied.

"At the request of my daughter, I have remitted the punishment of Ditmar and Lothrop. However, I do not desire that you communicate with them or their families. And I will permit you to be served the regular rations of the ruling class among us so long as you deserve it."

"Thank you, sir. I am used to plenty of good food and would suffer more from

your regular ration than those who are accustomed to it."

"I appreciate that. On the other hand our overpopulated community cannot indulge you too much in that respect. You present a great problem which is occupying much of the attention of the Council."

"I've just been reading the events between nineteen fifty and nineteen seventy-five," I said. "It seems the world kept right on with its evil living until the very end."

"Yes. We are fortunate not to live in such a state of society."

"Tell me, sir, when your father secured control of the community, did you have a civil war?"

"Not one drop of blood was shed. It was in the nature of a coup d'état."

"WOULD you mind telling me why a revolution was necessary?" I asked.

"Not at all," replied Ames, who seated himself and nodded for me to drop into the chair opposite him. "I am sure, when you know all the facts, that you will realize the necessity for my father's action. This community contained many of the ablest men in all walks of life in the old civilization. Lothrop invited them here with their families and they were delighted to take refuge to escape the catastrophe which scientific men foresaw clearly and which the general public refused to credit.

"Lothrop had collected a year's supplies for two thousand people. When the tail of the meteor engulfed the earth and the multitude of unfortunates who came here for refuge at the last minute were left outside to meet their doom, Mr. Lothrop was almost overwhelmed with reproaches for refusing to admit them. It was pointed out by these humanitarians that a quarter of a million people might have been sheltered within the great inclosure. You must understand that most intelligent individuals, including many scientists, supposed that in a few days or a few weeks the earth would be clear of the comet, that the poisonous gases would dissolve and the world would remain for the survivors as it always had been.

"But it was the theory of Professor Walsingham that it might be a year before it would be safe to breathe our atmosphere again, and upon his advice Lothrop refused to admit more people than the inclosure could support for a long period.

"As you have learned, the gases of the meteor devoured most of the earth's en-

velope, and when it finally purified itself, it was too rarefied for humans to breathe. It was evident that those within the inclosure must remain here until they died. Meanwhile the heating properties of Jobian gas were discovered. When it was mixed with our artificial air, it offset the great cold outside.

"There was a mass meeting of the members of the Community and it was resolved to set about the business of living as a socialistic democracy, each for all, and all for each. As these were cultured, reasonable people, there never was a community so well calculated to succeed, and for several years everything went well.

"The community had to be supported by the earth within the Dome; something which would have been impossible were it not for the scientific attainments of a number of the members. Our temperatures was suited to all temperate zone products. Our soil was kept fertile by extraction of phosphates from the outer air, rarefied though it was. Our people accepted bravely the arduous labor allotted to them. Everything produced and manufactured went into the community chest and was supplied to the workers according to their needs.

"Unfortunately, these good people failed to realize at first the necessity of limiting the population, and as there were more women than men among them, when the thinkers among the population brought forward propositions restricting the birth rate, the woman voted it down. The population doubled in a generation.

"Although good schools and splendid teachers were provided, the generation born under the Dome lacked the initiative and enterprise and spirit of research of their parents."

"I can readily understand that," I put in.

"Meanwhile," Ames went on, "the growth in population made it increasingly difficult to produce enough to feed the community. In the old world, no civilized group had to exist entirely upon its own resources. Commerce and exchange of goods were necessary. This, of course, was impossible now.

"In the beginning the arts and letters and music were cultivated. As time passed it was impossible for the community to support parasite professions. It was necessary to take men of science from all pursuits except those needed by the community and put them upon the soil. Life was very monotonous in those days. Everybody worked in the fields from dawn

to dark, and they were so fatigued that they went to bed immediately after dinner.

"It was evident that artificial lighting was extravagant, and unnecessary, and it was abandoned. And the population continued to grow. By the year two thousand and twenty-five there were three thousand people and it was evident to thinkers that the group must be permitted to increase no further if the community was to survive."

I nodded.

"There were other troubles. Avarice was abroad. The people were dissatisfied. Food was scarce. Our little factories were unable to produce clothing sufficient for the demand. There was hoarding of supplies, and unlawful bartering sprang up. Certain shrewd families were growing wealthy despite the community regulations.

"The son of our founder, who was President, was a weak, amiable man, quite unsuited to deal with the situation which was fast growing desperate. Killings began to take place. Houses were being robbed and their goods carried off. There were food riots. It was evident to the intelligent that the social democracy had failed and strong measures were necessary.

"MY FATHER, John Ames, Senior," he went on, "was an unusual man, Mr. Putnam. He had old-fashioned initiative. He got in touch with other bold and intelligent spirits to the number of fifty and on the night of January seventeenth, two thousand twenty-five, they took the powerhouse and the atmospheric laboratories, visited the houses of Lothrop and the other visionaries and demagogues, placed them under arrest, secured the firearms from the museum of the Palace, then captured the Community House. When the people woke in the morning they found the Council in full control and functioning. Not a drop of blood was spilled."

"A very remarkable achievement, I should say."

Ames smiled. "Particularly as there was no ammunition for the ancient rifles and revolvers used to overawe the populace. Wise laws were immediately made and enforced. The population was limited to three thousand. The old-fashioned, wasteful mode of dressing was prohibited. Men and women in the future were to wear the simple garb in which you and I are dressed."

"I don't suppose the women like that."

"There was much dissatisfaction, but the government was in strong hands. A system

of scrip was issued which could be used for purchase of manufactured articles, but not for food. Food was strictly rationed and punishment was swift for food barterers. Without these laws it is certain that the community would have fallen into anarchy and perished. Of course care was taken to preserve the forms of democracy, but since that day the general assembly has only had power to advise the Council. And for some years we have considered it advisable to function without the assembly. I hope I have made everything clear."

"As things are now," I commented, "you have evolved a system of patricians and plebeians. The bulk of the community works like serfs for the benefit of the ruling class which leads a life of leisure and lives on the fat of the land. Am I right?"

The President frowned. "You are quite wrong, and I should like to know where you get your information! The descendants of those whose energy and patriotism saved the community are naturally favored somewhat because their support is necessary. All males of these families are members of the Council's Guard. They drill regularly and are ready at any time to put down insurrection. You must realize what would happen to any nation which had no leisure class. Some must perform the manual labor. Others must be trained for leadership."

"And by giving your patricians good food and plenty of it, you develop a corps of strong, efficient men who have no trouble dealing with the ill-nourished malcontents. Your method is old as the hills, Mr. Ames."

"We regret that our community does not produce enough to provide an equal ration to all its members," he said sanctimoniously. "Our patricians, as you call them, receive meat once a week. The common people are necessarily vegetarians. Before the Catastrophe it was amply proved that meat is not essential to livelihood."

"Well, I was always fond of a good steak, myself," I stated, smiling.

"We welcome you to our party," he said, rising. "You strike me as a very intelligent man, Mr. Putnam. Your advice is going to be valuable, and you bring us a new and interesting viewpoint. Furthermore, you come from an age when socialism was justly despised as utterly impractical."

"I certainly favor the patrician diet," I assured him. "You are very kind to explain everything to me."

"I may say that you have made an ex-

cellent impression upon my daughter Helen," he said. "There is a young lady who might have lived in your epoch."

"She has pep enough to have cut a dash on Broadway," I declared heartily. "Tell me, Mr. Ames, how are you going to defend yourself if you are attacked by these Monsters I've heard about?"

"Our steel walls are strong enough to keep out prowling animals," he replied. "Our plate glass would resist ordinary missiles. And I doubt the existence of such creatures. During my lifetime nothing has ever been seen outside save small fur-bearing creatures, and how they find anything to eat I do not understand."

"I was told that some sort of monsters had obliterated a community in Southern California."

"We had a wireless message from a small group who had survived the Catastrophe out there to the effect that monsters were attacking them, but in the present condition of the world such creatures are not likely to travel three thousand miles over snow and ice."

"But you have no weapons of defense except spears and swords and knives."

"Unfortunately that is true. We can only hope that there will be no attack."

CHAPTER III

THE MONSTERS

WHILE I still disliked the president of the community so strangely named after myself, I was considerably impressed by his explanation of the overturning of the democracy and the setting up of an absolute monarchy. The first John Ames must have been considerable of a man, and his action very likely had preserved the community.

It was an axiom in my day that the best government known is that of a benevolent despot. The trouble with despotism, usually, has been that the ruler has been succeeded by an heir who oppressed the people for his own whimsies. John Ames, First, probably justified his coup d'état as did Mussolini, by proving that it was for the best interests of his country. John Ames, Second, found himself ruler of a peaceful and hard-working people and took it for granted that their labor was for the benefit of himself and his friends. When John Ames, Third, the arrogant and stupid youth I had seen last night, came to power, he would oppress them like all the brutal tyrants of history.

The subjects of King John Ames II differed from the ignorant masses of the rulers of the Middle Ages in two important particulars: first, that they were well educated, second, that they were well born.

Lothrop had invited into his glass and steel refuge one thousand of the best people of his time and with them had inaugurated a system of pure socialism. Sixty years later all save a few had been reduced to serfdom. I found it hard to comprehend their meek submission. Control of the supply of Jobian gas, of course, gave the first Ames a marvelous weapon. Death by strangulation is feared more than death by bullet or cold steel. But what Ames himself had been able to do a generation ago, stout-hearted patriots could do today.

I wondered if a combination of a strictly vegetable diet and the Jobian gas-impregnated atmosphere of the place might not have something to do with the obvious lack of spirit of the inhabitants. But the air seemed perfectly all right. I breathed it without difficulty and considered it sweet and pure.

For my own part, I yearned for action. Settling down to the humdrum life of this village after having been a citizen of the great world was going to be impossible. To Ames I owed nothing. My return to life was opposed by him, and he had punished the scientists who had risked his displeasure to bring it about.

While I could marry his daughter and take my place in the ranks of the patricians, I would always be regarded with suspicion by him. When the sensation of my coming had died out, an "accident" very easily could happen to me. That son of Ames who expected to succeed to the dictatorship was certain to be my enemy. Anyway, I didn't want to marry Helen Ames; not while there lived under the Dome a lovely creature who was a replica of my sweetheart, Ruth Reynolds.

And I thought the Ames coterie had lived on the fat of the land long enough.

I left the library and went to my room where shortly afterward I was served lunch. It consisted of a stew which contained vegetables and a small quantity of beef, a glass of milk, and a bread pudding. I felt very much better after eating it.

After lunch I left the Palace without interference and walked out of the village in the direction of the powerhouse which Helen had pointed out to me. This was a long, low building constructed against the wall of the great enclosure. As I approached I heard the soft hum of a dynamo.

My progress was stopped, however, by a ten-foot wall in the center of which there was a door. Boldly I approached the door and tried the latch. Locked. Immediately I heard a key turn on the inside, the door opened, and a man armed with a spear presented himself.

"Good afternoon, Mr. Putnam," he said courteously. "You cannot enter without a pass from President Ames."

I grinned at him and he smiled in friendly fashion. "I shall not try to force my way in. Who is in charge of the plant?"

"Councillor Julius Stein."

"I wonder if he would see me."

"Wait and I'll inquire."

A few moments later the door opened and Stein came out to greet me.

He was a small man with fine eyes, an aquiline nose and a square chin. He was very fair of skin like almost all who lived under the Dome.

"This is a pleasure," he said cordially. "I'm sorry I cannot invite you in to inspect the plant. Orders upon that point are very strict."

"I'm not a scientist," I replied, "and a sight of your machinery wouldn't tell me anything. I am just knocking around your little country looking at the points of interest."



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All but an infinitesimal fraction of the population of the world was destroyed. . . .

"We must seem a pathetic, puerile community," he said. "I would die to-morrow if I could spend to-day in the New York of your epoch."

"Oh, I have discovered that human nature hasn't changed much," I said frankly. "I find ambition, intrigue, jealousy and oppression are all still ruling the world."

"You have learned that already?" he asked mockingly. "Be very careful, Mr. Putnam. You took a high-handed atti-

tude last night and our president is a very arrogant man."

"I looked the Council over," I replied, "and I was certain that you and Murphy would listen to reason."

"We are a minority of the Council," he said gravely, "and our power is nil. To all intents and purposes John Ames is an absolute monarch."

"How is it possible that the sons of great men would submit to such a state of affairs?"



He took my arm. "Let us walk about," he suggested. "My father, Mr. Putnam, was one of the greatest electrical inventors of the old world. Murphy's father was the most famous surgeon of the period of nineteen eighty. The grandfather of John Ames was a United States senator. What chance have scientists against a politician?"

"Nevertheless—"

He laughed. "I regret the failure of our democracy. Given possible conditions, it would have succeeded. We happened to be confined in a very limited space and our population grew to a point where our lands would not support us comfortably. Human nature is congenitally selfish. When there is not enough for two men to eat, the stronger will take what he needs and leave the crumbs for the weaker. This place will support a couple of hundred people luxuriously provided the masses are put upon slim rations. I prefer to line up with those who fare well. I am sure you will be intelligent enough to do the same."

"I HAVE been wondering how you secured the materials for your gases," I said, to change an unpleasant subject. "From outside."

"But I am informed that the outer air is so rarefied that it is very weak in oxygen, nitrogen and other ingredients."

"The envelope of the earth at the time

of the Great Catastrophe," he replied, "was about five hundred miles high, but too rarefied for human life at a height of ten or twelve miles. The air outside, at the present time, has a density equivalent to that at the top of Mt. Everest in nineteen eighty. . . . I am telling you what our people do not know. It is my opinion that our earth's atmosphere is gradually being restored."

"I believe that this sort of thing has happened several times during the course of the existence of our world. I think it accounts for the destruction of the animal life and plant life, fifty to a hundred thousand years ago. The comet which struck the earth in nineteen eighty-seven tore away most of our atmosphere. What was left naturally expanded and has gradually been increasing in density. In time it will be possible for us to leave our hothouse."

"That's splendid! But I presume all vegetable matter was destroyed. The future world will be as barren as the moon."

"I don't think so. Remember that many feet of snow and ice have covered the surface of the earth for generations. When they melt I think the earth will become fruitful again. You see, the moon has no water. We have unlimited water in frozen forms, which proved that our atmosphere was never destroyed or completely poisoned."

"That's true."

"Had the Catastrophe arrived a hundred years before it happened, all human life on the globe would have vanished. Fortunately machinery for the manufacture of air and other gases had reached a high degree of efficiency in nineteen eighty-seven.

"Lothrop, our rescuer, foreseeing what might happen, had constructed here a superb plant with all the latest devices and placed the best men in America in charge. As you will discover, arts and sciences have been allowed to decay in this community, but we have never relaxed our vigilance here. Our lives depend upon it."

"Regarding this Jobian gas—"

"That is our great secret, my friend. I can tell you nothing."

"Even though it is my legal property?"

"I am afraid that might is right, Mr. Putnam."

"I can't understand its heating properties."

"I'll tell you this much: In your college days you heard of the supposed heat and energy contained in an electron?"

"Well, I supposed that was more or less a theory. Nobody ever discovered how to get it out."

"Professor Judkins was the greatest scientist who ever lived," he said solemnly. "Now I must return to my work. Our ruler sees and hears everything, and until your position among us is definitely settled, I mustn't appear to be too friendly with you."

"Let me ask you one question. Don't you think it rotten that the great-grandson of Jonas Lothrop, the builder of this Community and the savior of everybody within it, should be excluded from the patrician element?"

"The Lothropes wouldn't play the game with the Amesese, my friend. Let me warn you not to become too friendly with them."

"I'll take your counsel under advisement," I said, smiling. "I feel very grateful to Ditmar and Lothrop."

"You may; but these two men have done the Community a great injury in restoring you to life."

"I don't understand."

"Mr. Putnam, as you may surmise, there was very little religious belief among the people who came into this enclosure at the invitation of the first Lothrop. They were almost all free-thinkers or agnostics or actual atheists. For some years religion was not necessary, but a population which is downtrodden must have the consolation of religion. Let the masses distrust the

happy hereafter and they will always revolt against the present.

"Having no religion, the public made a cult of the superb white body sleeping in the tank of Jobian gas. For a generation our people have gone about their labors looking forward to the day when you, the real owner of this community, would awake from your hundred years' slumber and right all wrongs.

"There was a heated argument in the Council regarding your resuscitation as the day approached. Several of us thought it must be brought about or the masses would rise in their wrath. President Ames feared that your revival would be the signal for the revolution and wished the tests to fail. I maintained that the best thing to do was to revive you and take you into our midst. Ames finally feigned to agree with me, but he gave secret orders to Ditmar that the tests must fail.

"You were not to be killed, you understand, but to sleep on, and the people must be told that there had been an error in the calculations made by Judkins and that several years might elapse before you would respond to the tests. Ditmar and Lothrop, being scientists first and subjects afterward, brought you back to life and now they will labor six hours a day for six months in the fields."

"The punishment has been remitted," I informed him. "At my request transmitted to the president by Miss Ames."

"They would have been given the Nobel Prize, if Scandinavia still existed and Science were still respected. I am talking in strict confidence, Mr. Putnam."

"Understood. The people will think I am a pretty poor sort of god if I join their oppressors."

"Oh, they'll start worshipping something else; the common people always do."

"How can you call people common who are the children and grandchildren of mental aristocrats?" I asked vexedly.

He laughed. "The descendants of great men are usually commonplace, are they not? I wish you good afternoon, Mr. Putnam."

I turned away. My path led past several commercial structures which gave evidence of great activity, then across a stretch of cultivated land upon which grain was growing and finally into the tiny town. I observed that the roofs of both factories and houses were of the flimsiest sort, having been erected more for the shade than shelter, since above them loomed the glass and steel firmament.

As all streets and houses were exactly alike I was not aware that I was passing the Lothrop bungalow until my heart leaped at the sight of Marjorie Lothrop at a window.

Turning in at the little gate I knocked on the door.

It was opened immediately.

"I am alone," she said shyly. "My brother is teaching at the school and so is my sister. I know we have you to thank for releasing us from field labor."

"May I come in a moment?"

She looked as though she wanted to invite me to enter, but she shook her head.

"It is forbidden for a woman to receive a man alone in her house, and it might result in the imposing of further punishment."

"I would like to be better friends with you, Miss Lothrop," I said.

She smiled. Her smile was as frank and winning as Ruth's, but it had an elusive pallid charm of its own.

"I would like nothing better," she replied. "If you will come after dinner when the family is present—the twilight hour, you know—I would love it. There are so many things I would like to ask you."

"Can't we talk here in the doorway?"

"I assure you that there is a pair of eyes upon us from every house in the vicinity," she said nervously.

"Then I wish you good afternoon," I replied glumly. "I'll come to-night after dinner."

"We can't invite you to dinner. Every family must consume its own food and feed no guests. That is the law."

"A lot of fool laws are going to be changed in this place," I said savagely.

"Oh, if you only would!" she sighed.

"*Au revoir*, Mr. Putnam."

As she closed the door I had to take myself off.

AS I turned into the Main Street I was confronted suddenly by a young woman, plain and unprepossessing. To my astonishment she grasped my right hand, lifted it, kissed it hastily, murmured "God bless you," and turned quickly into a shop.

On the street within a few yards were three or four other men and women who observed the incident and smiled at me in friendly fashion. To conceal my confusion I looked into a shop window.

The display was rather pitiful. There were small household ornaments, rolls of white cotton cloth, strings of beads, bracelets, stuff of the sort we used to call junk

jewelry. I observed writing tablets, ink, pens, pencils and one very elderly typewriter which was placed in the middle of the window. It was obviously the item of which the proprietor was most proud.

This sort of stuff could be purchased by the scrip issued by the Council and I presumed that the shopkeepers were permitted to exchange the scrip for the necessities of life from the Community Chest.

The contents of this shop looked like relics of the days before the Catastrophe. In a community which labored so intensely to produce enough to eat, there was no time to produce articles of luxury. It seemed to me that the Council, by compelling women to wear the same simple garb as the men, had been shrewd. A woman clad in sleeveless shirt and shorts had no more temptation than a man to plaster herself with gewgaws. But women, being what nature made them, must find life tedious minus the impetus to shop. It must be a dull, gray world for them.

It had turned into a dull, gray day and I realized now that it was snowing outside though the temperature of the hothouse was unchilled. Looking up I saw the glass was obscured and here and there were white patches of snow upon it which were slowly melting.

If it were snowing, however, the temperature without could not be very low. At forty or fifty degrees below zero, snow should not fall, even in a very rarefied atmosphere.

To people born and bred in uniform temperature of seventy the drop of a few degrees would bring great discomfort, but to me it would be of small consequence. Warmly clad, I thought it was possible that I might exist outside if, as Stein had stated, the air was no thinner than upon the top of Mount Everest; but these people would probably freeze to death at thirty above zero.

Heigh-ho, there was nothing to do in the place and nothing to see. If it were not for the charm of Marjorie Lothrop I wouldn't care very much if they did thrust me out into the cold. Yet these people expected something of me. The woman who had kissed my hand—the people who had looked at me—they were expectant. According to Stein some of the poor creatures had worshipped me as I lay in my cloud of Jobian gas. In some mysterious way, I was expected to overthrow the oligarchy and restore their freedom.

Well, of what would their freedom consist if they got it? Not surcease from labor,

because if they didn't work hard in the fields they would starve to death. Not enjoyment of luxuries, for there were no real luxuries. Whether they slaved for themselves or for Ames and his gang, the work would be just about as hard. If the population restrictions were abolished they would overpopulate the place and die of famine in a generation.

They knew, of course, that the Councilor crowd had meat to eat, wine to drink and a greater variety of food. No doubt they yearned for better fare, but even if I overthrew the Council and reestablished the democracy and put everybody upon the same ration, the improvement in their table wouldn't be appreciable. While there might be decent food for a couple of hundred it couldn't be spread over three thousand.

My musings were interrupted by a tap on the shoulder and I found Professor Dittmar beside me.

"There is a ball at the Palace to-night," he said in a low tone. "You will have a chance to inspect our rulers and their families. I think you will have an opportunity to slip away about eleven o'clock. If you prefer to cast your lot with us instead of them, come to the Putnam Monument Building at that time. The door will be open."

"A ball? I heard nothing of it. And I thought there were no lights in the town."

He smiled. "A storage battery will provide electric lighting for the Palace to-night. We shall use tallow candles inside the monument, which fortunately has no windows."

"I'll try to get away," I said. "I am at a loss to know what can be done here to improve things, professor."

"You will be informed tonight," he replied. "When you knocked down young Holmes you made yourself the idol of the entire community, with the exception of the aristocracy."

"Tell me something else. Is there courage enough among your people to support me if I decide upon . . . a certain line?" I scanned his face closely.

"The courage of desperation! There is plenty of that."

"Are there any fighters among you?" I demanded then.

"I think you will find that there are."

"I'll meet you at my late 'tomb', if it is humanly possible. Will there be—er—ladies?"

"No. Half a dozen determined men, that's all."

"I'll be glad to meet them."

He left me abruptly and I returned to the Palace, sought the library and spent a tolerably pleasant afternoon.

Helen Ames broke in upon my reading in the afternoon. Her eyes were sparkling and her cheeks pink. In her sketchy garments she had plenty of what used to be called "S.A."

"You are invited to be present at a grand ball this evening," she announced.

"It's so long since I've danced," I protested, smiling. "All I know is the fox trot and the waltz."

"The fox trot is as obsolete as the minuet," she replied, "but the waltz is eternal. And I can show you the steps of the 'stamper' in a minute. It is in two-four time."

"And how do you propose to illuminate your ball?" I demanded.

"Oh, we've thousands of electric bulbs in storage, and bring them out for use upon times of festival; and we can get plenty of current from the power house."

"What do people wear?" I asked curiously.

"Most of the ladies will be in evening dress as were mother and myself at your dinner the other night. The men will wear the dress uniforms of the Council Guard. It will be a gay affair with a wonderful supper."

"What is the occasion?"

"To introduce the 'Man from the Past' to the beauty and chivalry of the present. You will meet all our leading inhabitants."

"Where will it take place?" I asked.

"In the Grand Hall. There will be two hundred guests."

"I'm getting excited. I had about decided that the Community was much too dull," and I smiled at her.

"Thank me for the ball, then. It was my idea."

"What do you do for music?"

"An orchestra! Four violins, piano, two clarinets and two saxophones. I suppose you think we have lost the art of music."

"I'm delighted that you haven't. May I have the pleasure of a dance with you?"

SHE laughed significantly. "You'll have a lot of dances with me. And I'll thank you not to get interested in any other girl."

"Really, Miss Ames—"

"Look here," she said frankly, "I've decided to marry you at the next drawing. I know you still love a woman who has been dead half a century, but you'll get

over that. I—I won't have you falling in love with any other woman in this Community to-night."

"I do not propose to be drawn by you or anyone else in a marriage lottery," I said angrily.

"George," she said slowly, "you have no choice in the matter. I am, every one admits, the most beautiful woman in Putnam and—I love you." She looked away for an instant, then met my gaze defiantly. "Furthermore, my father agrees that your marriage to me is the best way out of this affair. My brother is furiously angry, of course, but he doesn't count. You and I will rule here some day and then, if you like, you may change some of our methods which, it is obvious, you don't like. Everything is settled and any objection from you will be ignored."

"In my day women didn't force men into marriage with them," I said dryly. "Just make a note that I shall marry whom I please, when I please—and at present I am not sentimentally interested in you."

She smiled indulgently. "Don't let's quarrel. You'll come around. . . . For supper to-night we shall have cold chicken, cold ham, cold beef, potato salad, cucumbers and ice cream. And there will be red and white wine."

"What are the Lothrop family having for dinner to-night?" I asked.

"What does it matter? String beans, turnips, bread—the regular community ration."

"I should like them invited to the ball."

"Quite impossible. They don't belong. And it would be a bad precedent to admit members of the lower classes to a state affair."

"I see. What am I to wear?"

"You'll find a costume laid out on your bed. I chose it myself. Blue jacket and long blue trousers. It was one of my grandfather's costumes."

"Thanks for that. I would be very uncomfortable in these."

"You look very well in them," she said with so admiring a glance that I felt myself coloring. Laughing gayly she took herself off.

I returned to my book, but a moment later I had a sensation that some one was slipping up behind me. I glanced backward—and threw myself on the floor.

Crash! A sword descended, struck the back of the chair and shattered it. The blow was accompanied by an exclamation of baffled rage.

I sprang to my feet and faced two men

armed with swords. One was Holmes, whom I had knocked down with my fist in the street; the other was the son of President John Ames.

The pair had entered the library after Helen departed, turned the rusty key in the door, and prepared to solve the problem of Putnam Community as Alexander solved the Gordian knot—by slashing it with a sword.

Holmes withdrew his blade from the wreck of the chair and advanced upon me. His weapon was an ancient cavalry saber. Ames moved around to my left brandishing a cutlass. Neither spoke.

"I am unarmed," I cried. "This is murder."

Ames favored me with an evil smile.

"I'm going to cut you into pieces, you dog," snarled Holmes.

At my feet lay a heavy volume of history which I had been reading when Helen entered. I stooped like a flash, picked it up and stood at bay.

"Rush him!" commanded Ames.

The President's son charged from the left while Holmes made a frontal attack.

I aimed the book at Holmes, who immediately ducked—and with the motion of a baseball pitcher throwing unexpectedly to first base, I drove the three-pound missile into the face of young Ames. It struck him squarely between the eyes and he went down like a shot.

I leaped upon him as Holmes brought down his saber with all his force, hoping to split me in two. The weapon cut empty air and threw him completely off balance. When he recovered I had Ames' cutlass in my hand and stood on guard. Young Ames lay unconscious at my feet.

Swinging his long weapon, Holmes charged in. I recognized by the manner in which he exposed himself that he was ignorant of swordplay. My own knowledge was slight; a few fencing lessons with folks something like a hundred and ten years before.

Down came the blow, which I parried easily with the cutlass, and for a few moments it was slam-bang between us, steel ringing against steel with a resonance which should have alarmed the Palace. I had to give way because his weapon was six inches longer than mine. This was somewhat offset by my superior skill.

Ames gave signs of coming to, which dismayed me. He stirred. I kept one eye on him and narrowly escaped having an arm lopped off by a furious saber cut.

Ames sat up. I lunged at Holmes in my turn, and he gave ground. Whirling, I aimed a kick at Ames and caught him with the toe of my slipper on the point of the jaw.

He went over and out.

Whish! That saber-stroke had nearly decapitated me. Holmes was strong as well as vicious. I parried three furious blows. It was evident that I could get him with a lunge while he swung his weapon over his head, but to kill or dangerously wound the son of a member of the Council would probably bring my career in this new world to a quick end.

From this standpoint, he was out to murder me, aware that he would be protected by the Council, which would regard my death with relief. He lifted his right hand high above his head and brought the saber down with all his force. I parried the stroke and made my plan.

A second later he drew off and again lifted his weapon on high. Dropping my cutlass, I plunged at him. His sword arm I grasped above the elbow, and I drove my right fist with all my force into the pit of his stomach. As he crumpled I wrenched the saber from him and dropped it on the floor, and when he tried to get up I drove home an uppercut from the chin and knocked him into the middle of dream-land.

Taking the saber and cutlass under my arm, and bestowing not a glance upon the two unconscious murderers, I crossed toward the door. Somebody was pounding upon it and excited voices could be heard outside. I turned the key, opened the door, and was confronted by President Ames, Helen, two soldiers armed with spears, and three or four servants.

"What is the meaning of this disturbance?" shouted Ames.

"I have just disarmed two assassins, Mr. President," I said blandly. "You will find them lying on the floor inside. Neither of them is badly hurt."

With a smothered oath he rushed past me and into the library.

"Who were they?" demanded Helen.

"Our mutual friend Holmes and your beloved brother, Miss Ames."

Her eyes grew big as saucers. "They attacked you with swords, and you bested them?" she exclaimed. "George, you're just wonderful!"

Ames appeared in the doorway. He was white with fury. "You men get water and restoratives," he snapped. "Putnam, you are under arrest."

"Don't worry, Mr. Ames," I said. "The boys will be sitting up and asking what happened inside of a minute."

"Come inside," he commanded. "You stay out, Helen."

Her answer was to follow me in and to slam the door behind her.

"Explain, please," said Ames icily.

"I was reading in the library," I told him shortly. I was boiling. "Miss Ames had been gone only a couple of minutes when I heard footsteps, and saw those two men carrying these weapons sneaking up behind me. I dodged the first blow from the saber which Holmes carried, picked up a book, floored your son with it, seized his cutlass and stood off the other murderer. Not wishing to wound the son of a member of your Council, however richly he deserved it, I disarmed Holmes and knocked him out—for the second time within a couple of days."

"You did well," said Ames thoughtfully. "The fracas can be hushed up since nobody was wounded. You do not think, I hope, that this assault was instigated by myself or any member of the Council?"

"Certainly not. The two boys just don't like me."

"I'll see that they keep silent," he said grimly. "And in your own interests you will not speak about this."

"Next time an attempt is made on my life I won't be so sparing of the assassin," I warned him significantly.

"There will be no next time. Come in, men."

Servants entered with water and bandages, but the gladiators were already returning to consciousness.

"I hope this little incident won't spoil your party, Helen," I suggested.

"It won't," she replied with the look of her father in her eyes. "But, George, please don't think you are out of danger. Not until our marriage will you be safe in this community."

"That will be a long time from now, young lady. I can take care of myself. Right now, I'm going to my room."

"Au revoir, Hercules."

THE motive of the attack on me was easy to diagnose. Holmes had been Helen's favored suitor until my advent, and he had no intention of resigning her to me. Young Ames, as the heir apparent, saw in me a rival for power if wedded to his sister. Aware that any accident which eliminated me would be pleasing to the President, they had arranged the details

of the assassination ingeniously, but slipped up in its execution.

That they would try again I had no doubt in the world. And strangely enough it gave zest to existence in this weird hothouse. So there still was red blood in the veins of a lot of these apparently washed-out inhabitants! Holmes and young Ames and Helen had it, and I didn't doubt that the enforced vegetarians, Ditmar and Lothrop, also had spirit.

I liked Helen Ames, with limitations. She was beautiful and tempting, but she had a disposition like a tigress and an arrogance that was repelling. And she didn't have any more sympathy for the masses of Putnam than an old-time French princess had for the serfs upon her father's lands. If she had married Holmes in the natural course of things, I thought that after her father's demise her brother wouldn't rule long.

Trouble had been brewing in the Community before my coming. I proposed to bring it to a head.

There had never been any doubt but that I would cast my lot in with the oppressed masses if I found among them the slightest disposition to assert themselves. Well, they were stirring and only wanted a leader. I could give them that, I thought.

Back in the good old days of 1951 I had encountered occasionally a certain type of supercilious arrogance which was known as cold roast Boston, though it was to be found among a certain class in New York and Philadelphia as well.

In this miserable remnant of the old civilization I had encountered the same thing in the persons of Ames, Holmes, and others bearing old Back Bay, Boston, names. With the self-righteousness of their forefathers they were stamping upon the liberties of others and sanctimoniously justifying their oppression upon the grounds of public necessity. I disliked Ames intensely. I despised his son, and my contempt for the cowardly rat Holmes knew no bounds.

While they seemed solidly entrenched in power, I knew that Stein and Murphy were supporting them reluctantly, through self-interest. Oh, there were breaches to be made in their wall, and I was the man to make them.

For the first time in several days I was in a fairly contented mood. A fight against tremendous odds always appealed to me. The worst that could happen was—a death which was fifty years overdue. And

the best was to set Ames and his gang to a diet of turnips and string beans, and to place the Lothrop's back in power where they belonged.

It would be amusing to encounter my late antagonists at the ball to-night. I made up my mind to be quite polite to them. And the ball ought to be fun.

On my bed lay a suit of blue serge, threadbare but clean. It was cut in a fantastic manner, probably the style of the Nineteen-Eighties. The coat was very high-waisted and the trousers were almost skin-tight. I put it on and it fitted me fairly well.

I was inspecting myself in the mirror when a shrill whistle blew from the powerhouse, and immediately there were sounds of activity in the Palace. I heard excited voices, hasty footfalls, and presently there came a knock on my door. Without waiting for permission to enter, Helen Ames burst into the room. Her eyes shining with excitement.

"The Monsters!" she exclaimed. "They've come."

"What on earth—"

"Look out your window," she cried. "You can see them from it."

I crossed to the window and gazed out. From the second story I looked over the low houses of the town through the plate-glass sides of the enclosure half a mile away, and out into the white waste beyond. Descending a hill far off was a vast multitude of black specks. It was impossible to distinguish what they were except that they were alive and moving in some semblance of order.

"They were sighted a little while ago from the powerhouse observatory," she declared. "That whistle was to warn the settlement."

"I wish I had a telescope," I said. "They look like an army of ants from here. What makes you think they are monsters?"

"They must be, to live and breathe outside. Do you think they will attack us?"

"I wouldn't be surprised."

"How horrible—and how thrilling!" she exclaimed.

"There must be many thousands of them," I commented. "They are still streaming over that hilltop. I suppose the snow is frozen so hard it gives them good footing . . . I wonder how they subsist in this waste."

"There will be fighting, battles!" cried the girl, almost hysterically.

"And a general massacre if they are able to break in here," I said dryly. "From

what I've seen of our friends they won't put up much of a fight."

"But you will fight. You'll fight for me as Lancelot did for Guinevere."

I grinned at her. "I'll fight for myself and incidentally you."

"I beg your pardon, sir," said a servant's voice. "His Excellency wishes you to join him on the floor above."

"We can see better from there. Come on," exclaimed Miss Ames.

I followed her to a room on the third floor where I found Ames and the other members of the Council already assembled. Ames held a two-foot telescope which he immediately proffered to me.

"Please inspect them and tell us what you make of them," he requested.

I took the instrument and adjusted it and applied it to my right eye.

The snow had ceased to fall and the sun was out, shining brightly upon the unlimited expanse of snow. The monsters were plainly visible; their vanguard was about five miles away to the south.

I saw a multitude of hairy men, or perhaps men wearing heavy furs. They had two legs, two arms and a head which appeared to be covered with a fur hood. Each man carried a stick or a spear or a rifle—it was impossible to say which; and they moved in ranks and seemed to have officers. Away to the right was a mass which at first I thought to be cavalry, but which proved to be a vast herd of reindeer. I made out a great many sledges drawn by dogs.

The van of the invaders was now swarming across the plain, while their rear guard was not over the top of the hill.

"Well?" said Ames anxiously.

"They are men like ourselves, of course," I replied. "Positively not monsters. It looks to me like a migration of a huge tribe of Eskimos. They have reindeer and dog sledges. They are dressed in furs. I can't distinguish just what their weapons are."

"IT'S incredible," he exclaimed. "How could such a multitude live? Where do they come from?"

"It is very obvious that the air outside is fit to breathe," I remarked. "Here are thousands of men and animals who were not poisoned by the comet gas. For all you know in your hermitage the world may be fairly well populated."

"Savages, barbarians," he muttered.

"They know something of military methods," I retorted scornfully. "They

are advancing in a fair semblance of battle order."

Councilor Holmes wrung his hands. "What shall we do? Advise us!" he demanded.

"How can I advise you?"

"It is fairly evident that they mean to attack us," said Ames calmly.

"I should imagine that this place must have looked marvelous to their scouts," I replied. "Imagine crossing Arctic regions and coming suddenly upon an oasis like this."

"Well," said Ames, "we'll put ourselves in a position of defense. I am sure they can never break into our enclosure."

"They won't have to. Let them smash one pane of your glass and your artificial atmosphere will pour through it to be replaced with the icy air of the outer world. It all depends upon their weapons. If they have firearms of any sort the Community is doomed."

"No," replied Councilor Stein. "Our glass is five inches thick and bullet-proof. They might shatter it with cannon; otherwise they cannot penetrate it."

"I never heard of glass which was proof against a bullet from a high-powered rifle," I replied.

"You forget that you went to sleep in nineteen fifty-one," he answered. "Our founders constructed this enclosure against all conceivable eventualities and made use of the knowledge of the generation which followed yours."

"How do you account for the existence of this multitude, Councilor?" I asked him.

He shrugged his shoulders. "Evidently there were sections of the earth where the atmosphere was not badly polluted during the Great Catastrophe or there were certain men and animals unaffected by the poison gases in the air. For some years, of course, the outer atmosphere has been pure and, though rarefied, would sustain life if human beings could stand the extreme cold."

"I think they are armed only with spears," said Ames, who had taken the telescope from my hands and was studying the advancing enemy. "Our steel and plate glass walls will protect us, I am sure."

"That remains to be seen," I muttered.

"Mr. Putnam," said the President, "the Eskimo tribes of your time had no knowledge of military tactics, according to my reading."

"They were dirty, ignorant savages who lived in small groups in the Arctic regions, sir."

"Men who lived outside, now, would be forced to dress in skins and adopt the methods that sustained life in the old Arctic. These may be descendants of Americans like ourselves and amenable to reason."

"Three generations of barbarous life makes barbarians," I replied. "I think the only arguments which would satisfy them would be admission into this enclosure. The spectacle of your green fields, houses, flowers and growing vegetables is going to inflame their imaginations."

"It is impossible to admit them. They must be induced to go away. Will you go to them as our ambassador?"

With a cynical grin I met his eye. "In company with one or two influential members of the Community, yes. I will not go out alone. I have no desire to be left outside these walls."

"I'll go with you," declared Helen Ames.

"Positively not!" cried her father.

"I suggest," said Stein, "that we wait until we discover their intentions."

"And whether they have firearms," I added. "A continued fusillade from a few rifles or small cannon would soon shatter your plate glass. Remember that it is nearly sixty years old."

Helen squeezed my hand. "It would be a marvelous adventure to go out to treat with the barbarians in our insulated costumes," she whispered.

I didn't want to like the girl, but you couldn't hate a pretty creature who had such a splendid spirit. I gave her a friendly smile.

"Leave us, Helen," commanded her father. "We might as well hold a Council meeting here and now. Putnam, you may be useful to us. Remain."

"I suggest one thing," said Councilor Murphy. "Call off the ball tonight."

"Would it not inspire our people with courage to know that the government class is so indifferent to the approach of these savages that it amuses itself as it had planned?" asked Councilor Holmes.

"My dear sir," replied Murphy, "each festival of this sort increases the resentment of the masses. The women particularly are always furious when our ladies have an opportunity to wear evening clothes. You can't change the feminine characteristics in a few generations. Women are born with a love of bright colors and change of costume. Our working women are forced by law to wear white cotton like their men. In view of the fact that we may need the loyal support

of our people we should be careful not to antagonize them further."

"I agree with every word you have said," declared Councilor Stein.

Ames hesitated. "Their attitude up to the present has been of no consequence. We rule and we do as we please. However, there is something in what you have said. We must present a united face to the foe. We shall postpone the ball in the face of this emergency."

"May I ask if you have any weapons of defense?" I broke in.

"We have our body guard of a hundred trained spearmen," replied the President.

"A mouthful if the attackers ever get inside. You must draft your entire manhood, provide them with weapons, and drill them steadily."

"And what is to prevent them from turning upon us?" asked Holmes.

I laughed. "So far as I know you have given them no reason for such conduct. In the face of a savage enemy outside the walls I don't think a revolution is likely."

"I think we must depend upon iron discipline to keep them down," said Ames. "A few drastic examples will teach them they must not rebel against authority."

"Councilor Stein," I asked, "Can you electrify your enclosure so that those who touch it will receive a severe shock?"

He shook his head. "We are weak in electric apparatus. Impossible."

"With the vast reservoir of human knowledge which was cooped up here at the time of the Catastrophe, you are compelled to defend yourselves with the same weapons as Stone Age man!"

He grinned. "You see, our ancestors were all pacifists, damn it."

MEANTIME the van of the invaders had approached within a mile of our structure and were obviously in a condition of great excitement. They broke ranks and brandished weapons. Ames, looking through the telescope, said that the weapons appeared to be lances, spears, and bows and arrows. I'll admit I thought that was good news.

The multitude advanced upon a two-mile front and their array still extended over the brow of the hill five miles back. In full view I estimated that there were at least fifteen thousand in the army of whom a third or a half were probably women and children. How the perpetual snow could breed such a population and provide sustenance for them, I could not comprehend, but like the other dwellers

in the hothouse I knew nothing of the new world.

They surged to within a quarter of a mile of our enclosure and then came to a halt while some sort of order was being restored. Looking down upon our village I saw that the housetops were full of people and the plaza was jammed and everybody seemed to be talking or shrieking at once.

In the rear of the mob of savages a camp was being erected. We saw round tents of skin go up in regular formations. We saw hundreds of dog sleds come in and be unloaded, and presently the smoke of campfires ascended to the sky.

It was rapidly growing dark, and Ames put down the telescope with a sigh.

"There is nothing we can do," he said. "They do not intend to attack to-night and we have nothing with which to defend ourselves in case of an assault. Our wall must keep them at bay."

I sat down with Stein while Ames and the other Councilors conversed in low tones.

"Has it occurred to you," I asked, "that this arctic belt may not extend clear across the equatorial regions? The climate there may correspond to Labrador or even Nova Scotia as things used to be."

"I haven't thought about it," he admitted. "It is possible. Why?"

"Survivors of the Catastrophe could scratch a living there. And such animals as survived might have found their way south. I notice that the men outside have wooden poles for their tents and wooden hafts for their spears. They have iron or steel points to their weapons. If the world were covered by snow and ice all trees would have died long ago, and all metals would have been buried beneath a dozen, maybe fifty feet of ice."

"True. But what has brought people from such a region into this desolate country?"

"Tales may have reached them of this community with its civilization and fertility under glass. Hunters and trappers may have penetrated as far north as this and spied upon the place."

"There is something in your suggestion."

"For all we know there may be some civilized communities left in the world. Why not rig up a wireless broadcasting station and see what you can find?"

He shook his head. "Impossible. We cannot generate the power any more. You have no idea to what straits we are reduced scientifically. We are equipped to

meet only our needs, and nothing more."

"Mr. Putnam," called the President, "in the face of this peril, I assume we may depend upon your loyalty and cooperation."

"I'll fight for my life, sir."

"Your presence here is in the light of a miracle," said Ames, smiling, "and your influence with our stupid masses is greater than you know. I am going to risk arming our entire manpower as far as I am able, and I shall ask you to address our people tomorrow and persuade them that their only hope of salvation is loyalty to the government and courage to resist the savages."

"I'll talk to them in that vein, sir. It's common sense."

"Thank you. Will you kindly leave us now?"

Descending to my room I found my dinner on my table. I drew the table to the window and ate in the gathering gloom.

Although darkness was fast descending, the population of Putnam was still on the plaza or on the housetops and it was easy for me to comprehend their excitement and alarm.

Here were three thousand people who had been born and lived all their lives in a hothouse one mile square. Outside their walls was perpetual winter and utter desolation. They believed that they were the only human beings on the planet Earth. They breathed artificial air and assumed that they would die if they put their noses outside their glass house. Their world was within the walls and beyond was nothing.

Now, inexplicably, they saw upon the white plain without a vast multitude of humans, neither monsters as they assumed the denizens of the frozen world to be nor myths as most of the ruling Putnamites supposed. Through the glass they saw evidences of great and intelligent activity. Wood fires, for example. Cooking in the Community was done upon stoves which burned a condensed Jobian gas.

The hostile intent of the besieging army must have been evident, and no doubt this helpless and enervated people was shaken with fear. The din of their chatter was continual, but it was finally ended by a trumpeter who appeared upon the steps of the Palace, blew attention, and then shouted through a megaphone an order for all persons to withdraw at once into their homes and sleep peacefully while the

Council watched over them and guarded their security.

Gradually the mob dispersed, like the meek souls they were. Black night descended, but from my window I watched the encampment without. There were hundreds of fires which revealed the dark forms of the savages moving to and fro upon a line which extended from a hill to the west of the Community to the edge of the frozen lake, a distance of nearly two miles.

There seemed to be plenty of fuel in the ranks of the savages. No doubt they were dining upon reindeer meat, and it made my mouth water to think of fresh venison steaks.

It was evident to me that the ice belt in which the Community was situated could not extend many hundred miles to the south, for this army had traveled on foot and had plenty of wood for its fires, while reindeer cannot live in a land which is absolutely devoid of vegetation. I suspected that the air they breathed was good, for trees and grasses do not grow in exceedingly thin atmosphere, nor do fires burn.

Hours passed. The camp fires on the snow burned very low. I could see sentinels pass in front of their glowing embers. The enemy was taking no chances upon a sortie from the glass city, being unaware of the absurdly helpless and meek character of its inhabitants.

I remembered at last that conspirators were meeting to-night in my former tomb, and that I had promised to conspire with them. While it was possible that the appearance of the barbarians had changed their plans, I thought that the meeting would probably take place, and so determined to attend it.

As the Palace door was probably locked and guarded, I would have to drop from the window. My blue costume, donned for the ball which had not taken place would make me less conspicuous in creeping across the plaza than the white shorts, so I lowered myself just as I was from my window sill and dropped upon the soft grass.

CHAPTER IV

OUT IN THE GLACIAL AGE

DARK though it was, I found and pushed open the door of the building in which I had slept a hundred years, and was immediately confronted by a sentinel.

"Name, please," he whispered.

"Putnam."

The fellow groped for my hand and kissed it.

"You are welcome, sir," he murmured. "All are assembled. We wait only you. This way."

Taking my hand, he led me down a corridor and opened a door to lead me into the chamber in which I had lain in my glass case. The room was dimly lighted by a single tallow candle. As there were no windows, there was no chance of the faint illumination being discovered. I discerned six or eight men sitting on the stone floor, and recognized Professors Ditmar and Lothrop among them.

Ditmar presented me to Jones, Hatrick, Rubens, Casey, Hubbard and Burroughs, all small pale men with determination written upon their refined features. Some of them kissed my hand, despite my protests; all greeted me hopefully and with enthusiasm.

"First, Mr. Putnam," said Ditmar, "tell us what are our prospects of surviving the attack of this army of Monsters?"

"If they have weapons which will break your glass, you are doomed. But I see no evidence of any missile weapons save arrows. They cannot even find heavy stones to hurl at the enclosure. So what can they do?"

"Besiege us, perhaps," replied the professor.

I laughed. "What of it? Here is a community which is self-supporting, while it is impossible for them to have transported enough supplies to last them for more than a few weeks. When they find they cannot make a breach in your walls they will have to break camp and return to wherever they came from. I think this is a raid, nothing more."

I heard sighs of profound relief on all sides.

"Then the danger is practically negligible."

"Assuming that they have no means of breaking your glass, yes. However, they may return with more effective weapons. It's about time this Community realized that it is not alone in the world and may have to fight against great odds for existence."

"How can they breathe? There is no air out there," asked one of the group.

"Obviously the air is good, because they do breathe it," I retorted. "They are dressed to sustain the extreme cold."

"Well," said Professor Ditmar, "we have

learned to-day that things are not as bad, outside, as we have been taught. We seem to be in no immediate danger from this savage mob. Let us get to our business."

"By all means," I agreed. "I am curious to learn your grievances and how you hope to obtain redress."

"Very well," said the professor. "You have learned already that our government is a brutal tyranny. We are oppressed, maltreated, forced into slavery for the benefit of a vicious aristocracy."

"I have seen no evidence of cruel oppression," I replied. "Please be more specific."

"I shall. First of all, the two hundred and fifty 'patricians' are exempt from labor except the nominal duties of the Council's Guard. The other ninety-odd per cent of the community are forced to work seven days a week in the fields and factories. The peasants of the former world were allowed to use some of what they produced, but were kept in poverty by excessive taxation. Everything we produce is turned into the community storehouses, and we are doled out hardly enough food to keep body and soul together."

"What happens to the rest of your food products?"

"They may be drawn out without stint by the Councilor class. They live in luxury at our expense. Meat and wine are forbidden to us. You know how they live at the Palace."

I nodded.

"There is the question of housing. In the Community are five hundred houses. One hundred of these are occupied by the aristocrats, two and even one to a cottage. The other four hundred are occupied by two thousand seven hundred and fifty people, sometimes as many as three families to a four-room cottage. You can appreciate the effect of such congestion upon modesty and decency."

"Go on."

"For clothing we own only what you have seen us wear. Two suits of white cotton are issued to each individual per year. The Palace crowd is privileged to wear a variety of clothing. From a masculine standpoint that isn't so important, but it humiliates our women terribly."

I smiled. "I can understand that."

"They disregard completely our natural instincts of affection. Marriage is arranged by lot, but our oppressors disregard that law also. Our most attractive girls are

drawn dishonestly by the scoundrels. Their women are never drawn by one of our class. And the most abominable feature—"

"Let me tell him, professor!" exclaimed the man Burroughs. "A year ago my sister, the sweetest and loveliest girl in the Community, was drawn by young Ames. He kept her three months, divorced her, and her name went into the next lottery. She was drawn this time by a third scoundrel, but she stabbed herself with a carving knife and escaped his clutches."

"Good God!" I exclaimed. "They've turned marriage into a form of slavery!"

"You've said the truth," said Lothrop grimly. "Our beautiful girls are sometimes married to three or four of the young aristocrats and finally are drawn by their own class who must marry them whether they want to or not."

"My sister Marjorie comes up in two weeks," he continued angrily. "Young Ames wants her. He has drawn nine women in two years. You can understand what her fate will be. She has promised to kill herself."

"But their own women—why do they permit such outrages?"

"They can't help themselves. But they make no pretense of loving their husbands."

"I can't understand Ames permitting such abominations," I gasped. "While he strikes me as cold and overbearing, I would not set him down as a libertine."

"He is dependent for power upon these people," replied Ditmar. "He knows we commoners would topple him off his throne in a minute if it were not for the spears of his guardsmen."

"DON'T you realize you could overpower the guard in one rush?" I asked.

"But they are armed and we are without weapons," protested Hatrick uncomfortably.

"There are at least a thousand men among you and the guard is only a hundred strong. Unarmed mobs have overpowered soldiery with guns and cannon in the past. You know that if you are familiar with history."

"Our people have had pacifism and non-resistance taught them from childhood," said Ditmar. "It is almost a religion with us. And scores, maybe hundreds, would be killed in an uprising of that sort."

"So much the better for the survivors," I

said contemptuously. "Don't you appreciate that you won't be much better off if you do wipe out the drones? You won't improve your menu much and from what I have seen of your factories you can't produce clothing enough to enable your women to go in for changes of fashion. With a population of two thousand you would get along very well in this glass enclosure, while these who might be killed in an uprising are not getting so much fun out of living now that they should be eager to live."

"You are as brutal as Ames," muttered somebody.

"Not at all. I am merely trying to make plain to you that you can't improve your lot without action. Ames and his crowd are not going to lay down their leadership. If you want it you must take it by force. Lay down your lives for your people. If you are not willing to fight for liberty you don't deserve it."

"You are right," cried Ditmar. "I'll willingly throw myself on a spear."

"And so will I!"

"And I!"

"And I!"

Suddenly a sharp voice from the rear broke in: "You men are under arrest!"

I turned. An officer with a sword stood in the only exit. Behind him I saw three or four spearmen.

I heard groans from all around me and I leaned forward and blew out the candle.

"Here's your opportunity," I called cheerfully. "Rush 'em, men."

I moved forward, bent double, cloaked by the impenetrable darkness, toward the doorway.

"Don't let one escape," shouted the officer as I dove at his legs.

Down he went with a clatter on the stone floor. I grappled for his sword arm and wrenched the weapon from him.

"Come on, men!" I shouted just as a guardsman stumbled over me. He fell and I rose and thrust with my sword at a soldier whom I distinguished by the faint glimmer of his spear point.

He went down. Ditmar and Lothrop were by my side and I heard Lothrop groan as an unseen spearman drove his point into his body. With an oath I ran the soldier through; as I pulled out my sword I collided with the shaft of another spear. I grasped it with my left hand and thrust at its wielder, who sank with a moan of pain.

The way was clear. I ran down the dark and now empty corridor and out into the open. Behind me came my sheep-like conspirators.

"Scatter," I commanded. "It's your only hope."

"They killed Lothrop!" exclaimed Ditmar. "Oh, the swine!"

"Think of the living. . . . Good night!" I exclaimed, and moved swiftly toward the Palace. The sword was still in my hand and I threw it across the grass. The situation was distressing but clearly understandable. Among oppressed people there are always those who curry favor by "informing," and word of the revolutionary



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meeting had been carried to the Palace. An officer and four men had been sent to arrest the conspirators.

Well, I had killed or wounded three of the soldiers. If the officer had identified me I was going to be in plenty of trouble. On the other hand the chamber was in semidarkness and I was in dark clothes. It might be that my presence at the meeting was not known.

The problem was how to get back into my room. I paused at fifty paces distance from the Palace and contemplated it. I observed lights in several windows and suddenly the door opened and out sallied a dozen men armed with spears, headed by President Ames in person. I dropped flat on the grass and they moved swiftly toward the Putnam Tomb.

To my astonishment the Palace door was not closed after the departure of the party and the light in the hallway went out immediately. It was my chance and I glided across the lawn, up the steps and slipped into the hall.

It was empty. I ran lightly up the steps to the second floor and bumped into a soft body in the hall. Arms went around me.

"Who is it and what do you want?" demanded Helen Ames.

"It's Putnam. Release me, please."

She hugged me tighter and giggled. "Not until you confess. Were you at the meeting of the conspirators?"

"Yes, if you must know."

"What happened?" she asked breathlessly.

"I killed or wounded your soldiers and escaped," I admitted. "Now betray me."

She laughed and released me. "Not I. It puts you completely in my power."

"Does your father know that I was present?"

"I don't think so, but he will suspect it when he finds that there was a fight. Those rabbits would have surrendered without a struggle."

"Well," I said sullenly, "I don't care what happens to me."

"I do, George," she retorted. "Get into your room, undress and go to bed. While father may suspect, he can't prove anything in all probability."

"Good night, Miss Ames."

"Good night, unwilling lover."

After that I reached my room without incident and removed my costume and crept into bed. There was going to be Hades to pay about the bloodshed, but I didn't much care what happened. Helen was right about the conspirators. With

the exception of Ditmar and Lothrop they were rabbits.

Only two generations from the Great Catastrophe, and men were back to swords and spears! Outside was a horde of savages with no weapons strong enough to break plate glass, and inside was a helpless herd of antelope who would be defenseless against attack assuming they were not all strangled by the escape of the Jobian atmosphere.

I was sick to death of them, these whining oppressed and their debauched oppressors. The only person within the enclosure for whom I had any respect was Helen Ames.

I couldn't leave, however, until I had ended the abominable tyranny of the Ames family and their friends. And I yearned particularly to destroy their atrocious marriage lottery.

SHORTLY after daybreak I was awakened by trumpets on the plaza and, rising, looked out of the window to see the population of the Community assembling.

There was activity in the camp of the enemy, also. I could see officers moving about and marshaling the horde into battle array. They had banners of some sort which were being unfurled. Near a group of tents in the center of their line I saw that a flagpole had been erected in the ice and men were working with halyards. A ball of cloth was run up to the top and broke out. To my astonishment there suddenly waved in the breeze the Stars and Stripes.

Americans! The flag of my country! I drew myself to attention and brought up my right hand smartly as we used to in the Reserve Officers' Training Corps when the flag was unfurled.

So this fur-clad horde marched under the Stars and Stripes! I felt a thrill of sympathy for them. Such as they were, they had survived the great Catastrophe without the advantages of a steel and glass enclosure and artificial air. And if they had preserved the flags, they might have preserved firearms—in which case the Putnam Community was doomed.

My meditations were interrupted by the unannounced entrance of President Ames. He wore a blue uniform cut like the costume which I had donned for the ball that never took place and he had a sword strapped to his side.

"A word with you in private," he said sternly.

"First look out the window," I requested. "What do you see there?"

He stepped to my side. "I believe—it looks like the old United States flag," he said. "I never saw one outside of a book before."

"You mean you don't use it in the Community?"

He shook his head. "It never occurred to our founders to bring a flag into the inclosure."

"Indeed!"

"Last night one of my soldiers was killed and two were badly wounded," said the president.

I was silent.

"There was a meeting of conspirators in the Putnam Memorial Building. I was informed of it and sent an officer with four men to arrest them. They set upon my men in the dark, disarmed my officer, and one of them used his sword to overthrow my spearmen."

"Why didn't they use their spears?" I asked innocently.

"The attack was unexpected. I believe that you were the man who attacked the guardsmen, Mr. Putnam."

"I admit nothing," I replied.

"I am considering whether I should order you to be eliminated."

"Use your own judgment," I said cheerfully.

"I hesitate only because of the difficulties of the present situation," he replied. "It is evident that your loyalty is not to be expected."

I laughed. "If one man could put to rout five of your guard, Mr. President, how do you anticipate that your soldiery will give a good account of themselves against those stout fellows outside?"

"They are not all poltroons," he said vexedly. "Mr. Putnam, why did you join those conspirators?"

"I wanted to hear both sides of the conditions prevailing in this community. So far I had heard only your version. I had learned enough to know that the men who assembled last night need expect no mercy at your hands if captured, so I bowled over your animated ninepins and enabled my fellow conspirators to escape."

Ames was shaking with suppressed fury.

"As a matter of fact it was not a conspiracy," I stated. "It was just a recital of grievances. They had no notion of rising to overthrow your authority and you might just as well have permitted the meeting on the plaza at noon. I told them frankly that determined men could overcome your

guardsmen with their bare hands if they didn't mind a few score deaths, but the idea didn't appeal to the cowards in the least. You have squeezed most of the manhood out of your subjects. I congratulate your majesty."

He eyed me speculatively. "If you were put outside, do you think they would have spirit enough to resent it?"

"I think you could put down any rising. On the other hand, from my experience of the quality of your soldiers I doubt if they would fight very hard against an infuriated mob. With cowards on both sides, who could predict the result?"

"You try my patience, sir," he said, choking with anger. "It may interest you to know that Professor Ditmar was arrested at daybreak. Professor Lothrop lost his life in the fracas your impetuosity brought about. Their women have been condemned to work in the fields until further notice."

"Lothrop was killed? That's a con-founded shame. Mr. Ames, do you consider it just to punish women for the offenses of their men?"

"I consider it salutary," he said shortly. "You will not leave this room until I make up my mind what to do with you."

"Very well."

"And your rations are reduced to the status of the working man," he added maliciously as he departed.

This was bad news because I had awakened hungry.

From my window I watched the entire population assemble and I heard Ames address them from the steps of the Palace. The purport of his speech was that the savages without were helpless and that the business of the Community would continue as usual. A trumpet sounded the order to go to their various labors, and in five minutes the plaza was empty.

I next turned my attention to the savages, who advanced very slowly and with great caution. Their line extended the full length of the enclosure and flanked it. They moved in a solid phalanx behind which marched several hundred archers. Four or five thousand fur-clad persons remained at the camp and a few score guarded the reindeer who had been driven into a corral made of ice blocks. I assumed that those at the camp were the women and children.

A group of about fifty individuals, advancing a hundred yards behind the phalanx, I took to be the general and his staff. I saw no weapons in the entire array save

spears and bows. It was evident as they came close that the lack of any sign of defence within the glass enclosure astonished and perturbed them, and the whole line halted a hundred yards away.

It must have been astonishing to the savages who stood in their furs in the bitter cold to gaze upon a expanse of gardens and pretty dwellings and people scantily clad who worked in the fields or moved about with no apparent expectation of being molested—astonishing and most exasperating.

FINALLY they made up their minds to rush the place and the whole line advanced at the double quick. Now there was a steel wall eight feet high around the Community, above which reared the great squares of plate glass in steel frames. Against the wall beat a human wave whose shouts were only heard very faintly. Arrows sped from bows, struck the glass and bounded off. Men climbed upon each other's shoulders and thrust at it with the points of their spears.

If they were acquainted with window glass in their unknown homes, they probably anticipated that it would be easily broken, but the thick tough glass resisted them successfully, even when they assailed it with axes. The shatterproof glass of my time had been amazingly improved.

For half an hour the futile assault continued. I saw bearded faces pressing against the glass and fierce eyes flashing impotent fury upon the timid inhabitants, most of whom had stopped their work in the fields and watched the "Monsters" nervously, by no means certain that their defenses were adequate. Finally the tide receded. The savage multitude drifted back to the camp where no doubt a council of war was held.

Our people gave themselves over to rejoicing. They came dancing out of the side streets and congregated in the plaza, shouting, screaming and abandoning themselves to hysteria. The strain on them undoubtedly had been enormous for few among them were ignorant of their fate if a single pane of plate glass had broken during the assault.

I kept my eyes upon the savages who fought under the Stars and Stripes, and presently I saw a man advancing bearing a white flag and followed by two others, presumably officers, for they carried swords.

The flag bearer thrust the staff in the snow about two hundred feet from our

enclosure, folded his arms and waited for a response. They evidently wanted to be admitted for a parley. At that moment I was summoned to the council room. The members were all assembled.

"Be seated, Mr. Putnam," said Ames courteously. "The Council would like your opinion of the situation."

"Your bulwark held," I said. "It doesn't look as if they could make a breach in it."

"Of course they can't. But this flag of truce—shall we ignore it? It is impossible to permit them to enter."

"Pay no attention to it," advised Holmes. "Finding that we treat them with contempt and being unable to communicate with us or to break into our stronghold, they will pack up and go away."

"Is that your opinion, Mr. Putnam?" asked Ames.

"They can't besiege us. No doubt they have come a long way and they must conserve their supplies for the retreat. I expect they will camp here for a few days and then retire. It seems to me that you should treat with them; otherwise they may return better equipped to smash their way in."

"To treat with them would be a sign of weakness," said Councilor Homes. "I am against it."

"I should like very much to talk to them and discover whence they came and all about them," said Councilor Stein.

"It seemed to me," I stated, "that an opportunity to learn from them something about the world outside should not be neglected. For all we know they may represent a nation with hundreds of thousands of population. If they live a thousand miles to the south in a region where the ice has melted they must be familiar with the ruins of great cities, and they should easily find in them the means of breaking your glass. This time they didn't know what they were up against. They are sure to return and with better arms."

"Right," said Stein. "We might persuade them of our invulnerability if we talked with them."

"And who is to venture outside the walls?" asked Holmes scornfully. "These brutes will probably dispatch anybody fool enough to put his nose outside."

"I doubt that. They carry the American flag, they send forward a flag of truce, and for all we know they may be civilized. They wear furs but so did Peary and Admiral Byrd when they visited the Arctic."

"Civilized!" exclaimed Holmes. "With bows and arrows and spears?"

"Are you any better off?" I jeered.

"I agree with Putnam and Stein," said Ames. "We should parley with them and persuade them that it is useless to make another attempt against us. I appoint you our ambassador, Mr. Putnam."

"Much obliged," I said dryly. "I refuse the honor."

"You are afraid," sneered Holmes.

"Not of them, but of you," I retorted coolly. "I am not at all sure you would readmit me to the enclosure."

I caught a look in the eyes of President Ames which informed me that my conjecture was not without grounds.

"You have committed a serious offense against our laws," he said with frank indifference. "You have been welcomed by the government and you are not in harmony with it. However, I give you my word, if you go outside, that you will be permitted to return."

"We will be too anxious to hear your news to shut you out," said Stein.

"I will go," I replied, "if your son accompanies me, Mr. Ames."

There was consternation for a moment and Ames scowled. "You want a hostage," he said. "I will give you Professor Dittmar."

"In which case I am sure we would not be admitted within the enclosure. I want some one near and dear to you."

"Very well," he said to my astonishment, "my son will accompany you. Stein, take Mr. Putnam to the plant and equip him. The meeting is adjourned."

AS I followed Stein from the Palace, I observed a moment later that a white cloth was displayed from a third story window.

We walked rapidly across country to the air plant which was located on the opposite side of the enclosure from the camp of the enemy.

People thronged from all sides, but did not dare address a councilor directly. However, shouts from the back of the crowd reached our ears.

"Are we safe?" "Can they break in?" came in female voices.

Stein turned and waved a reassuring hand at the people. "We are perfectly safe and you have nothing to fear."

Presently we were in the fields. Looking back I saw a group of three persons coming from the Palace.

We were admitted immediately through the door in the wall and, crossing a small open space, we entered a long low build-

ing set directly against the side of the steel enclosure.

We passed through an office and went into a locker room. Stein drew forth a bunch of keys and produced a curious-looking costume. It resembled somewhat

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a diving suit. It was constructed of rubber and was in one piece from foot to neck. There was a helmet of rubber with a glass face-covering and I observed a speaking tube inside the glass and telephone attachments at the ears.

"Our workmen venture out in these to cut ice and to bring in snow for our water supply," he said. "They are in good condition. We pump warm air into the suit, which is perfectly insulated. You can talk to a companion and you can hear perfectly. Get into it."

"If I had a fur coat I wouldn't bother with this apparatus," I replied disdainfully. "If those people out there can breathe the air, I can."

"They are accustomed to very low temperatures and you are not," he replied. "Slip it on."

I had adjusted my costume except the helmet when President Ames entered the room. He was accompanied by his son and, to my surprise, his daughter.

"My son has never been outside," said Ames half apologetically, "but in this crisis he believes it his duty."

The young man favored me with a scowl of hate. I saw with satisfaction that I had broken his nose in our encounter.

"I don't see why two of us have to go out," he protested to his august parent.

"For this reason," replied Ames. "I do not trust Mr. Putnam completely. Put on the costume."

Stein handed him a suit similar to mine and reluctantly he thrust one foot in it. I saw him grow very pale and begin to tremble. Helen said nothing, but eyed him with scorn.

"I won't!" he exclaimed sullenly. "I don't have to. Father, you can't make me go outside. We'll be killed by those Monsters."

"Put it on!" said his father sternly.

He made to thrust the other foot into the suit, whined piteously, and suddenly toppled over in a faint.

"Give it to me," commanded Helen Ames. "I'll go."

"Oh, the coward," murmured the father in a low, shamed tone.

Helen was pulling the costume from the legs of her craven brother.

"No, no, Miss Ames," I protested. "I'll go alone."

"Helen, I forbid you!" declared the President.

"I'll be the hostage," said the girl defiantly. She had pulled on the costume and was fastening it at her neck. My eyes spoke admiration and she colored prettily.

"I will trust your father," I assured her. "There may be some danger. It is terrible to expose a girl to it."

"Dad," said Helen, "everybody knows that John is to go out with Mr. Putnam. If he goes alone they will know that my brother is a coward. Don't you see, I must go?"

"I'll go," said Ames.

"No, your place is here."

He turned to me, much moved. Though I hated him, I was sorry for him, then.

"Do you think they will respect the flag of truce?" he asked piteously. "Helen is right; I can't have the Community learn that John was afraid to go."

"I'm not afraid," snarled the recreant who was climbing upon his feet. "I'm not taking chances in those old suits, that's all. There might be a tear in them."

"Stein," said Ames, "conceal the coward here until the others return. Mr. Putnam, bring her back safely and your offenses will be condoned."

"I'll take care of her, sir," I promised. "Miss Ames, you are a heroine."

"Pshaw!" she retorted. "It will be an experience. Put on my helmet, Mr. Stein."

He fastened the glass and rubber contraption over her pretty head and she smiled at me whimsically through her glass mask. My own helmet was then put in place and a small hose brought into play to pump air into the costume. It was ingeniously made so that we breathed easily by means of a canteen affair of compressed air attached to a belt. Even our gloves were insulated. Withal the costume was light and easy to move about in.

The President embraced the inflated figure of his daughter, shook my hand and nodded to Stein. He led us through a narrow door into a steel chamber hermetically sealed, went out and closed the door on us. A moment later the wall opposite began to open and revealed glaring snow outside. Helen stepped to my side and took my hand. Together we stepped out into the real world.

We clambered precariously up a slope, for the water and irrigation service of the Community removed snow and ice from without the door as soon as it formed, and then began what was about a two mile tramp around the enclosure to the spot where the ambassadors of the barbarians awaited us.

I was perfectly warm and comfortable and the rubber soles of our costume enabled us to move without slipping upon the solid crust of the snow.

"Isn't this thrilling," said a voice in my ear. Helen was speaking through her tube and my wireless phone picked up her words. I had to turn my body to look at her. Her cheeks were pink and her eyes were sparkling. As we passed the little forest within the Dome we saw that there were people on the limbs of trees who waved to us and applauded and no doubt shouted though we could not hear them.

Presently we were moving across the far end of the glass house and we were instantly spotted by the fur-clad soldiers, who set up a shout. Their discipline was good, however, for they did not break ranks and rush upon us. We rounded the corner of the enclosure and observed the bearer of the flag of truce and two others who had been warned of our coming and were moving toward us.

I lifted empty hands and immediately the two men laid their swords on the snow and lifted their hands skyward. I was relieved at this for I had been by no means certain that they would respect their own white flag.

"You see," I said to Helen, "these people mean to do the right thing."

"It would be fun if they carried us off, though," she retorted.

"I'm afraid it wouldn't. Stein said we have only two hours' air supply at the most."

Nothing more was said until we came within a hundred yards of the envoys and then a barytone voice came to my ears.

"How the devil can we talk to them? Their heads are glassed in."

"We can hear you perfectly," I said into my speaking tube. Their astonishment was ludicrous for his remark had been made in an ordinary tone and could not have been heard by the naked ear at that distance.

"Why, they speak as good English as we do," said Helen. This they heard also for they laughed boisterously, like Viking conquerors.

In a moment we confronted each other.

"One of them is a woman," gasped a black-bearded man with fine blue eyes and a fair skin.

"Who are you and why do you attack our Community?" I said sternly.

THE man with the black beard looked at the other one and smiled. The second man was heavily bearded, but his whiskers were red. They were both six-footers and were garbed in bearskins and with fox-skin gloves.

"We are Americans," replied Blackbeard.

"We attacked your glass country because we wanted to get into it. Why do you dress like that in the open air? Do your faces freeze easily—is that the reason?"

"We are warm and comfortable like this," I replied.

"But how do you speak and hear through that headdress?" he demanded.

"Do you know nothing of the telephone?"

The two men looked interested. "We have heard of it. Our ancestors used it to talk for enormous distances. Are you sorcerers in there?"

"We are men and women like yourselves, but we know how to protect ourselves from cold and enemies."

"That is wonderful," he replied. "We thought at first it was Fairyland when we saw trees and flowers growing amid snow and ice. We have little grass and few flowers in our country. Why does your glass not break when it is struck with a spear?"

"It is so thick that it is proof against any weapon or missile," I informed him. "We knew you could not break in, which is why we did not attack you with our terrible weapons. We did not wish to hurt you."

"Have you guns in there?" he demanded eagerly.

"Very terrible guns. Are there none in your country?"

"We have found many, but nothing to use in them," he said frankly.

"And that's a lucky break," I reflected. "How far is your country from here?"

"Ninety days' march," he replied. "We have had many die on the way because of hardships."

"Why did you come?"

"For years we have been hearing from hunters of this fairyland where men and women go about unclad among green grass and flowers and trees," he replied, "and finally we decided to conquer it and help ourselves to its treasures. We raised a great army and we are here."

"Then you had better return and report that our city is impregnable and that we cannot be conquered."

"Oh, we shall capture the place," he said confidently. "If you surrender, your lives will be spared. Otherwise—" He made a significant gesture of his finger across his throat.

"You carry the American flag," I said. "That is our flag. Do you know the name of the land in which you live?"

"It is called Carolina," he replied. "It

was one of the States of the American Union before the time of the great death and the great cold."

"Have you snow and ice there?"

"Much in the winter, but it melts and we have grass in summer."

"Do you live in cities?"

"Oh, yes, but they are not enclosed like yours."

"We built our enclosure at the time of the Great Death, to avoid it. We supposed that everybody else in the world perished."

"Most people died," he replied, "and of those who lived most perished from cold, but some survived. They were our grandfathers and grandmothers. Now we are a very strong nation. Ten times as strong as our army which you see. You had better surrender."

"And you had better go home," I replied. "It will soon be colder here and you will not have enough food to bring you back to your own country. You cannot conquer us."

"If you will come out from your glass house we shall conquer you very easily," he assured me.

"We shall not come out and you can't get in. You are wasting your time, my friend. If we wished we could have run an electric current around our fortress and the touch of it would kill you. Do you know what electricity is?"

"Oh, yes," he said, impressed. "Our ancestors used it to kill criminals and to light their cities. Do you know how to make it?"

"We could kill your whole army and shall do so if you attack us again."

"Well," he said after a slight hesitation, "go back in peace, since you are protected by the flag of truce."

"We have only good will toward you," I assured him. "But now you are warned. Your army will die suddenly and painfully."

"We are not afraid to die," he replied. "Good-by. . . . Your woman is very beautiful."

"Thank you," said Helen, speaking for the first time. "You are rather handsome yourself."

He grinned broadly and Redbeard clapped him on the back.

Good-natured barbarians! More human, I reflected, than the cold-blooded aristocrats and milk-and-water sheep within the Dome.

Saluting one another, we separated and moved as rapidly as possible around the enclosure to the entrance.

"You were marvelous," she declared. "I am certain you frightened them. That tale about electrifying the structure was an inspiration. I wish it were possible."

"They seem a decent lot of savages," I replied. "They have traditions of the glories of the past, but apparently are unable to revive them. Even if this outfit retreats, however, I think they will be back with better equipment. We've only postponed the evil day."

"Imagine there being, in the world, a country where they have grass and trees in the open air," she said with a sigh. "I would like to see it."

And then the idea came to me of building an airplane. It would all depend on the air density. . . .

We arrived before the entrance to the enclosure which would have been hard to distinguish except that the spot was marked with a white cross. As we approached it the door slid open and we stepped into the vestibule. The outer door slipped back into place and then the inner door opened and Stein and Ames rushed into the chamber and dragged us to the locker room.

It amused me to see that they were shaking with cold from a second's contact with outer atmosphere in the steel chamber. I was perspiring inside my costume. Stein removed my helmet and then relieved Helen of hers.

"Well?" said Ames. "What happened?"

"They summoned us to surrender and I warned them of dire consequences if they attacked again. I think they will get out."

"What are they like?" asked Stein eagerly.

"White men like ourselves. Ignorant descendants of survivors of the Catastrophe. They come from the Carolinas, where they say they have grass and other vegetation during a short summer. Hunters have been bringing back tales of this Community for years.

"I am sure Mr. Putnam scared them," said Helen eagerly. "Their leader said I was beautiful. I wish I could make George think so."

"I think you have both beauty and the finest type of courage," I said warmly. "I congratulate you upon your daughter, Mr. Ames."

"She ought to have been my son," he said bitterly. "May I beg you to be silent regarding his abominable exhibition of cowardice?"

"My lips are sealed," I promised.

"There will be a meeting of the Council in an hour," said the President. "Mr. Putnam will make his report officially."

"In the meantime, I should like to question him regarding the impressions made upon him by the barbarians," stated Stein. "I'll conduct him to the meeting."

Ames took his daughter away with him and collected his craven son en route.

STEIN led me into a small room furnished with a desk and two chairs. We seated ourselves.

"The men with whom you talked—they seemed to be exactly like ourselves? Normal? Intelligent? Possessing similar physical characteristics?"

"Yes. Their English was not so precise but their mental processes seemed normal. Physically they were bigger and stronger than your people."

"A hard life would breed big men," he said thoughtfully. "The most remarkable thing is their statement that only five or six hundred miles to the south of us, the temperature is high enough to melt snow and ice and to permit of vegetation. It bears out my theory that the world's atmosphere is rapidly increasing in density and in time the earth will be habitable again."

"It seems to be habitable now. What I cannot understand is how the grandchildren of civilized people could have degenerated into barbarism in sixty years."

Stein smiled. "Civilization, so-called, was the work of a limited number of able minds in each generation. The radio, the telephone, the airplane, the motor, the complicated machinery of the world was in the hands of specialists. The masses of the population were no more capable of producing mechanical marvels than so many African savages. You, for example. Could you, given the tools and

materials, manufacture a single one of the products of your age?"

"I am afraid not," I admitted.

"We know positively that the poisoned atmosphere swept the world clean of most of its inhabitants and the great cold which followed covered with a mantle of snow and ice the works of mankind. The appearance of this horde proves, of course, that there were survivors. These were men and women whose vitality and healthy lungs enabled them to breathe the air which slew the vast multitude surrounding the enclosure at the time of the Catastrophe.

"During the first few months after the calamity the radio of this Community broadcast appeals for news and our response was from a similarly protected community in Los Angeles which finally was wiped out. That was ample evidence that the destruction was world-wide. It is possible that the poison gases of the meteor were less potent in certain sections; they must have been or nobody could have survived. Those who came through were isolated cases, a few thousands, perhaps in the whole North American continent. Certain animals also survived. The horse must have perished since there isn't a horse in that army outside. Fur-bearing animals seemed to have kept alive.

"As the years passed the survivors drifted together into bands, clad themselves in skins, warmed themselves by fires, and moved south to avoid the cold, accompanied by such animals as were alive. They increased and multiplied."

"But they had been civilized people," I protested.

"They had no tools, my friend. If you were no expert gun maker, you could not make a gun without the tools and materials. If you were an authority upon ex-



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plosives you were unable to manufacture them without the ingredients.

"Education comes from books and the libraries of the world were quickly buried under twenty or thirty feet of snow and ice. The struggle for existence must have been awful and word of mouth education of children was perforce neglected. The children of the generation following the Catastrophe probably did not know how to read and write. As they did not come through the crisis with arms in their hands, they had to improvise them to kill animals for food. The spear was the first weapon of mankind and they went back to it."

"These fellows had steel swords and spears with steel points," I informed him.

"They moved southward by instinct; first a coming together of survivors and then a gradual migration extending over many years. They came at last to a land where snow had melted and uncovered the ground. They found ruins of cities and towns and they found plenty of iron and steel."

"They ought to have found plenty of arms and ammunition."

"Rusted weapons, and ammunition more dangerous to those who used it than to those at whom it was fired. If my theory is right the melting of the covering of snow and ice caused great inundations and I think it must have happened within the last ten or twenty years. We have records of density of the outer atmosphere taken every few months since the Catastrophe and until the last twenty years the air outside was much too rarefied for human lungs."

"Evidently human lungs adjusted themselves to it."

"Granted. My point is that, deprived of every aid known to civilized man, the third generation of the survivors would be too ignorant to take advantage of the wonders of civilization uncovered by the melting of the ice blanket in the south. They would continue to talk English, but their vocabulary would decrease and their comprehension with it."

"I can understand that."

"Our situation would be like theirs except that our founders brought here a vast store of supplies and materials, provided us with a mild climate and established schools to teach the children. Even so we have lost most of the arts of the old world and we also have been reduced to using swords and spears as weapons."

"What's going to happen to this place if a great thaw takes place, as you think it did in the south?"

"We shall be drowned like rats in a trap unless we make our preparations and migrate south ahead of the floods. However it will be years before that emergency confronts us. The temperature outside today was twenty below zero."

"How will the Community like that?"

He laughed. "The possibility has occurred to me only since the appearance of this horde made it evident that somewhere land has been cleared enough to support a large population. You and I are the only Putnamites who are aware of the possible danger."

"If you had an airplane," I said regretfully, "how easy it would be to find out just what is happening in the outer world!"

"We have an airplane," he replied surprisingly. "It is boxed up just as it was when the founders brought it within the enclosure. And we have a store of fuel to fly it five thousand miles."

"Gasoline?"

"Of course not," he replied. "Gasoline was replaced by Odine before nineteen-seventy. A quart of it drove a motor car twenty-five miles and a gallon will fly a plane fifty miles."

"Is it a petroleum product?"

"That is its base. Hermetically sealed, it keeps indefinitely. No doubt it is powerful now as it was years ago."

"And the airplane was never used?"

"There was never an occasion. The air was too rare, and the world was assumed to be dead save for this Community."

I stored this information away for future reference. We were interrupted then by one of his assistants who came in to report that the savages had sent a strong detachment to the side of the enclosure in hope of discovering an entrance which they could batter down.

Stein was not perturbed.

"They cannot break our steel door," he declared, "and if there should be danger of it I would fill the outer chamber with so strong a dose of Jobian gas as to put them to sleep. Come, Putnam, we must go to the Council meeting."

The meeting was merely a relation by me of what had happened, followed by a discussion from which I was excluded.

I TOOK occasion to slip out of the Palace, for my departure apparently had not been prohibited and hastened to the

cottage where Mrs. Lothrop and her sister-in-law must be mourning their dead.

I found the two women and a young man who was introduced as Foster Brown, sitting in silence with white faces and be-raved eyes. There was no coffin in the room as I had expected.

Brown was a man of twenty-three or four, rather handsome, dark of hair and eyes, with a weak chin.

"I am here to offer my sympathy," I began in some embarrassment.

"It was your fault," said Marjorie with weak bitterness. "If it had not been for you, my brother would have been alive. You urged him to resist the officers."

"Safe enough for you," said the man Brown. "They dare not kill you, but we are dirt under their feet."

"I assure you, Miss Lothrop," I said earnestly, "I acted to save your brother and his friends from the consequences of conspiracy. I liked him better than any man I have met in the community. I owe him my return to life. I mourn his loss as whole-heartedly as you do."

"We appreciate that," said Mrs. Lothrop. "Excuse Marjorie, she is beside herself with grief. Foster was like a brother to my husband and he doesn't realize that he has hurt you."

"I beg your pardon, sir," said Brown. "It kills me to think that my friend is dead and that these poor women are to be put to hard labor in the fields."

"I can promise you that order will not be executed," I declared. "May I see him? I considered him my friend too."

Mrs. Lothrop burst into tears in which she was joined by Marjorie.

"Don't you know?" asked Brown. "Our dead are put outside immediately. It is the law."

"Then all I can do is offer my condolences," I said sadly.

"Thank you," replied Marjorie. "I am unfair, I suppose, but your coming has brought us nothing but trouble."

I gazed at the girl, almost a replica of my lost Ruth; and for the first time I realized that neither the spark or spirit of Ruth Reynolds were in her. Of course she was not to blame. Her education, her environment, her life spent in dull employment, were responsible for what she was. Sweet, honest, decent, fearful—and crushed.

"I know it. I bitterly regret that they restored me to life," I said gravely. "I repent my intrusion upon your grief."

"Last night you met the friends of free-

dom," said Brown aggressively. "To-day you are hand in glove with our oppressors. You killed those police soldiers, but we shall pay for it. You escape."

"I did not see you at the meeting," I said sharply.

"Because I knew it was futile. They have the upper hand. There is nothing we can do. I warned Lothrop and Ditmar."

"There is nothing to be done for persons in your frame of mind," I stated. "Will you forgive me for unintentionally bringing sorrow upon you, Miss Lothrop?"

"Can you really save us from going back to the fields?" she asked eagerly.

"I think so."

"I want to be your friend," I said, approaching her and taking her hand. "I am going to try to abolish the marriage lottery."

"So you can take her yourself, no doubt," declared Brown angrily.

"So that Miss Lothrop may marry whom she pleases," I replied sharply.

"For shame, Foster," chided Mrs. Lothrop.

"I forgot myself," he said sullenly. "Anyway, he can do nothing. He lines up with the Council."

"I hope I shall see you, Mrs. Lothrop, and Miss Lothrop, some time when I do not meet hostility from your other visitors," I said. Without speaking to Brown I bowed and left the cottage.

It was obvious that young Brown was in love with Marjorie and his animus against me was due to fear that her resemblance to her great-grandmother might add me to those who wanted her. The poor serf knew that Marjorie was slated to be drawn at the coming lottery by the young scoundrel, John Ames, III, yet he had not enough spirit to join her brother and his friends in the conspiracy to overthrow the ruling clique. I hoped that Marjorie did not love him. It was fairly evident that at present she was filled with resentment against me.

As they had made no reference to the fact that I had recently been outside in conference with the representatives of the barbarians, it seemed evident that the three had spent the day in the cottage with their grief, unaware of the momentous happenings without. Otherwise curiosity would have forced them to question me.

On the street outside I was stopped by several people who wished to know what the Monsters, as they still called the enemy, were like, and whether there was a possible chance that they could break in.

I felt no resentment against Marjorie,

only pity. Her love for her brother had been great and no doubt, before my return to life had caused him to lose his employment, life for them had gone along placidly with only the menace of the marriage lottery to perturb them. Well, all I had to draw me to her was her resemblance to Ruth. I didn't love her. My heart was dead and I could never love anybody.

I thought of going out to join the barbarians, and taking my chances of surviving the cold. That, at least, would be living.

CHAPTER V

PIONEERS IN A NEW WORLD

AS I entered the plaza, from which a fairly clear view of the outer world was obtainable, I observed great activity in the ranks of the "barbarians." They were breaking camp. I hastened to my room and watched their movements with great interest. One by one the tents came down, the American flag descended from its staff, their reindeer were rounded up and headed toward the southern hills, and sledges were being rapidly loaded.

To tell the truth I watched their preparations for departure with regret, for my mood was dismal, and I would have welcomed action of any sort.

There could be no criticism of their judgment. Having no means of penetrating into the enclosure, it was the part of wisdom for them to withdraw before they had exhausted their supplies. I would not have expected such intelligence from primitive people, and it showed they had not utterly lapsed into savagery.

The Putnamites were again on the roofs of their houses giving every evidence of joy. I thought bitterly that they had better make the most of this victory, because the readiness of the enemy to depart indicated a speedy return with better resources for the job before them.

In about two hours they began their march back up the hill, but I did not have an opportunity to see the last of them before I was summoned to the Council Room.

John Ames sat there alone. He did not invite me to be seated, but gazed at me like a cold and hostile judge.

"It appears that my orders mean nothing to you, Mr. Putnam," he said. "You had the effrontery to visit the cottage of the Lothrop to-day."

"Lothrop was my friend. I called to express my sympathy to his widow and his sister."

"He was a traitor."

"If he was, so am I."

"I agree with you," he said coldly. "We must come to an understanding immediately, sir."

I was silent.

"You are a strong, able man," he said. "You could be a tower of strength to my government, or its greatest menace. You have already committed several offenses punishable by elimination which I have excused because I hoped you would realize that your place is in my party. You performed a valuable service to the Putnam Community in going out to meet the enemy envoy to-day. I have expressed my appreciation of that already. Well, that menace is removing itself. Things revert to what they were."

"Well?"

"Because of the conspiracy last night, I decided not to risk arming the men of the Community. Put weapons in the hands of those scoundrels and they might overthrow my guard by force of numbers. Fortunately a defense of the Community proved unnecessary. . . . Now—two of my guards are dead by your hand and their families demand your punishment."

"What is your proposition?" I asked gravely.

"Your whole-hearted, unreserved loyalty to the Council. In return I will arrange your marriage to my daughter. My son, I am forced to admit, is not a strong character, but my daughter is superb. When I die, you and she will succeed me. That is my proposition."

"I can't marry a woman whom I don't love," I replied. "Your daughter is beautiful and as brave as a man, but you forget that what seems to me only a few days ago was the year nineteen fifty-one and I was in love with Ruth Reynolds."

"That is absurd. I can't trust you unless you are a member of my family," he said impatiently.

"If I were a member of your family, I should have to acquiesce in your method of governing this Community, should I not?"

"Certainly," Ames snapped.

"It's impossible. Abominable things take place here."

"Be specific, please," he said, stifling his anger with difficulty.

"First of all, the marriage lottery. It is disgusting enough in itself, but the violations of it are worse. I cannot understand how a man of your culture and refinement can countenance it."

"I'll answer that," he replied. "Conditions here, except in the case of the ruling class, have deadened the old fashioned human emotions. Romance among the workers has almost died out. Twenty years ago they were indifferent to marriage, and when they married they produced no children. The lottery was instituted by the State to assure the perpetuation of the Community. No more than two children were permitted to any family because we would not permit the Community to be overpopulated.

"The ruling class, it appears, retain the normal social interests, and the enforced marriage rule was not necessary for them. But we could not discriminate officially in a Community law, hence it was necessary to modify it unofficially in their case."

"Your patricians are human, the others are beasts of burden," I said contemptuously.

"In a sense you have expressed it."

"Then why permit your young men to draw girls from the lower classes and cast them off after a few months?" I could not stomach that.

"They marry legally, and divorce has been permitted from the beginning. It was forbidden to the working classes twenty years ago purely for economic reasons. There are certain abuses, I'll admit, but it is better than the toleration of worse social evils, is it not?"

"I would demand the abolition of the lottery before I agreed to make an alliance with you," I said shortly. "Furthermore, I

understand that you have great stores of food and could easily improve the rations of the working people. That will have to be done."

"Anything else?" he asked sarcastically.

"A fairer distribution of the houses, and the abolition of class privileges."

"Yes?" His sneer was bitter.

"I see no reason why everybody in this enclosure should not be on equal footing. In short, the democracy ought to be restored in large measure."

He rose. "I am afraid nothing can be done with you," he said coldly. "You will be informed of my decision shortly. Good afternoon, sir."

I went up to my chamber thoughtfully. If Ames dared to eliminate me, I was confident that he would do it, and in view of the retreat of the barbarians the prestige of the government had been so enhanced that he might be able to get away with it.

Perhaps I had been indiscreet in making what must seem to him to be preposterous demands, but a showdown had been demanded. If I had temporized I would have found myself married to Helen in short order, and bound hard and fast to the Ames juggernaut.

There was no doubt that Helen Ames was a remarkable young woman. My admiration for her was boundless, but I was not marrying anybody.

AN HOUR passed and then my door opened to admit Councilor Stein. I was rather glad to see him; he and Murphy



IN THE NEXT ISSUE DRINK WE DEEP

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were the only warm-blooded humans on the Council.

"I've come to reason with you, my rash friend," he said solemnly. "Mr. Ames has decided that you are to be put outside to-night unless you accept his terms."

"That's all right with me," I told him sullenly.

He sighed. "I've argued with President Ames. I have pointed out the risk of a revolt when the people learn that you have been eliminated. He says he'll chance it. He intends to put you and Ditmar out to-night."

"Ditmar. That's a pity."

"He has been convicted of treason and the killing of members of the Guard."

"That was my fault. We would all have been peacefully arrested if I hadn't started the rumpus. Look here, Stein—"

"Yes?"

"I'll tell you how to get rid of Ditmar and myself in a way which will save your faces and keep the people quiet. That ought to appeal to Ames."

"It would, naturally."

"Give me that airplane. I used to drive my own plane. Give out that Ditmar and I are being sent out by the Council to scout the enemy's country."

"My friend, it is an open machine. No cabin. You would freeze to death or be strangled by the rarefied air. Probably you could not get it off the ground before you perished."

"That would appeal to Ames, wouldn't it?" I demanded excitedly.

He shrugged his shoulders. "No doubt. Let me remind you that our insulated costumes provide air for only two hours."

"Give me woolen clothes and plenty of them. They'll keep off the cold and I'm willing to gamble I can breathe the outer air without difficulty."

"We have woollens and blankets in the storehouse," Stein said with a faint gleam of hope. "There has been no need of them since we have been using Jobian gas for our atmosphere."

"Make that proposition to Ames. He'll accept it."

"Because he will believe the result will be the same as putting you out on the snow naked. If you are really serious, if you think you have a chance—"

"Have you men who can assemble the machine?"

"I think so. The directions are plainly marked. It's a matter of screws and wires. I believe the engine will function because it has never been uncrated. We have oil

and fuel. I'll agree to make the suggestion on one condition."

"What?"

"That you return and report what you have discovered. I am certain that if you come back in a few days Ames will not dare to refuse to admit you."

"I'll promise that!"

We shook hands and he departed. I waited impatiently for the decision.

The odds against an airplane expedition under arctic conditions in an atmosphere more or less rarefied were enormous, but they didn't deter me. For an opportunity to explore what was left of the world I would have taken any chance. And I was sure Professor Ditmar would be as keen for it as myself. The scientist was doomed and this gave him a remote opportunity for life and knowledge.

I knew a little something about airplane construction and engines, for it had been my hobby to fly, back in the old days. Just to hold the wheel in my hand once again, to taxi across the ground and to lift into the ether! I grew wildly eager for it.

Half an hour later Stein returned.

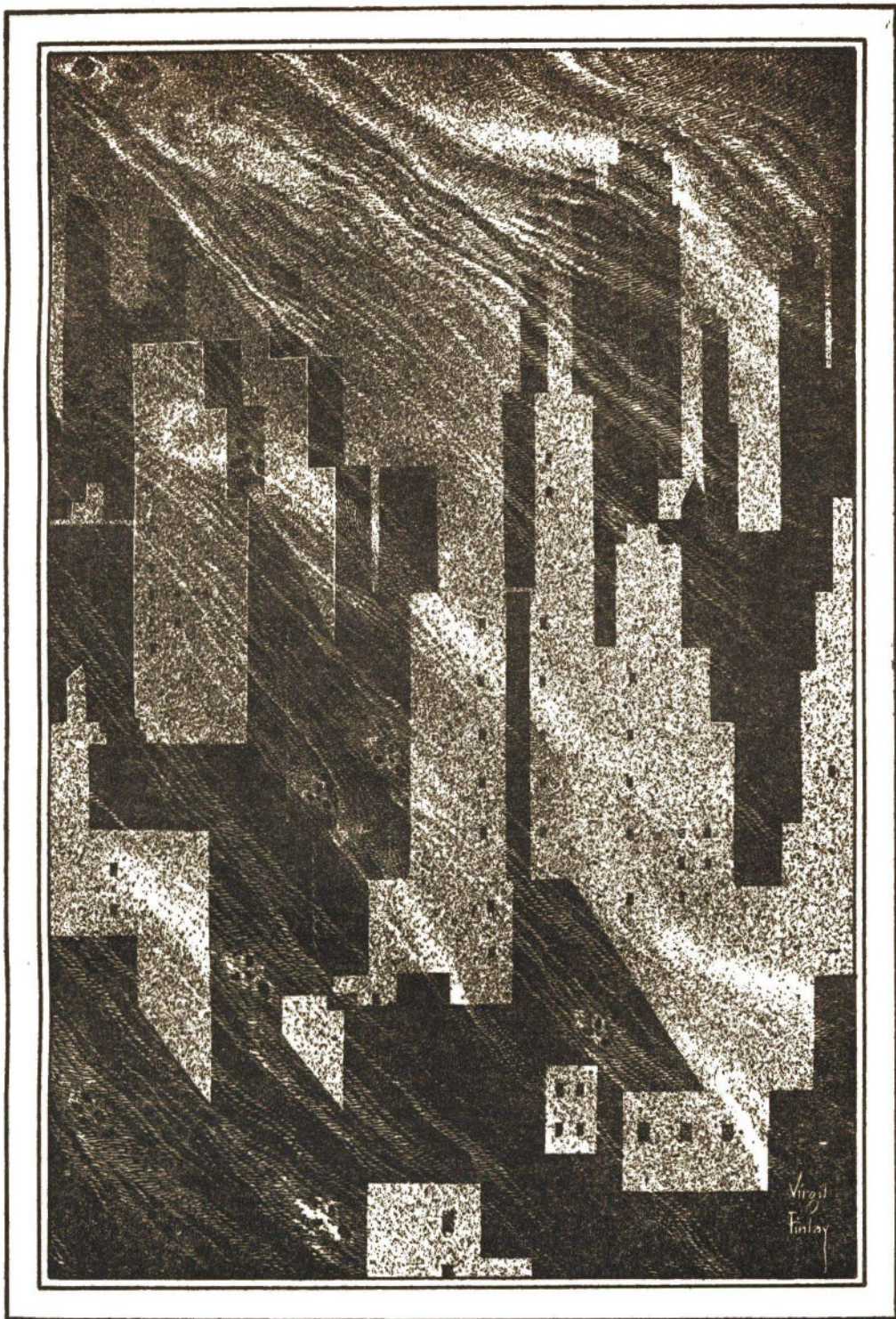
"You are to come with me." He was fairly stuttering with excitement. "Ames has consented. He believes that you will perish by strangulation and he is willing to lose the airplane which he considers useless. He consents to your being accompanied by Professor Ditmar. It will be given out that you two are volunteering to pursue the enemy in the interests of the Community. You will be heroes, of course, in the minds of the people; but dead heroes will not endanger the government, is Mr. Ames' theory."

I laughed. "Thought he would see it that way."

"I'm not so sure I can manage a new-fangled ship," I said hesitatingly.

"Your lifting apparatus operates from a push button. In other respects, according to the historians, flying in nineteen eighty was about the same as it was in nineteen fifty."

The power and gas plant, as I have already stated, was guarded by a high wall which admitted one into an inclosure about two hundred feet long by one hundred feet wide. After crossing it, we came to the plant itself, a one-story building about one hundred and twenty feet long, having a two-story warehouse with a frontage of sixty feet at its left. There were two spearmen on guard in the inclosure and I saw others in a small building at the right of the plant.



"People who died in the great death haunt these places."

Of the plant itself, I had seen nothing but the office, the locker room and the steel chamber which connected with the outer world. Stein left me in his office for a few moments and then summoned me to the courtyard. Presently twenty men came out of a huge door in the storehouse carrying a great packing case which they set down in the middle of the court and which they immediately attacked with sledges. In no time the packing case was removed and an airplane, minus wings, propellers and engine, rested on the courtyard. It had the customary tractable landing gear.

"Those should be removed and some of the wood from the packing case used to manufacture skids," I declared.

"But suppose you descended in a snowless country?"

"We will take the wheels with us and replace the runners on some icy surface before we make a landing."

"As a matter of fact you should come to rest so gently that you won't need wheels," he replied. "I'll have the engine unboxed and set up and then we'll move the machine into the steel chamber."

When the engine was released from its packing I inspected it carefully and found it, apparently, in perfect condition. It was a fifteen hundred h.p. high compression engine with a carburetor of a type unknown to me, suitable, no doubt, for the use of the new fuel, Odine. The little Putnam mechanics made a frightful to-do about lifting and setting the engine in place and I lent them a hand, astonishing them by my strength. Two hours elapsed before we were ready to push the machine into the air-lock chamber which we entered directly from the courtyard by a wide door.

The business of placing helicopters which I discovered would function both in front and at the rear, and the affixing of the wings had to be postponed until the machine was pushed outside; but oil and fuel were put into the tanks and I saw with satisfaction that there seemed to be no leaks.

Darkness was descending when so much had been done and work was abandoned until morning.

As we were returning to the Palace, Stein said to me, "I find in looking over my inventory that we have several heavy fur coats and plenty of woolen cloth of the best quality."

"I would like hoods made out of your warmest blankets to go over our heads, as the Barbarians were covered."

"They will be ready when you are."

"Has Professor Dltmar been notified that he is going on a journey?"

"I doubt it, but I'll break the news to him first thing in the morning."

We shook hands, and I returned to my room. A spearman followed me upstairs and admitted to me that he had been assigned to guard my door all night.

I was jubilant. I had no doubt that the plane would function and that the outer air would afford me no inconvenience. I felt like a bird which was being released from a cage. A poor canary, permitted to escape, tries his wings joyfully, with sublime unconsciousness that his life in a brutal world will probably be of short duration. But I knew the perils that confronted me—and I didn't care. I would rather go out gloriously than fritter away my life in this conservatory.

AMES, probably feeling as a warden does toward a man condemned to die at sunrise, sent me an excellent dinner of cold beef, bread, potatoes, and a pint bottle of white wine, which I consumed with satisfaction. Hardly had I finished when I heard the voice of Helen Ames outside my door, and a second later she entered.

It was already night, but I could see her dimly by the moonlight which poured through my window. I feared a scene, but there was no way of avoiding an interview.

"So," she began bluntly, "you prefer death to becoming my husband."

"My dear girl, you put it crudely," I expostulated. "In the first place, I don't love you. How could I? My heart is in the grave." Suddenly I wondered whether it was; but I hurried on: "In the next place, I can't pretend to agree to the abominable government of this Community, as I would have to do if I married you. I admire you very much. You are a splendid girl—"

"Don't hand me idiotic flatteries," she replied. "I presume you thought that I loved you so much I would persuade my father to condone your crimes once more."

"I had no such hope, Miss Ames."

"That is fortunate," she said bitterly, "because I approve heartily of your elimination."

"Then there is no more to be said."

"You have chosen to perish spectacularly," she said coldly. "I suppose a fall from the sky will end things quicker than strangulation or cold."

"Most likely."

"Oh," she exclaimed, with a break in her voice, "I believe you are mad!"

"If I am not, it is remarkable."

The girl came close to me. We had been standing a few feet apart in the moonlight.

"Am I so repulsive?" she reproached. "Is there anything wrong with me—anything disgusting? Even if you don't love me, George, you ought to be able to—to tolerate me."

In the silvery light she was astonishingly, disturbingly beautiful. Her dark eyes gleamed luringly. I felt her breath, and it was sweet. I was a human being and not immune to the temptation of a lovely girl's presence; and for a moment I believed I was a fool not to embrace her and accept her and all that went with her.

"You are one of the most beautiful creatures who ever lived, in this world or the old one," I said rather hysterically. "But I can't do it, Helen. Loyalty to my fiancée—hatred of conditions here—everything forces me to refuse."

She sighed, stretched out her arms, and then, tensing most unexpectedly, struck me heavily on the cheek with the open palm of her right hand.

"I could kill you!" she cried savagely.

"Your father expects to attend to that detail, Miss Ames. It is his prerogative."

"You deserve death!" she accused.

"Frankly, I welcome it."

She went to the window and looked out for a long moment, then seated herself in a chair.

"My father consented to a last appeal," she said evenly. "Are you in love with Marjorie Lothrop?"

"I assure you I am not, Helen. Miss Lothrop looks very much like my dead Ruth, and I feel kindly toward her for that reason. Helen, in all probability I am going to die. You feel bitterly toward me, but I assure you that I am not taking my stand because I dislike you. You have shown me that you have every fine quality a woman should have except that of generosity."

"And I assure you that I am generous!"

"Prove it. Relieve Mrs. Lothrop and her sister-in-law from the hard labor to which they are condemned. I think Marjorie is in love with a man named Foster Brown, but I understand that your brother proposes to draw her in the lottery. Save her from that and, if there is a hereafter, I'll be your guardian angel."

To my surprise, the beauty whom I had thought to be hard-hearted and selfishly determined began to weep. "I'll arrange to save her from field work," she said after a minute. "She must take her chance in the lottery."

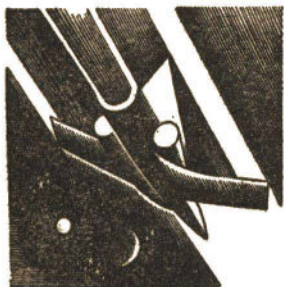
"There is no chance in the lottery," I said angrily.

"George, you don't understand our people. Those common girls who are drawn by patricians are usually delighted because it means better fare, better quarters, and a better life—for a short time, anyway."

"I have heard of one who killed herself," I replied.

"One among thousands, and she was mad."

"Well, I may be back before the lottery," I said thoughtlessly.



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She leaped to her feet.

"Tell me," she pleaded. "I won't betray you. Do you really think you have a chance?"

"Yes."

"But how? We can only insulate our costumes for two hours. After that you will strangle."

"I haven't any doubt that the outer air is fit to breathe, so I don't expect to strangle. I am used to cold weather. With warm clothing, I won't freeze. And, if the plane functions, I'll be back in a week with information so important that your father will have to admit me to the enclosure."

"But the outer air is too rarefied to breathe."

"Nonsense. You saw that multitude of attackers breathing it."

"They are used to it."

"I studied their faces. There was no indication of abnormal noses or chests, which surely would be the case if too thin air had caused a physical change in mankind. . . . Helen, I hope you will not tell your father what I have told you. He might decide on some other method of killing me."

"You are mistaken. I am certain you will die."

"I am reasonably certain I won't."

"You have no intention of returning here if you find another place to live," she charged.

In the back of my mind I had a notion that Ditmar and myself might discover a habitable corner in the outer world and stay there, but I pretended I would surely return.

"If you return you will be drawn by me in the lottery," she declared. "You cannot escape."

"You persuade me not to return," I said indiscreetly.

"Oh!" she cried, as if I had struck her. "I hate you! I loathe you! I hope you die horribly!"

With these words she rushed from the room, and I dropped on my bed exhausted from the strain of the interview.

Presently I slept. I woke at daylight, received an apple for breakfast, and presently was conducted by an armed guard to the plant. Stein was already at work and summoned me into his office.

"I advise you to inspect your plane very carefully," he said slowly. "It appears that Miss Ames obtained admission here during the night."

"How did she get in?" I demanded in surprise.

"All doors open for the daughter of the President."

"And you think she might have tampered with the machinery?"

He gave a wry smile. "'A woman scorned,' you know."

"I doubt it. She knows nothing about machinery."

"Nevertheless . . ."

"I'll make an investigation before I start, of course. Is Ditmar here?"

"He was brought at dawn. Poor chap, he expects to be put outside. I decided to allow you to break the good news to him—if the news is good."

"May I see him?"

"I'll have him brought in and leave you alone with him."

A MOMENT later the professor entered. He greeted me warmly, but there was despair in his eyes.

"We are both condemned," he said. "I regret, my friend, that I brought you back to life only to have you suffer the pain of death."

"Not necessarily," I replied, and I told him our program.

The professor's joy was boundless.

"It is worth whatever happens," the scientist declared, "to have even a glimpse of what is outside. I am certain that we cannot breathe mere air very long, but I hope we live until we have shown the Community an airplane in flight."

"The air is pure and sufficiently dense," I said confidently. "Stein has kept to himself the fact that its density has been increasing steadily for twenty years. We are going places and we'll see things, professor."

"In that case I have not lived in vain." Stein returned suddenly.

"I have a message from the President," he declared. "He has no wish to have a fiasco at the start of this enterprise and the orders are that you will wear insulated costumes when you depart. He considers it injurious to the peace of the Community if the people should learn that a man can breathe the outer air even for a brief period. I'll load your furs and hoods into the machine and you can don them when you find your supply of Jobian air giving out."

"Very well," I said, smiling.

"Put on a costume now, Mr. Putnam," he said, "if you wish to superintend the placing of wings and propeller and its helicopter. My men are equipped and ready to push the plane outside."

"First let me give it the once over."

Followed by Ditmar I entered the airtight lock chamber and inspected the engine and plane.

No doubt the founders of the Community had made it to send it out when the world catastrophe was over, as Noah sent out a dove from the Ark, but they had never found occasion to use it. This was fortunate for me; had it been assembled, neglect and age would have finished it. I glanced into the fuselage and observed that several coonskin coats and a pile of blankets had been thrust into it.

Following the inspection I went to the locker room, donned an insulated costume, as did the professor, and presently we were gazing at each other through the glass window of our suits.

Meanwhile, the outer door had slid back and the plane was rolled out upon the snow, the wheels removed and replaced with the wooden ski-runners. I went out with Ditmar and Stein, who had also put on the dress, and for an hour and a half worked steadily with the mechanics.

We returned for fresh tanks of Jobian gas and again set about our task. I was mad to remove my helmet and breathe the air of heaven, but there would be time enough for that.

Wings and propellers in place, I drew off and gazed at a craft which resembled an airplane of my time only in the shape of the fuselage.

"Ready," I said. "Is President Ames coming to give us a send-off?"

"He will watch your attempted flight from the Palace," he replied. "The people have wind of what is about to happen, and the fields on this side of the enclosure are jammed with them. Having no permission to quit work, they will be punished."

I shrugged my shoulders, shook his hand and motioned to Ditmar to climb into the machine. I observed that a supply of food had been placed therein, and I suspected that we owed that thought to Stein. Ames would have considered it a waste of sustenance. For water, we would always descend and melt snow.

There were two seats in the cabin, which was bulwarked high and protected by glass windshields. Ditmar sat beside me, and behind us there was room for two other passengers. I waved a hand to Stein, who stood in the snow.

TENTATIVELY I pressed the button marked "helicopter." Immediately a rattle and roar were heard above us and a

second later I observed that the ground was dropping away from us. We went up almost vertically to a height of a thousand feet and then I disconnected the helicopter as I threw in the forward engines.

Ditmar was looking over the side and I glanced down. Directly below us was a square green tablecloth dotted with white specks—the Community. It seemed spread on a carpet of snow. We could see antlike people leaping about and capering with astonishment at their first airplane. I wondered what Ames was thinking. No doubt he had no expectation that the air would sustain us.

I headed south, leaned over and slapped Ditmar on the back. We were off. Ahead were mountains, and I soared to surmount them. In a few minutes the Community was a green dot behind us.

"Congratulations," said Ditmar. "A few minutes of this are worth a lifetime in the Community." There was a moment of silence.

"What's that?" I exclaimed.

My hearing apparatus, abnormally acute, had caught a faint sound behind us.

I looked back. I saw the mass of furs behind us move. They were thrust aside and there protruded the face of Helen Ames. She was deadly pale and frightened.

"Oh, I'm so cold," she moaned.

"Take this wheel," I exclaimed to Ditmar. I ducked under the breastwork into the second seat, pulled aside the furs and revealed the daughter of the President of Putnam. She was clad only in her white cottons and her flesh was blue with cold.

I caught up a fur coat and thrust her into it, wrapped her feet in a blanket, picked up one of the thick woolen hoods and pulled it over her head.

She had crawled into the lower end of the fuselage. She had been lying there for hours, and if she did not die of exposure it would be sheer good fortune.

"I can't believe it—she breathes this air!" exclaimed Ditmar.

"Of course, of course," I exclaimed impatiently. "Helen, child, why did you do this absurd thing?"

She smiled wanly. "I thought it would be exciting," she replied.

"But how did you survive during the time the plane was on the ground?"

"I was wrapped in those woolens and only peeped out to breathe now and then. I was coming out and I had thrown them off when the cold struck me."

Fumbling with the fastening of my helmet, I finally got the thing off. An icy blast

struck my bare head but the air was pure and sweet. I inhaled deep drafts of it.

"Put the hood on, you fool!" cried the professor.

I pulled on one of the fur hoods which Stein had caused to be manufactured for us, but I laughed joyfully. The temperature of the air could not have been much below zero. I had experienced sixty below in Canada a few weeks—no, a century—before.

I began to remove the insulated suit which would hold its heat for many hours yet, and in a moment I stood almost naked in the wind. I drew on a fur coat and then I forced Helen to don my suit. It would warm her up and perhaps save her from death.

I was horrified to find her in the plane, and curiously, glad. She seemed to understand my emotion for she said nothing and dropped her eyes, almost demurely.

I was glad, because the presence in the world of a girl of such sublime courage is enough to make any man glad. I could not forget that Helen Ames, when she crawled into the machine, expected nothing better than death. She had been trained to believe that a Putnamite would strangle and congeal if exposed to the outer air; she had never seen a flying machine and probably had no expectation that this ark would fly. But she had chosen to live—or die—with me. My eyes filled with tears as I gazed at her. Devotion such as hers demanded homage.

I lifted her right hand in its insulated mitten and kissed it.

"You wonderful, wonderful girl," I muttered.

"You are not the only one who is not afraid to die," she replied.

"It's no question of dying. I'm going to take you back," I declared.

"No!" she exclaimed. "If you turn the machine I'll jump out of it. I swear it. I'm going with you, wherever you go."

"Helen, when that suit gets cold, you'll freeze," I said gravely. "I am used to this kind of cold."

"But Professor Ditmar isn't."

"He was condemned to death and was willing to take the chance."

"And so am I," she asserted bravely. "If you should succeed in returning me to Putnam, I give you my word I will kill myself."

"Helen, dear," I said humbly, "I don't deserve your devotion."

"Most likely not," she replied, smiling curiously. "But you must try to be worthy."

"Get her into the front seat," suggested Ditmar, wisely. "It is sheltered and a certain heat seems to be coming from the engine."

I led her to my seat and Ditmar slipped back.

He fumbled with his helmet fastening and finally removed it.

"Ah," he breathed. "This is good. 'The open air!' With us it has always been nothing but a phrase."

"Put on a hood quickly," I shouted as I saw the change in his face. He stooped to obey, toppled over and fell to the bottom of the cabin.

"Hold this wheel exactly as it is," I hastily instructed Helen and dived to his assistance.

I pulled the hood over his head and spoke to him but he did not answer. I lifted his head and looked into his face. His eyes were open but without expression. Although he still had on his heated suit, his heart had stopped.

"WHAT is the matter?" asked the girl anxiously.

"I think—I am afraid he is dead. I don't understand it."

"He was sixty years old," she said calmly but sadly, "and he was subject to heart attacks. I think he died of joy, George."

"You are sure the air doesn't bother you?" I demanded.

"I've been breathing it for hours. It seems to chill my insides but I like it."

"It is perfectly pure," I said thoughtfully. "It must have been the shock—and, as you say, the joy—of his first experience with the outer world. Poor professor! We'll let him lie there for a while till we decide what to do."

I climbed back and took the wheel from her. She laid a glove on my bare hand which was reddening with cold.

"Don't feel too badly, George. He died happy and they intended to put him out naked."

"I suppose so. What am I to do with you?"

She snuggled against me. "Keep me," she suggested. "I know you don't love me yet but you will."

"Suppose the experience kills you?"

She shrugged her shoulders. "Life in that hothouse was killing me."

I looked south. Nothing but ice and snow. North, south, west and east—only ice and snow. I looked at the altimeter. Three thousand feet. It would be a little warmer at a thousand feet. I began to drop.

Helen, curious like all women, was inspecting the contents of drawers beneath the instrument board and suddenly gurgled.

"Look," she cried, "needles, thread, scissors, thimble."

"A housewife," I replied. "They forgot nothing in equipping the plane."

"Let me hold that stick while you thread me a needle," she commanded. "My hands would be too stiff. I'm going to cut up a blanket and sew it into stockings and gloves for us. We are going to need them. It's a nuisance to be wrapped up at the feet in blankets, and your hands are freezing already."

The girl worked with great rapidity; her cutting was crude and her stitches were uneven but, in half an hour, she had produced lamb's-wool mittens of a sort, which I put on gratefully for my hands were congealed and likely to be frost-bitten. At the end of an hour she had long blanket boots which did not fit me well, but which were better than bare legs.

We had passed over where the city of Albany should have been, and saw only a great white mound. The Hudson River was invisible, but I followed its valley. In an hour we came in sight of a multitude of black specks which could be nothing but the army of Barbarians on the march.

I flew low to give them a fright and passed over them at a height of a few hundred feet. They stood staring up but betrayed no evidence of alarm. If these particular Barbarians had never seen a plane, they had heard of them. To my astonishment they cheered.

Another hour passed and Helen had contrived long socks and mittens for herself.

"This suit begins to feel clammy," she said. "I am going to take it off and put on the fur coat again and these things."

She crawled back and effected her change. I asked her anxiously if she felt the cold.

"A little," she replied, "but I can stand it."

Presently she touched me on the arm.

"What are we going to do about the professor?" she asked in a low tone.

"I'm going to descend upon some level spot, and lay him in the snow."

"He would like that," she said gravely. "George—"

"Yes, child?"

"Don't call me child; I'm a woman . . . George, in your day would I have been considered unmaidenly?"

"You would be just as wonderful as you are now," I assured her warmly.

"Would Ruth Reynolds have done what I have done?"

I hesitated. "I doubt it," I admitted. "She was a bit timid."

The girl was silent and so was I. Time passed, with both of us busy with our thoughts.

Presently I sighted a white level plain, set my helicopters going in reverse and stopped the engines. We landed as lightly as a bird on a limb. I lifted out the dead scientist and tried to scrape out a grave for him, but the snow was too hard.

"Leave him," she called from the plane. "He wouldn't mind. The open world is his tomb."

We rose again into the air and continued south. And after a time I sighted New York. It rose out of the snow, grim, gaunt and gray. Its tall buildings were ice-encrusted but their forms were easily distinguished. I picked out the huge Empire State, and the smaller clumps of skyscrapers that marked Forty-second Street in mid-town and the Wall Street district downtown. Helen's eyes were sticking out of her head.

"So that is where seven millions of people lived," she murmured. "George, I never before realized how horrible the Catastrophe was. The world, to us, was just the Inclosure. The Great Catastrophe was a tradition like the Deluge."

I uttered an exclamation of satisfaction as she spoke.

"What is it?"

"The sea," I exclaimed. "It is still open. The harbors, of course, are frozen over, but the sea is open."

"Where? Oh, where?"

I pointed to a gray line along the horizon.

"There is hope for the world, my dear," I exclaimed. "The sea is clear." To please her I ran out beyond the ice line and showed her the ocean. It was dotted with ice floes, but it was not confined by them. Helen Ames looked her first upon the Atlantic Ocean.

I turned in again and continued south. We passed over Philadelphia in three-quarters of an hour, and occasionally I could see barren patches of rock and earth. The Barbarians had told the truth. There was a land which was not buried under snow and ice.

"I'm hungry," said Helen plaintively.

"We have a little food in a box back there. Stein provided it."

"Carrots, turnips and old bread," she said contemptuously. "I raided the Palace larder last night. I brought beef, chicken, and ham and fresh bread and wine."

"That's good news. I have been wondering why your absence wasn't discovered. Stein told me you had visited the plant last night, but he supposed you had returned to the Palace."

We talked together in normal tones for the revolutions of the propellers were practically noiseless and there was only a low hum from the mighty engine.

"I came just before midnight when the Guard is changed. I suppose that is why they didn't learn that I remained at the plant."

She crawled back into the fuselage and presently returned with sandwiches and a bottle of wine. It was cold and coffee would have been very acceptable, but that solace of the Golden Age was unknown. However, the alcohol in the wine warmed us a little.

The temperature, according to the thermometer upon the instrument board, was two above zero. We sighted hills now whose tops were free of ice and I uttered an exclamation of delight when I distinguished fir trees growing upon them.

"What's the matter?" asked the girl.

"The necessity of living under glass is past, Helen. The world is habitable again. Your people can come out of their inclosure and dispense with their artificial atmosphere and be human again."

"In cold like this? Absurd."

"My dear, hundreds of millions of people lived comfortably in temperature much lower than this in olden times. Of course they wore warm clothes and heated their houses. Besides, in a few hours, we shall be in a much higher temperature and you'll see the disappearance of the snow."

"I'll believe it when I see it," she said skeptically.

I HAD been traveling at a hundred miles an hour, but I saw by the speed index that the machine was capable of two hundred miles in that period. I gave her all the gas she would take. In an hour the snow had vanished and we began to travel over green country. Occasionally I sighted villages, but from the absence of smoke, concluded that they were uninhabited. We were, by my estimate, in southern Virginia.

We saw streams that flowed freely and crossed one big river. There were young forests and vast stretches of grass, but no evidence whatever of cultivation.

"Helen," I said, "it is evident that the comet did not pull the earth out of its orbit. The period of extreme cold was due to the elimination of much of the atmosphere. The sources from which our atmosphere was originally created immediately began the work of recreation and as the air increased in density the rays of the sun increased in heat. At the present time the Arctic seems to have spread over the temperate zone, but it is very likely that the tropics now have the climate which our latitudes once enjoyed. The Community must migrate to the tropics."

"Our people may grumble, but they know they are very well off where they are," she replied.

"Stein told me that he believed that previous encounters with comets were responsible for the destruction of life in early stages of the world. I believe him. The whole United States was covered with ice fifty or a hundred thousand years ago. Before that its climate had been very hot and bred a vast multitude of gigantic animals. The cold killed them. But the sun and earth were relatively unchanged. The ice period passed when our atmosphere again became dense. Of course the destruction wrought at the time of the three early glacial periods was almost complete. The survival of human beings proves that upon this occasion it was only partial and the restoration of the atmosphere seems to have been very rapid. The Community must move south, that's all there is about it."

"No, thank you. This part of the world has too many Barbarians. We are safe in our cage."

"My dear, the world had attained a high degree of civilization during the Roman Empire. White savages destroyed all of it, but for a thousand years the walls of the city of Constantinople resisted them. Inside those walls civilization persisted and eventually came out and again civilized the world. Your people must do the same, don't you see? There may be hundreds of thousands of people living down here in ignorance. With the culture which survives at Putnam, with its library and its knowledge, we can remake the world in a generation."

"Much more likely to have our throats cut by these Barbarians," she said shrewdly. "I do believe it is getting warmer."

I glanced at my thermometer which said forty-five degrees above zero. My fur coat was beginning to be too heavy.

"Look!" she cried. "People!"

I gazed down and saw a house with

smoke coming from its chimney. In its yard were three tiny figures who waved hands at us.

I was tempted to descend, but another hour would bring us into summer, or so I believed.

"Let us move Putnam down here," I urged enthusiastically, "and there is nothing which we cannot accomplish. We'll find factories for the manufacture of everything and we have textbooks in the library to tell how to make things. We'll find motor cars and some of them may still run. Railroad locomotives. Supplies of every sort. Oh, it won't take long to put the world back on its feet."

The temperature rose steadily during the next two hundred miles and we discarded our furs and Helen's makeshift hose and gloves. There were vast stretches of smiling fields, uncultivated, but ready for the plow. We saw forests, flowers, smiling streams no doubt full of trout. We were in South Carolina.

And while passing over a great plain our motor began to miss.

"We'll go down," I said to Helen.

"I'm frightened, George," she admitted. "Who knows what might happen to us on the ground?"

"There is no sign of life of any sort," I said reassuringly.

I started my helicopters and shut off the engines. We sank to a musical whirring from the reversed paddles.

I had failed to make allowances for our almost vertical descent and we landed close to a piece of woodland on the edge of the meadow, settling as gently as a hen on an egg.

CHAPTER VI

COUP D'ETAT

THE temperature was sixty-eight. The grass was two feet high. Insects buzzed about. Summer was in the air, and it was like a breath of heaven.

Six or seven hundred miles to the north, three thousand fools lived under a glass dome surrounded by snow and assumed that the whole world was like that. They breathed artificial air and most of them had barely enough to eat.

"The promised land," I said gayly. I leaped to the ground and helped Helen out of the cockpit. She was so joyful that she began to dance until a thorn pricked her bare calf.

"Careful," I said. "There may be snakes."

With a shriek she climbed back into the machine.

I discovered a loose wire in the machine and tightened it.

"Stay there, then," I said, laughing. "I'm going to take a look in the wood and explore around a bit."

"But snakes may bite you," she wailed.

"I know how to avoid them," I boasted. "I'll be back in a little while."

I crossed the patch of long grass and entered the wood. Immediately I noticed that the big trees were dead and a young growth had sprung up around them. By the height of the young pines I judged that they were not more than ten or fifteen years old, which meant that, previously, this land had been buried under snow and ice all the year round. I walked a little way into the wood before a woman's scream alarmed me. Something was happening to Helen!

I whirled and ran at top speed out into the field, and what I saw made me run faster. Four men were running away from the airplane and one of them was carrying Helen Ames.

I tore silently through the long grass and gained on them with every lope. They were stout fellows, clad in homespun jackets and long trousers, and one of them carried on his shoulder a woodman's ax, while the others had wooden clubs. The man bearing Helen had tossed her over his shoulder like a sack of meal.

She saw me coming and made signs for me to go back. She feared injury to me more than to herself. I ran like one demented, and I was within a rod of the axman before he was aware of it. He swung about and began to whirl his weapon, grinning toothlessly when he observed that I was unarmed.

"Go on," he shouted to the others. "I'll tend to this coot."

There was a remote chance of overcoming him, and I took it. I plunged in and dived headfirst into his groin. On the football field I had often brought a man down by a dive of from seven to nine feet, but this was not a tackle. I had to knock him out with my head before he brought down the ax.

My skull struck him in the abdomen, solid bone against soft flesh. The ax dropped from paralyzed fingers. He had swung it back over his head and it fell behind him. He went down and completely out, and I was unhurt. I sprang up, armed with the ax, and was in pursuit of the others in an instant.

The men with the clubs had no stomach for my medicine. They streaked it and left the captor of Helen in the rear. He took one look over his shoulder, flung the girl from him, and ran for dear life. I picked her up and set her on her feet.

She flung her arms around my neck and kissed me rapturously, and I warmed to her kisses only too readily. I disengaged her.

"There, there," I said. "Where on earth did those brutes come from?"

"They must have been hiding in the grass, because they were climbing into the airplane before I noticed them. Oh, George, I was so frightened!"

"I doubt if they would have harmed you," I consoled. "I want to question the fellow I dropped, if the blow hasn't killed him."

He had returned to his sense by the time we reached him and he was groaning with pain. I heartlessly grasped him by the collar and pulled him to his feet. I observed that he had a dirty white cotton shirt beneath his coat and wore rude but serviceable leather boots.

"Who are you and where do you come from?" I demanded.

"We didn't mean no harm to the woman, sir," he whined.

"Answer my question."

"My name is John Murr, and I live in a village about five miles yonder." He pointed to the south. "I came up here to cut down some trees."

"How many people live in the village?"

"'Bout a hundred. That was a powerful blow you give me, sir."

"You deserved it! Have you always lived here?"

"No, sir; we trekked from farther down, 'bout ten years ago when the ice began to go out up this way during the summer."

"Can you read and write?"

"No, sir, but I've heard about it. There's an old man in the village that says he can."

"Did you ever hear of the Great Catastrophe?"

"Sure, the Great Death and the cold that followed it. My folks used to live 'way up north, but they came down here 'bout that time."

"Well, you can go," I said. "I'll keep your ax."

He began to whimper. "It's the only ax in the village, sir. I daren't go back without it."

"You'll have to," I said grimly. "Do you know what that is?"

He nodded. "A flying machine."

"How do you know?"

"I saw it flying. Thought at first it was a big bird. But before the Great Cold there were lots of flying machines; so the old folks tell."

"You can go," I said with a shrug. He immediately took to his heels.

"LET'S be off," I suggested to Helen. "We have a weapon now. This ax may come in handy in case we meet more hostility."

I helped her climb back into the plane and climbed into my seat. As I was about to take off, my rather thick skull was penetrated by a thought. I stopped and began to pull open the drawers below the instrument board, from one of which Helen had taken the "housewife."

If the plane had been sold ready equipped with such trifles, it might contain things of greater value. The first drawer rewarded me. I took out a small hermetically sealed box, the cover of which informed me of its contents. It proved to be an automatic pistol, new and shiny as when it had been packed there. Beneath it was another tin box, which contained an ample supply of clips of ammunition. Joyfully I explained its use to the girl.

"But is it safe to use?" she questioned. "It's so old."

I inspected it carefully and saw no signs of deterioration. However, the ammunition might be worthless. To test it I got out of the plane, loaded the weapon, aimed it at the ground, and fired. Helen screamed and covered her ears at the loud report, but it was music to me. I reentered the plane triumphantly.

"We are no longer helpless," I declared. "We can defend ourselves, and how. What a joke on the Community, Helen. They put their firearms in a museum and destroyed the ammunition, while all the time this fine weapon reposed in the crated plane. Let's see what else we can find."

We discovered four fine hunting knives, a complete kit of tools and, in another hermetically sealed package, several pounds of chocolate bars, emergency rations. The girl had never tasted chocolate, and didn't like it, and received with polite incredulity my statement that it might save our lives.

"What are we going to do now?" she demanded.

"We'll go two or three hundred miles farther south and look the country over," I declared. "Your people have been in a hothouse long enough. I'm going to trans-

plant them to what used to be Georgia or Florida and give them an opportunity to be of some use in the world."

"My dear George," she said, "you must not go back. Father won't hear of your notions, and if you insist upon them you will surely be killed this time. I suggest—" She blushed furiously.

"What?"

"That you and I find a lovely spot and move into a deserted house and—well, live there. We'll be married, somehow."

I found myself coloring and I kept my eyes averted.

"We have a duty to perform, my dear," I said after a slight hesitation.

"What, I'd like to know?"

"Judging by the army in furs and the fellow with the ax, the world has fallen into ignorance, and barbarism. In Putnam there is knowledge, science. We may find a city like Mobile or Jacksonville standing with everything just about as it was when the people dropped their tools fifty-odd years ago. I'm going to bring the Community to such a place. In no time we'll have that city functioning just as it used to. We will have railroads and motors and flying machines and typewriters, agriculture in the open air, manufacturing of every modern comfort and convenience."

"And how are you going to get them there?" she asked dryly.

"Well—er—I hadn't thought of that."

"It would take months of marching over snow and ice. Ninety per cent of our people would freeze to death. Besides, nothing would hire them to take their noses outside the enclosure, and you know it."

"Well," I said sullenly, "I'm going to explore, anyway."

"And you don't want to live alone with me in some lovely spot," she said sorrowfully.

"Helen, dear," I replied exasperatedly. "You know that I love another—"

"Who has been dead of old age for sixty years," she reminded me.

"Whom I kissed and told good-by only a week ago, or so it seems to me. I admire you more than any woman I ever met—"

"I'll do without that," she said somberly. "Let's go."

"Gosh, it's warm!" I exclaimed. I glanced at the thermometer and saw that it had crept up to seventy-eight in an hour.

"I'm really uncomfortable," she agreed.

"Well, it will be cooler in the air."

We ascended to a height of three thousand feet and cooled off a little, and again headed south. In fifteen minutes we dis-

tinguished fields under cultivation and cabins from the chimneys of which smoke was curling, and then we passed over small villages, which seemed to be well populated. It was probably from this section that the army had been recruited which had invaded the territory of Putnam.

"I imagine that they have long winters here and short summers," I said to Helen. "Probably the climate is like that of ancient Canada. Hence the furs. It took sublime courage for these people to march into the frozen Arctic on the strength of idle tales."

We encountered no large cities and, as we flew over southern Georgia we lost track of inhabited country. About five in the afternoon I turned west.

"I want to hit the Gulf of Mexico," I explained.

"Why?"

"I want to feel the temperature of the water of the Gulf."

Darkness was falling when we descended upon a Florida beach at dark. We had flown for nearly nine hours and covered some sixteen hundred miles according to the instruments. I observed that there were no palm trees nor signs of tropic vegetation but well grown sycamores, oaks, pines—trees of the temperate zone.

As soon as we had nestled on the hard sand I ran out and tested the water. It was cool, not cold. The temperature must have been between sixty and seventy, only a few degrees below normal of the period before the Catastrophe.

The strain of the day had been too much for me. I was dog-tired and hardly able to keep my eyes open, and Helen was in no better case. Yet, for both of us to sleep might cause our destruction. I made her lie down and promised to call her in two hours and I sat upright in my seat and occasionally lifted my lids with my fingers to keep them open.

The gentle, swishing of the ripples on the sand was sweet, soothing music. The stars were bright. The air was balmy. Well, I suppose I must have fallen asleep within fifteen minutes after Helen closed her eyes.

HORNY hands on my throat awakened me. Two vicious eyes were looking into mine and a harsh voice was demanding, "Do you give up?"

There were half a dozen dark forms swarming over the machine. I heard Helen wake from slumber with a smothered shriek.

"I give up," I said. "Don't hurt that girl."

"Then climb out of here," my captor grunted.

I hastened to obey him and extended a hand to Helen as she was lifted out of the cockpit by two men.

"What will they do to us?" she murmured.

"Nothing, I hope."

"Bring them up to the house," commanded the leader.

I noticed that the fellow carried a heavy cane and that his followers picked up cudgels as they closed around us.

They marched us across the sand and up a narrow path through the bush for two or three minutes when we entered a clearing and came in sight of a house.

In the moonlight it was strangely beautiful, an old Southern plantation home, with a wide front veranda and tall pillars. As we drew near I saw that the place was almost devoid of paint, and in a state of dilapidation. The boards of the porch were rotten and one of them gave way as I stepped on it. The flooring of the hall creaked and groaned beneath our weight. The place gave every evidence of having been under water at one time.

From a back room the leader brought a lighted candle and revealed that the hall, save for an old walnut table and a rusted clock, was quite bare.

He carried the candle into a big room at the left which contained soggy horsehair upholstery upon ancient mahogany chairs and divans. On the marble-topped center table of black walnut was a candelabrum containing a number of tallow candles which he proceeded to light with the one he carried.

"What a weird place this is," remarked Helen.

"You can sit down if you want to," growled the leader. "You boys stick round in case they make trouble."

The man talked more like a Westerner than a Southerner, though we were on the Gulf coast of Florida. I guessed that these were descendants of the hardiest and roughest survivors of the Catastrophe, drawn from all parts of the country.

He seated himself, drew from his pocket a bag of tobacco and proceeded to roll himself a cigarette. Its aroma almost maddened me.

"Give me one, please," I demanded. "I'm crazy for a smoke."

He handed me the bag, but seeing that I was unable to roll one, was kind enough

to do it for me. We lit up and Helen uttered a gasp of alarm. For the first time she saw smoke coming out of the mouth of a human being.

"Where's the rest of your clothes?" he demanded. "Were you traveling in that flying contraption in bathing suits?"

"This is the regular dress where we come from," I informed him.

"Must be a warm country."

The man was about forty-five. He had a short brown beard, long, unmatted hair and hard, black eyes. He wore homespun clothes cut like those which I had worn back in 1950. His teeth were long and yellow, but his manner was more curious than hostile.

"Why did you attack us? We were doing you no harm," I said.

"We seen your machine come down on the beach," he replied. "We got to take care of ourselves, haven't we? How do we know what you might be up to?"

"What are you going to do with us?" demanded Helen.

His eyes rested upon her admiringly. "I ain't never seen anybody as purty as you be," he stated. "We got women but they ain't so much."

"Well—what do you intend to do?"

He cleared his throat. "I'm the boss of this country round here," he informed me. "I can raise a couple of hundred men and anything I want, I git. I want that machine of yours. I can use it in my business."

"Well, you seem to have taken it; but unless I show you how to run it, it will be no good to you."

"You'll show me, all right. I think I'll kick out my old woman and marry that one. I ain't ever seen such a purty one."

"I may have something to say about that," replied Helen scornfully.

"Not much, you won't! Where do you come from, eh?"

"We are from a city many hundreds of miles to the north."

"And that's a lie. I know the whole country right into the ice lands. Of course, I never seen a flying machine that worked."

"Oh, you've seen airplanes before?"

"I'll tell you," he said. "Most folks are scared to go into those old cities because they are full of bones of people that died in the Great Death time and their ghosts haunt them places; but I went into one of them and I saw a couple of machines like yours. I didn't know what they was for until I seen you coming down right out of

the sky. Some of the boys thought you was witches, but I looked you over from the bushes and knew you was people just like us."

"YOU'RE a brave man," I observed.

"I'm the bravest man in all this part of the country," he admitted, simply enough. "Now, where are you from?"

"About fifteen hundred miles north there is a settlement in a great steel and glass house where many people live. I come from that place."

"Say!" he exclaimed. "I heard about it. Tom Hooker, the big boss farther north, took a whole army up there. He wanted me to raise my men and go along, but I like it better here. We've been hearing wild tales of that place for years. Trees and flowers right out in the middle of the ice. Is it true? You come from there?"

"Yes."

"I want to know! What happened to Tom Hooker's army?"

"It was beaten off and it is on its way back."

"When will it git here?"

"Not for months, I imagine."

"Licked, eh? Say, that gives me a break. I'll get my gang and make a raid up that way. You'll come along with your machine and keep a watch out for Hooker."

"How long have you been in this country?" I demanded.

"Oh, my dad brought me here from further west. My mammy died on the way. When we first come here it was lots colder than it is now."

"Have you any government?"

"What do you mean?"

"Well, you've heard of the United States Government which kept order in olden times."

"Oh, sure. But that's all gone now. We have to look out for ourselves. You see, folks drifted down here from everywhere and just moved into places that had stood up during the old spell, and we ain't got together nohow. Hooker only collected his army by getting a lot of bosses excited about the loot up in the ice. If he took a licking it will be end of him. He was the most powerful man alive, but folks won't pay attention to him any more. There's another mob of savages that didn't go with him. They come raiding us once in a while."

"Say, Joe," said one of his followers from the door. "Your old woman is raising the devil upstairs. She saw that one and she won't have her in the house."

He rose, "I'll tend to her," he declared. "You watch these two."

As soon as he was out of the room Helen rushed to my side and grasped my hand.

"Don't let that terrible man marry me," she pleaded.

"I'm not going to, dear. Helen, what we have learned from him bears out my theory of the existence of human life all through the South. Isolated individuals seem to have survived the poisoned air and they trekked toward the tropics, seeking warmth. Apparently they were the roughest and most ignorant types and their children grew up like savages. They are joined in little gangs, in a condition of anarchy—"

"I don't care about your theories," she cried angrily. "I don't want that man to touch me. Oh, listen!"

Female screeches came from above, the tramp of feet and the sound of blows. The brute was beating his wife.

The cries were heartrending and I resisted with difficulty a mad impulse to fight my way upstairs and interfere, but interference came in another fashion.

"Where's Joe Hanin?" shouted an excited voice outside. "The savages are coming."

"How do you know?" demanded one of the men in the hall.

"Jack Cann just come in. He says they burned his house and killed his wife and kids. They saw this flying thing and they came over to get it."

"How long before they'll be on us?"

"Well, they got to make a big detour around that haunted town and probably won't get here till morning."

"We'll be ready for them," shouted the chief from above, having been distracted from the beating of his wife by the uproar below. "You fellows get out and round up everybody. How many in the gang?"

"Cann said there were hundreds."

"Start that big fire on the beach. That will bring in the boys. A couple of you watch these prisoners. I've got things to do. Put out all but one of them candles."

He rushed out of the house and a follower entered and blew out the candles.

"What do these raiding parties fight with?" I asked him curiously.

"Knives and spears and clubs."

"No guns?"

"Man, there ain't been no guns since before the big cold."

"Where is your pistol?" whispered Helen to me.

"I had no pockets and I put it back in

the drawer on board the plane. If I only had it, we might make an attempt at scaring the mob and escape."

"We must find a way to get back to the plane," she said.

I glanced at our guard.

OUR ruffian of a guard stepped into the hallway, leaving us alone with the light from one candle. I found myself squeezing the little hand which had crept into mine.

"Their superstition," I said, thinking aloud, "is responsible for their condition. I suppose, when the snow melted in this section and revealed cities, towns and villages, the first of the uneducated survivors were revolted by the multitude of human bones in streets and houses, and immediately revived from the past a belief in ghosts and witches. The towns became taboo to them, and their opportunity to acquire all the advantages of civilization were lost."

"Will you be kind enough to think of a way of escaping from these fiends?" Helen asked tartly.

"We can't do anything at present. I presume some of the people who survived the Catastrophe had rifles and revolvers, but threw them away when they ran out of ammunition. Helen, these savages lack the initiative of real savages. They don't create anything. They don't even build themselves houses, but huddle in the dwellings they find standing. They don't know enough to repair them. White savages speaking almost as good English as we do. It is revolting."

"You don't care anything about me," she complained. "What do I care how they live or why they are brutes? I want to get away."

A shrill female voice was heard in the hall. A woman was in altercation with the man who was guarding us. She thrust him aside and rushed into the room.

"Where is she?" the creature cried shrilly. "Let me get my hands on her and I'll tear her limb from limb."

The woman who entered was about forty. She had tousled and dirty black hair. Her complexion was mottled, and two or three teeth were missing from the front of her mouth.

She wore what we used to term a Mother Hubbard and her feet were large and bare. She approached Helen with outstretched claws and I stepped between them.

"Keep off," I warned.

She faced me like a tigress.

"She can't come in my house, the shameless thing. Look how few clothes she wears," she snarled. "And she won't get my man away from me."

"She doesn't want your man," I assured her.

And then in a low tone I added, "All we want is to get away. Can you help us?"

"Huh? Back to that flying thing?"

I nodded eagerly.

She grew more calm. "Joe would kill me, but I don't care. I won't have her around. I'll get you out of here."

She blew out the solitary candle.

"Pete," she called, "go out to the stove and get some fire. The candle went out."

"All right," he called back, and we heard him tramping toward the rear of the house.

"Quick," commanded the woman. She led us into the hall, pulled open the front door and pointed. "Run for it!"

Nothing loath, I grasped Helen's hand and we dashed across the clearing. We heard shouts from the house and ran faster. The cries were answered from the woods and the pursuit was on. Fortunately we found the path and sped along it. Oaths were bellowed out—humanity had not forgotten its profanity. They seemed to be gaining by the time we reached the beach.

A hundred yards to the left a great fire was roaring on the beach and a score of forms were assembled around it. The light, however, outlined the airplane halfway between us and the fire. We darted toward it.

Helen was breathing heavily. It was the first time in her life she had ever run any distance. Behind us three or four men had debouched upon the beach, sighted us and shouted with triumph. The group around the fire heard the uproar and rushed toward us to head us off.

Three of them arrived at the plane simultaneously with us. I ducked under the club which one of them swung at me and dropped him with a punch on the point of the jaw. I grasped his club from his hand as he fell and hurled it in the face of the second man. The third aimed a savage blow at my head which I dodged with difficulty. But he had thrown himself off balance and I sent him to the sand with a deft kick.

Helen was already in the cabin, and I sprang at it as the enemy received reinforcements. A man grasped at my leg, but I wrenched myself free. Already they were

climbing into the machine from both sides.

My fists were working like pile drivers, and in the close quarters of the cockpit the enemy couldn't use their clubs. I fought with all the science and brute force which I had brought down from a previous century, but it would have all been over in a minute had Helen not thrust a small object into my hand.

Bang! A blinding flash, a loud report and one of the savages fell shrieking. The automatic had spoken. It spoke again and a second man dropped. That was enough for the others, who leaped terror-stricken out of the machine. I sent a couple of shots into the mass of humanity on the beach and they ran wildly for shelter. Firearms had the same effect upon these white barbarians as they had upon the Indians when the first Europeans landed in America.

"Smart girl!" I exclaimed. "Are you hurt?"

"No, dear—are you?"

"Some nasty wallops from clubs at close quarters, but nothing serious. Let's get out of here."

I started the helicopters and we lifted instantaneously. I looked down. No sign of life was visible below. The bonfire was unguarded. The human brutes were all under cover.

"Where are we going now?" she demanded.

"Back to the Community."

Helen sighed. "Let's don't. I'd rather be alone with you in the air than home again with everybody I know around me."

"There is no place to go. The water which we see below extends unbroken, save for a few islands, to South America, which is as far from here as the Community."

"But I hate to go back into the cold regions, and I don't want to face father."

"Helen," I said grimly, "things are going to be different in the Community from now on."

I turned north and ran at half speed until dawn, which showed us green fields below and, far to the North, the ice line. Curiously, it was still quite warm. I was dead for sleep and we decided to descend upon an open plain which gave no evidence of human occupancy. Helen had slept for several hours in the machine and was able to stand a watch. I instructed her to wake me in three hours.

It seemed only a few minutes when she called me, but the sun was high in the heavens and hot.

We ascended again and drove north at full speed. The temperature was at least

seventy, but we had come above the region of perpetual snow. I flew low and saw, as I had suspected, that it was melting fast. There were going to be floods in that region.

Warm southern winds accompanied us as far north as Philadelphia, where the temperature was still fifty degrees above zero. It fell rapidly after that, and as we passed over the great mound of New York it had dropped to ten above zero. We had said little that day and every now and then I observed a tear trickle down the cheek of my splendid comrade.

"In two hours we'll descend in front of the enclosure," I promised her.

"I don't want to go home. Father will do something terrible to you. He loves me better than anybody in the world and his anger when he found I had gone with you must have been frightful."

"Think how glad he will be to get you back."

"He will punish me and have you eliminated," she told me dolefully.

"Somehow I'm not a bit afraid of your father and his Council," I said cheerfully.

I had kept a sharp lookout for "General" Hooker and his retreating army, but we must have passed forty or fifty miles to the right or left of them. I had estimated that they could not be more than fifty miles south of the Community, but our course was probably erratic, as I swung east or west whenever anything below interested me.

JUST before five o'clock in the afternoon we sighted the green dot which was the Community.

Helen grasped my arm.

"George," she said. "I know you hate me. Well, land me at the Community and before they can lay hands upon you go back to the South. You can survive there."

"I have business at the Community," I said obstinately. "And I don't want to leave you. You're a wonderful pal, Helen Ames."

"Very well," she said, with her jaw thrust out. "I have given you your chance."

"I can't be forced to do anything, Helen," I told her, smiling.

She stooped suddenly, pulled the pistol out of its drawer and with disconcerting speed placed it against her forehead. I snatched at it—but if she had known how to release the safety catch I would have been too late. I got it away from her and dropped it between my knees.

"You little fool," I shouted angry and frightened. It had been a terribly near thing. "Are you completely mad?"

"I don't want to live. I want to die," and she burst into sobs.

I restrained the impulse to take her into my arms; I forced back the confession of all it meant to me to have her beside me alive instead of dead. I gritted my teeth. This thing was going to be done in the way I had worked it out during the night.

In five minutes we settled in the snow outside the great glass and steel structure. Long since, we had smothered ourselves with furs and resumed the woolen mitts and stockings which the girl's needle had created.

Our return had created a much greater sensation than our take-off. We saw that the entire Community had come running across the fields and piled up outside the wall of the Air and Power Plant, and we judged from their extravagant gestures that they were delirious with excitement.

I had landed the plane about fifty yards from the entrance to the enclosure, and by the time we had walked across the intervening space the vestibule door had opened. We stepped into the steel chamber together, but when I made to take Helen's hand she drew it away fiercely.

The door closed behind us and a few minutes elapsed as the cold outer atmosphere was replaced by the warm Jobian air. Then the wide door on the opposite side of the room opened and we walked out into the courtyard of the plant. To my astonishment I saw drawn up the entire guard of the Community, officers with swords, privates with long spears. At the left was a crowd of people, two hundred or more, the patricians. Directly in front of us stood the Ames family, father, mother and son.

Helen threw off hood and fur coat and ran to her father, who coldly repulsed her. She turned toward her mother, who took her in her arms. Ames clapped his hands and immediately four guardsmen stepped forward and ranged themselves about me. My automatic pistol was inside my shirt, ten cartridges in its magazine. I held a second clip in my left hand.

The President came forward with great solemnity and stopped six feet from me.

"You have added one more to your numerous crimes," he said sternly. "You rejected my honorable proposals and vilely kidnaped my daughter. You will face about and march into the air chamber and you will go outside. If you like, you may

make use of the airplane to aid your departure."

"In the first place," I said mildly, "I did not kidnap Miss Ames. Without my knowledge she concealed herself in the plane. She will bear me out."

"Nevertheless," he said curtly, "you are to be immediately eliminated."

"Furthermore, we have made tremendous discoveries, about which, for the well-being of the Community, you should be informed."

"I am not interested in your discoveries," he replied. "Enter the chamber or I shall have you driven in by my soldiers."

Councilor Stein appeared suddenly from behind me.

"Mr. President," he said, "in the interests of our very existence we should learn where they have been and what they have seen. Why not permit him to inform us before sentence is executed?"

"My daughter will inform us."

"But she is without any experience of the outer world, or the past civilization. I implore you not to refuse an opportunity to learn what may be of vital importance to us."

"Nothing which he may say will affect his sentence," replied the inflexible old tyrant. "He has outraged the laws of the Community and the feelings of a father."

"Let him talk to the Council," Stein pleaded. "Miss Ames is safe and sound. Their return is a miracle. As a member of the Council, I demand of you that he be heard."

Curiosity was evidently working upon Ames. He shrugged.

"Very well," he said. "A meeting will immediately be held in your office. Soldiers, conduct him there."

Stein led the way; I and my guard followed, and the other members of the Council came out of the mob of patricians and fell in. In a couple of minutes we six were assembled in the little office of the superintendent of the plant.

"The Council is in session," said Ames as he seated himself at the desk.

"You guardsmen, wait outside the door."

"Tell us, Putnam," Stein implored.

"In the first place, I wish to lodge a protest with the Council against my arbitrary sentence. Merely as a matter of form," I stated.

"Your protest has been heard," said Ames. "You have killed members of the Council Guard. That alone is sufficient for your elimination."

I smiled. "Since there is no appeal, I propose to show myself magnanimous and put you in possession of information which will be of great benefit to the Community which proposes to expel me."

"You may speak," said Ames.

"Very well. In the first place, your impression that the atmosphere without is too rarefied for the lungs of the members of the Community is mistaken. Miss Ames and myself have been breathing it with impunity for two days."

I smiled to observe the sensation the remark created upon all except Stein, who had already guessed it.

"I don't believe it," said Holmes.

"Miss Ames will tell you that she hid herself in the fuselage of the airplane without an insulated costume and suffered no ill effects whatever from the atmosphere."

"I have observations to prove that the air has been rapidly increasing in density over a period of years," said Stein. "Mr. Putnam speaks the truth."

"Where is Professor Ditmar?" asked Ames harshly.

"He is dead. Heart failure."

"More likely poisoned by the air," commented Bolton.

"Then how do you account for the perfect health of Miss Ames and myself?" I retorted angrily.

"Proceed, please," requested Stein.

"**WE** HAVE traveled three thousand miles," I said. "We spent last night on the Florida shore of the Gulf of Mexico," I stated.

There were gasps of incredulity.

"We found that the snow line ends about six hundred miles south," I continued. "We discovered that from North Carolina to the Gulf the summers are mild and that vegetation is abundant. I believe that the climate of the Gulf States to-day is approximately that of New England in nineteen fifty-one."

"But New England had severe winters," said Stein.

"And produced a very hardy race of people from whom most of you are descended," I pointed out.

"You found this country populated?" demanded Ames.

"I should estimate that there are at least a hundred thousand people living in the South."

"But they wear furs," said Holmes.

"Only for such an expedition as recently camped outside this enclosure. At home

they wear woolen garments, which indicate plenty of sheep."

"But they have no weapons which would make them dangerous to us?" said Ames anxiously.

"I don't think they understand firearms. We saw no evidence of their possession of them."

"Then savages who live a thousand to sixteen hundred miles away are no concern of ours," declared the President.

"You visited cities?" asked Stein eagerly.

"We saw them from the air. The vast quantity of human bones in the towns and cities cause the ignorant survivors of the Catastrophe to avoid them like the plague. Hence they have failed to take advantage of the vestiges of civilization to be found in them."

"We have nothing to fear from them," said Holmes with a laugh.

"Not yet. Nevertheless you are in great peril."

"And how, sir?" demanded Ames skeptically.

"From nature. Nature has about decided to restore things as they used to be. We found summer temperature to the south. We saw the beginning of a great thaw in progress along the snow line. And it is only about the first of June. If the heat continues, snow and ice will have vanished from this section by September."

I met blank incredulity except in the eyes of Stein.

You couldn't blame them. They were born into a land of perpetual snow and ice and survived there by means of a glass dome and artificial air. It was impossible for them to conceive of different exterior conditions.

"In a few weeks or months," I assured them, "the outer air will be warm enough to enable you to admit it within the inclosure and suspend your manufacture of Jobian gas."

"The man's insane," declared Holmes.

"At this minute I can take you outside and demonstrate that you can breathe out there. It is still cold, but not very cold. You see me none the worse for an excursion of three thousand miles."

"Not a word of this," warned Ames. "Not even to your families, gentlemen. We must have absolute secrecy."

"Why?" I demanded.

"Since you will be put outside in a very few minutes," replied the President, "I don't mind explaining. We had an uprising yesterday afternoon. Several persons were killed and order was only restored by

a threat to cut off the Community's supply of Jobian gas. Our troops have been assembled here and the wives and families of our aristocracy brought here in case such an action was made necessary. The threat, however, was sufficient. Once permit these fools to learn that they could breathe the outer air and we could not control them."

"They will learn very soon," I replied. "The whole country hereabouts is buried under thirty feet of snow and ice. Your inclosure is set in a hollow—I don't know why."

"It is caused by our consumption of the snow in this vicinity for drinking and irrigation purposes," said Stein.

"Well, the melting of this vast quantity of frozen water will cause a great flood."

"Our inclosure is watertight as well as airtight," declared Ames.

"Perhaps, but a vast accumulation of water outside will quickly turn your cultivated land into a swamp and in very short order it will become a lake."

"Absurd!" snorted Ames.

"Your only hope," I said earnestly, "is to abandon the inclosure and take your Community to the top of a mountain. There are high peaks only a few miles to the west. You must take ample supplies and wait there until the floods subside. I advise you to begin your preparations at once."

A roar of laughter greeted my suggestion.

"I think we have heard enough," said Ames.

"Just a minute," said Councilor Stein. "There is nothing amusing about this. What Mr. Putnam has told us about conditions in the South has confirmed my theories based upon observations of the outer atmosphere and from what we learned by the appearance of that furl-clad army outside."

"We remained in this refuge because the air outside was too thin to breathe or to transform the rays of the sun into heat. We have the most ample evidence that the earth's envelope has restored itself, with increasing rapidity of late. If that is the case, the disappearance of the arctic conditions in these latitudes must follow. It may not happen this summer, but it is sure to happen within a year or two."

"Mr. Putnam asserts that at the first of June the ice has disappeared only six hundred miles south of us, which persuades me that there will be a great thaw in this vicinity by August or September. It does

not need the melting of the entire mass of ice and snow which surrounds us to drown out this Community. A fair-sized thaw would do it."

"Is that so, Stein?" Councilor Murphy demanded quickly.

"You are as mad as Putnam," Ames interrupted contemptuously. "You will keep your absurd theories to yourself if you do not wish to share his fate. And there has been sufficient delay in executing his sentence."

The five members of the Council were facing me, seated. I stood with my back to the door.

I lifted my hand. "Mr. Ames, I wish to marry your daughter."

"Nothing can save you," he replied. "You had your opportunity and you refused it. If for no other reason than the mad suggestions you have made, your elimination is necessary. We have troubles enough without prophecies of an impossible deluge."

"I see," I said slowly, "that you are unfit by mind and temperament to rule Putnam Community. This Community is my property and I hereby take it over."

"Stark mad," commented Ames. "Call in the soldiers."

My hand was thrust into the breast of my cotton shirt and I drew it forth with my fingers around the butt of my automatic.

"When reason fails we must essay force," I declared. "This, Mr. President, is an automatic pistol. I found it in the plane. I have used it with excellent results and with it I can lay all five of you dead at my feet before assistance reaches you."

Holmes and Burton sprang to their feet and bore down upon me. Murphy and Stein kept their seats.

"Stand back," I warned. "I promise you I'll shoot."

"Guards!" shouted Ames. "Take your prisoner."

The door opened behind me. Holmes was almost on me. I pressed the trigger and the weapon spat fire. In the little room its report was deafening. Holmes went to the floor with a bullet in his thigh. I swung about to face the spearmen, but they had dropped their weapons and taken to their heels.

"Lift your hands high above your heads," I commanded of the Council. "I, George Putnam, proclaim myself President of Putnam Community and I abolish the offices of Councilors."

Ames folded his arms and faced me.

"You may murder me," he said in a low tone. "I will never resign."

"Stein," I commanded, "conduct these Councilors into the air chamber and shut the doors on them. Holmes is only slightly wounded and you can get a doctor for him presently."

"I don't care to be shot, Mr. Ames," said Stein apologetically. "You see that I must obey his orders."

Ames bowed his head slowly. He was very pale. He moved out of the room and the others followed him docilely. I brought up the rear.

Stein opened the small door which led from the locker room into the steel chamber and the councilors filed within.

"Shall I follow?" asked Stein.

I laughed. "You are the only intelligent man in the Community. I need you."

He pressed the button which closed the door and turned the knob which supplied air to the chamber.

CHAPTER VII

ONE AGAINST A CITY

"ONE PISTOL will not conquer three thousand people," Stein reminded me.

"We'll see about that. Take me outside."

He led me into the courtyard where all was in confusion. The report of the weapon had been heard and the cowardly soldiers had spread word that I had murdered the members of the Council. When I appeared, an officer waved his sword and the Guard presented spears and bore down upon me.

"Halt," I shouted. "Throw down your arms. The first man who advances another step dies."

They hesitated, but the officer came on, waving his sword.

"Come on, men," he cried. "Cut him down."

Reluctantly I lifted my pistol and shot the officer in the leg. The tongue of flame which leaped from its muzzle and its sharp bark did the job. There were shouts of terror from the guardsmen and a backward movement.

"Drop your spears," I bellowed. "Quick, or you die!"

Down went scores of spears, but three men less than thirty feet from me hesitated. I aimed at their legs and brought two to the ground. With a bellow of fright the third dropped his weapon and fled.

"Order that the gate be opened and the

public admitted, at once," I commanded.

Stein roared out the order and a moment later the big door to the wall was flung open. I glimpsed a multitude outside, but, despite the gesture of invitation, the timid populace would not enter.

I took another course. Pointing to the exit I ordered the patricians, men, women and children, to go immediately to their homes. It was ludicrous how enthusiastically they accepted the invitation, for the opening in the wall was immediately congested.

Minus their weapons the guardsmen were mingled with the civilian rout. In five minutes I was left in the inclosure with Stein and Helen Ames.

She grasped my arm.

"Did you hurt my father?" she demanded angrily.

"He's safe, my dear. Have you a megaphone in the place, Stein?"

"I'll get you one immediately," he promised.

"What happened?" demanded Helen, at my side.

I laughed. "I had to take over the government of the Community. It was that or be put outside. Your father was adamant."

"What are you going to do to him?"

"Nothing, dear. I'll release him in an hour or so. A revolution has been effected by a few shots and three or four flesh wounds."

Stein was back with a three-foot megaphone which I grasped as I strode to the opening in the wall.

"Hear me, you people," I bellowed. "I, George Putnam, take charge of the Putnam Community for the benefit of all. The reign of the Ames family is at an end."

My appearance was greeted by manifestations of delight and my words drew forth a great cheer.

"The old democracy is restored," I shouted. "Special privileges are at an end. The marriage lottery is abolished. The guard is disbanded. All food rations will be equalized and housing conditions bettered."

The plain was filled with an insane multitude, shouting, weeping, capering with joy. A benevolent rush was made for me and I had to order the door shut in their faces.

"What do you think of the situation?" I asked Stein.

"You have eliminated any chance of a counter revolution. The guard is disarmed. The Council are prisoners and the patricians are outnumbered ten to one. I

offer you my services in any capacity."

"You'll remain on your present job," I said, smiling. "I have something to say to Miss Ames. Leave us, please."

I turned to Helen, who regarded me with a frown.

"You heard me say that the marriage lottery was abolished?" I asked.

"I heard you."

"I told you in the plane that I would permit nobody to force me to do anything," I went on.

"I heard that, too."

I smiled broadly. "Very well. Helen, I learned in the last few days that a hundred years have passed since I became engaged to Ruth Reynolds. She has been dead for nearly sixty years. Yet I have forty years at least ahead of me and I do not wish to face them alone."

"Well?" she said enigmatically. She did not smile.

"I ask you to be my wife."

"My answer is 'no,'" she said curtly.

"What?" I gasped.

She stamped her foot. "You heard me. No, no, no!"

I suppose my dismay and bewilderment must have touched her.

"You had a deadly weapon and you took advantage of unarmed men," she declared. "You have overturned a stable government and promised a flock of sheep what is not good for them. You have turned out to be a demagogue, a cheap politician. The only things which made life worth while in this Community you have abolished. You have dethroned the Ames family. Well, I stand with them against the usurper. Put me in prison with my father."

"But, Helen, dear, he was going to have me eliminated. I had to do this."

"Any man with ideas like yours ought to be eliminated," she retorted, and she turned her back on me and walked away.

I scratched my head and looked after her. She walked to Stein's office and encountered him. I saw that an altercation was going on.

I hastened toward them.

"You can release the ex-councillors," I said. "Let them go to their homes. I don't think they are in the least dangerous."

"You'll find out quickly that we are very dangerous," declared the girl.

I looked at her coldly and passed into Stein's office. A man cannot go through such adventures as I had shared with Helen and not come to love a girl as loyal and brave and companionable as she was; and that she loved me I had had ample

evidence. Her present attitude was beyond my comprehension.

True, I had used a gun against men unarmed or armed only with spears, but the odds against me were hundreds to one. I was fighting for my life and had to make use of my advantage. As for my proclamation, I had always intended to restore equality in the Community if the opportunity came my way. Under existing circumstances it was the most effective way to win the support of ninety per cent of the population. I thought she ought to have sense enough to see that and I began to boil at her injustice.

PRESENTLY Stein joined me.

"They have gone," he said. "Aside from my working force, we are alone in the plant. My men are beside themselves with joy at your announcement."

"What can Ames and his patricians do?"

"Nothing whatever. They will have to keep indoors or the mob will tear them to pieces. You have no conception of the resentment the people have against these proud aristocrats."

"Well, they are entitled to my protection."

"Were you trying to scare them by your talk of a great thaw?"

"I was speaking the truth, Mr. Stein. I think it is coming soon."

"I believe you. The temperature outside now is zero, the highest it has been in fifty years."

"Of course it is possible that the hot spell will pass safely, this summer."

He shook his head. "It's only June first. What are your plans?"

"Well, I've got to organize a new government. I must make good my promises. In a few days we'll begin preparations for a migration to a hilltop."

"If you couldn't persuade the Council, whose members may be arrogant but who are intelligent, what chance have you of convincing the common people that we are in danger of a deluge?"

"I'll find a way."

"You can take over the government and effect popular reforms, but belief in the dangerousness of the outer atmosphere is their creed. Besides which you couldn't make them leave their homes and march through snow and ice if they did become convinced that they could breathe the outer air."

"Well, the thaw may not reach us this year. By next year I'll have succeeded in convincing them. In the meantime I want

an inventory of everything in your storehouse. You said there was a great supply of woollens left over from the days when they experienced cold here."

"Not enough to clothe three thousand persons. Well, I have had our wounded placed in the plant hospital and a physician is attending them."

"You are going to be my right-hand man. I feel I can trust Murphy, too; don't you think so?"

"Give him a few days to think it over and he will join you," Stein assured me. "He's not so hidebound as Ames, Holmes and Bolton."

"I know very little about the machinery of the Community government. Is anything apt to run down as a result of this swift overturn of authority?"

"I don't think so," he replied. "We have reduced officialdom to its lowest terms. You must make it plain that you expect every man and woman in the Community to go about their regular duties. I can answer for the functioning of the plant, but the factory and field workers may consider the downfall of the Ames regime as a license to abandon their employment."

"Have you printing presses?"

"Yes. Years ago we published a daily newspaper, but it was stopped because we ran out of newsprint. Bulletins on the board in the plaza gave the public what information it needed."

"I'll prepare a proclamation to be posted on the bulletin board."

"Are you serious about putting everybody on the same ration?"

"Certainly."

He made a grimace. "You'll be astonished to find how little difference it will make in the bill of fare of the masses, and it will be a great deprivation to the formerly privileged classes."

"Can we manage a small quantity of meat for everybody once a week?"

"Possibly."

"Isn't it true that you have a vast store of good food in the warehouses?"

"No. Ostensibly we were supposed to pile up a surplus in case of a failure of our crops for any reason, but the patricians have helped themselves with little regard for the regulations. We have perhaps three months' supplies on the basis of the old ration."

"Anyway, I'm doing away with the marriage lottery," I declared, somewhat chagrined by his information.

"That is a much-needed reform. You'll establish yourself at the Palace, of course."

"No. I'm going to quarter myself here. After all, I am acting singlehanded and your patricians might try to capture me if I gave them an opportunity."

"Have you much ammunition?" he asked.

"Several hundred rounds in the plane."

"I suggest, Mr. Putnam, that you call an assembly of all the people and explain your plans in detail, leaving the migration idea to be broken to them very gradually and very gently—what is it, Bowen?"

A workman had pushed open the door.

"There is a riot outside the walls, sir," the workman declared excitedly. "The mob is attacking the Councilors. They'll kill them."

I was out of the room in a shake and running toward the gate which had been closed after the departure of Ames and his three Councilors. Two of Stein's men were standing beside it and at my command they threw it open. Ames, Holmes, Murphy, and Bolton rushed for shelter and I confronted a mob of several hundred, mostly women. These had been threatening all sorts of dire vengeance upon the Councilors, but as yet had not dared to lay hands on them. At my appearance their snarls changed to cheers. I demanded silence and got it.

"Now, you people, listen to me," I shouted. "I'm ruler here and these men and the whole body of patricians are under my protection. You'll find that I can punish as severely as the Council used to do. Disperse or it will be the worse for you."

A man stepped forward. He was a big man for a Putnamite, brawny and truculent, and he pointed a finger at me belligerently.

"If there is punishing to be done," he said impudently, "we demand that you punish our oppressors. We demand that all the patricians and their families be put outside immediately."

"Yes," "yes," "yes," shouted those behind him. "Put them all outside."

I STEPPED close to him and looked him in the eye. He met my gaze insolently. I measured him and drove a short hook to the heart. The blow didn't travel more than six inches, but he fell like a stricken ox. There was a cry of horror and terror from the mob, most of whom did not see the blow, but supposed I had blasted him with a glance. I straddled him and confronted the crowd.

"Go to your homes," I shouted. "It is I,

not you, who have overthrown the Council and I will decide what punishment will be meted out, and to whom."

"If you put the patricians out," screeched a woman from the rear of the crowd, "there will be more food for the rest of us."

"Back to your homes!" I shouted. "Go before I make you sorry you were ever born."

They wilted and melted away. I watched them stream across the fields with concern. If this was to be their attitude, my hands were going to be full. Yet I might have expected it. Oppressed peoples are always ferocious when set free. The atrocities in Russia and in France during their revolutions might be repeated here upon a small scale if I relaxed my vigilance.

"You see the character of the people you have championed," said Ames with a sneer as I reentered the inclosure.

"I think they compare very favorably with your patricians," I replied. "It seems that I have to take you under my protection."

"You need us as much as we need you," he retorted. "Night is coming on and it is certain that the mobs will gather and attack patrician houses in the dark. The blood of women and children will be on your head."

"Arm yourselves with spears," I replied. "I'll ask Stein to arm half a dozen men and send them with you. Collect your people and take them into the Palace. You ought to be able to defend yourselves there, don't you think?"

"I am sure of it," he replied. I read the meaning of the glitter in his eye.

"I shall remain here to-night and guard the air plant," I informed him. "By morning I shall have made plans for you and I shall expect you to march out of the Palace and lay down your arms. If you refuse I shall arm the mob and storm the Palace, in which case I won't be able to prevent a massacre."

"If you convince us that we shall be safe, we shall surrender," he replied. "By morning you may realize that the wisest course is to make terms with us."

"I doubt that. Good evening, gentlemen."

A few minutes later the three Councilors with half a dozen workmen, all armed, set out for the Palace. I was not at all sure that the people would not attack them despite their spears, but I could think of no other means of safeguarding them.

"In the morning," I said to Julius Stein,

"we shall organize a new guard from among the lower classes. Stein, where do you keep your cattle?"

"In a corral beyond the warehouse. You think they might raid the corral and warehouse for food?"

"It's well to be prepared."

"We have two spearmen always on duty there. I'll rig up a searchlight and sweep the whole inclosure with it."

"Have you the necessary power?"

"Oh, yes. We are prepared for emergencies of this description."

"Then get that done at once. It may save lives."

We could hear yelling from the direction of the plaza. There was no doubt that mobs were roaming about who, protected by darkness, might make any mischief. Any race not as meekly peaceful as the Putnamites would have been apt to tear the Community apart in the ebullience of their feelings, and there were unruly spirits among these. The fellow I had knocked out, for example. I had forgotten him, but I now thought it desirable to bring him into the plant. When we reopened the gate, however, it was evident that he had regained his senses and slipped away.

By the time that night had actually descended Stein and his men had mounted a large searchlight on the wall and turned it upon the village half a mile distant. Its beam outlined multitudes of white-clad figures who scuttled out of its rays like frightened lizards. Gradually the hum of the mob died down. Habit was sending them to bed with the darkness.

In an hour and a half the six men sent with Ames returned minus their spears which the former President had taken from them and given to former guardsmen. They reported that the patricians had been assembled in the Palace without more serious trouble than jeers and insults from the mob.

THINKING about Helen Ames, I lay awake quite a little while. The girl had made a strong appeal to me from our first meeting and my hostility toward her had been a defense complex. I had loved Ruth Reynolds tenderly and protectively and mourned for her deeply and sincerely, thus Helen's aggressiveness had offended me.

As days passed, her vitality and courage had its effect. By contrast with her vivid beauty and high spirits, Marjorie Lothrop was made to appear weak and uninterest-

ing. If there had been no Helen Ames, it is likely I would have fallen in love with Marjorie because she looked so much like my lost Ruth. I would have been made unhappy by that meek soul.

That Helen loved me ardently and unselfishly I had not believed until there occurred the miracle of her appearance in the airplane. While I had not admitted it even to myself, I had capitulated on the spot. Masculine pride forced me to defend myself against her for a little while longer, but our close companionship did its deadly work. I tingled at her touch and yearned for her ripe red lips, but I still had no intention of accepting her proposals. With the automatic pistol in my possession I had been confident that I could grasp control of the Community and then, with the Council abolished, the marriage lottery a thing of the past, I would take her for my wife instead of permitting her to seize me as her husband.

Well, things had worked out much as I had planned. The Council were my prisoners, the patricians dispersed and I was supreme. I attempted to marry her—and she turned on me like a tigress.

Of course she still loved me. Surely she would get over her fury at the abolition of aristocratic government and the humiliation of her family. In a day or two she would be amenable to reason. Complacently I fell asleep.

About two hours later I was awakened by Stein.

"Get up," he said rudely. "An insane multitude has set fire to patrician houses and is attempting to storm the Palace."

I rolled out of bed, pulled on my shorts and rushed into the courtyard. There was a red glare toward the village and the roar of the mob was distinctly audible.

"But I was going to turn most of the patrician houses over to the people," I said stupidly.

"You don't expect swine to think, I hope," he said bitterly. "What's to be done?"

"The Palace is of stone. They can't fire it."

"If they get in they can murder the only civilized people in the Community," he exclaimed. "You are responsible for this. Stop it!"

I leaped upon the platform upon which the searchlight was mounted. It was playing over the low roofs of the houses, upon the Palace, and the plaza which was black with people.

"There are only a dozen spears in the

building and they know it," said Stein who had climbed up beside me. "They are armed with axes and garden tools."

"I thought the whole Community had gone to bed," I gasped.

"You told them you would protect the patricians so they decided to take things into their own hands. A few firebrands stirred them up and they are lusting for blood."

"I might have expected it. Stein, you stay here and hold the plant. They may attack it. I'll go down there and try to reason with them."

"Spray them with bullets from your pistol. They are beyond reason," he growled.

"Open the gate," I commanded.

He shouted to one of his men, who rushed to the gate and opened it, and I dashed through it. The moon was up, now, and the burning houses beyond the plaza clearly outlined the stone structure of the Palace.

I sped down the cement road which led through truck gardens into the outskirts of the town. I met nobody upon the streets. The entire Community was around the Palace. Those sheep had been transformed by an unfamiliar taste of liberty into so many wolves.

As I debouched into the plaza I saw a line of men carrying a heavy beam ascending the stone steps of the building with the intention of breaking down the door. I drove into a mob of women who were singing, yelling, cheering, and urging their men to kill. I dug a path through them with my elbows and such was their excitement that I was twenty feet deep in the mob before I was recognized.

"It's Mr. Putnam," shrieked a female voice. "Our rescuer! Our liberator!"

"Make way!" I shouted. "Do you want murder done there?"

"You shall not save them!" exclaimed a woman in front of me. She turned and threw her arms around my neck. I broke her hold and thrust her away.

"They deserve death," cried another. "Don't let him help them."

She fell at my feet and grasped my legs.

Crash! The big door of the Palace had fallen. An insane mob, waving improvised weapons, swept up the steps and surged into the building. The din was terrific. I kicked savagely at the bloodthirsty harri-dan who held my legs, and broke loose. No longer considerate of their sex, I fought my way through the raving fiends, striking with my left fist clenched and hitting out with my pistol.

From the Palace came the shrieks of terrified women and children, to be drowned in a shrill burst of jubilation from the crowd in the plaza. For five or six minutes longer I was held up by the women who fell on the ground before me and built up a barrier with their bodies while others grasped at me from behind. I fought like a madman and finally dived head first over the last barrier, dashed across fifty feet of open space and found myself in the rear of the masculine mob which was trying to get into the Palace.

I SHOUTED wild and furious commands which were unheeded. I was unrecognized by the madmen and the cries of mortal agony from within informed me of the frightful work which was going on there.

Helen Ames was there. She would be slain without mercy with her father, mother and brother. I lifted my pistol and fired point blank into the mob. I emptied the weapon, stopped, refilled the magazine and opened fire again. A score of men were down. Each bullet was responsible for two or three of them, so closely were they packed. To me they were not human, but a pack of ravenous wolves.

The explosions of my cartridges and the shrieks of the wounded at last had an effect. The mob in front of me melted away and I rushed to the bottom of the Palace steps, still thronged with murderers who were unable to get through the comparatively narrow entrance.

I faced the mob in the park.

"Disperse," I shouted. "To your homes."

A low ominous murmur answered me. They were ready to turn upon their liberator.

"He's as bad as they are," somebody shouted. The mob surged toward me. I fired four shots into their faces, and the spurts of flame as much as the bullets were responsible for their flight.

I turned to the assassins upon the steps and looked into the insane eyes of Foster Brown. I lifted my pistol but I hesitated to fire at Marjorie Lothrop's fiancé; and a blow from the cudgel of a ruffian who had slipped up behind me felled me. Immediately I was trampled upon by a rush of feet from the rear. I lifted myself, was struck upon the head by a heavy slipper, and lost consciousness.

When I recovered, the mob was pouring out of the Palace, their white garments stained with gore. All the houses upon the opposite side of the plaza were in flames.

I was a mass of bruises and my head was splitting, but I still held in my hand my automatic pistol.

I moved through the throng toward the Palace and at that moment its lower windows reddened with flames. With a choked cry I tried to climb the steps but I was grasped by half a dozen men and dragged away.

"They're all dead in there," gloated the murderer who had my right arm. "They've paid for their crimes, damn them."

I wrenched myself loose. Smoke and fire were pouring from the windows of the building and a long tongue of flame darted through the open door. In the plaza men and women were capering madly, some of them having joined hands to dance in circles, in their jubilation.

Helen had been burned to death or had been slain by the savages! I wanted revenge! There were not bullets enough in my pistol to slay them all. I stumbled away from the Bedlam-like scene and then the plan came to me.

I could cut off their air supply. Asphyxiate the whole Community, men, women and children! Strangling would be too good for them!

I began to run toward the plant and found myself in a mob which was running in the same direction.

By the time we were close to the wall I was in the vanguard and I turned my back to the gate and opened on them with my pistol. Immediately the gate was opened and as I entered it slammed in the faces of the mob. Stein stood within and behind him was Helen Ames.

"Helen, my darling!" I cried in amazed joy and opened my arms. She ran into them and sobbed upon my breast. It seemed as if my heart would burst.

"They have killed my father and my mother," she moaned. "Oh, George, I don't want to live."

"How did you escape, darling?"

"Ames sent her to appeal to you for help when the mob began to attack the Palace," Stein explained. "She came across the fields and missed you. She wanted to go back, but I kept her here."

"I want to die," moaned Helen.

"No time to lose," said Stein. "My men have all deserted. They dropped over the wall and ran to be in at the massacre of the patricians."

Crash, crash, crash!

The mob without was hammering on the gate.

"I'm going to shut off the air supply,"

declared Stein. "We'll escape in the airplane."

"That was my idea," I cried. "No, wait." The sweet pitiful face of Marjorie Lothrop swam before my eyes. "There are decent people among them. They are not all mad. Give them a fighting chance to assume control."

Stein hesitated.

Helen lifted her head and extended an appealing arm

"They killed my people," she said brokenly, "but asphyxiation is too horrible. Please don't, Councilor Stein."

"Too late!" he exclaimed. The gate was tottering on its hinges. In a second it would fall.

He grasped Helen's hand and ran with her toward the entrance of the locker room. I followed less precipitately, my weapon ready. As I reached the door the gate fell and the savages broke into the courtyard. I drove them back for the moment with two or three shots, rushed inside, slammed the door and saw that Stein had opened the door to the steel air-lock chamber.

"Go," he said. "I must remain to close this door and open the outer door."

"Leave them both open," I said with a wild laugh. "The outer air may cool the fools, but it won't poison them."

HE NODDED and pressed the button which opened the outer door. We saw the airplane on the snow outside, and we rushed toward it. As we passed through the side wall of the inclosure, our pursuers appeared at the inner door, but the cold air drove them back. They screamed with mortal terror at their first taste of air!

We three climbed hastily into the machine and I wrapped up my companions in the furs which lay in the bottom of the cabin. The temperature did not seem to be much below freezing, but Stein was shivering and shaking as though with ague.

I swung into my own fur coat and climbed into the driving seat.

"Wrap yourselves up with those blankets around your legs," I ordered. "Stein, breathe slowly at first and bury your face in your furs. You will get used to it quickly enough."

There was not the slightest danger of pursuit now and I took my time about starting my engine and turning on the helicopters. We rose slowly and vertically and looked down through the glass roof upon the spectacle below.

Half the houses in the village were burning as well as the Palace and no effort whatever was being made to extinguish the flames. The maniacs were dancing up the plaza and we saw a mob still streaming toward the plant. Apparently our departure skyward was still unnoticed.

"What's going to happen down there?" I wondered aloud. "Death by freezing?"

"I don't care what happens," cried Helen passionately. "I never want to return to the Community."

"No doubt some of my workmen were in the mob which broke into the plant," said Stein, who was no longer suffering from the cold. "They will know how to close the doors of the steel chamber and they can operate the Jobian air plant after a fashion. The fools have destroyed half the city's habitations. By morning they will have recovered from their Saturnalia and will be ready to listen to suggestions from the few intelligent ones among them. I presume they will set up the old democracy; and in a short time they will again be in the hands of a despot. What is going to become of us? That is more important."

Helen was weeping. "I don't care what becomes of us," she moaned.

I leaned back and took her hand, and she did not withdraw it.

"I'm going to land close to one of the abandoned Southern cities," I said.

In the back seat Helen had presently sobbed herself to sleep upon the shoulder of Julius Stein. I tore south through the night.

At Charleston, close to great naval stores, I was certain we would find rifles and ammunition in good condition, and the three of us, well armed, would be more than a match for hordes of savages. I anticipated finding great stocks of canned goods which would solve the food problem. We would find vast quantities of gold, too, no doubt; but that was worth nothing to us.

The country was barren, but snow and ice had vanished long since and the temperature that morning was just under fifty. I picked out an ancient landing field and brought the machine down as gently as a dove lighting upon the threshold of its cote.

Stein was speechless with astonishment and delight at the high buildings of the city and the absence of arctic conditions. I smiled at Helen.

"Why did you refuse me, last night?" I demanded.

"Because you had demonstrated that you didn't love me and you only offered to marry me to pay up for what you had done to my father."

"My dear, I fell in love with you when I found you in the airplane. I am in love with you now. I have put out of my mind all thoughts of a hundred years ago. I am thinking only of what sacrifices you have made for me and how brave and wonderful you are. Unwittingly, however, I am responsible for the horrible massacre of last night. If you refuse me now, Helen, I can't blame you."

She smiled radiantly. "I don't blame you, George. You had to overthrow the Council or be put outside. No human being would have believed that our mild, meek people would turn into wild beasts. Father did not believe it. He was certain he could hold the Palace with a dozen spears. It was not your fault."

"Then will you take me as your husband?"

"If you did not want me, I don't know what I'd do," she said pitifully. "I can be happy only with you."

Stein spoke up. "Perhaps this is my chance to repay you for my escape from that madhouse back there. As a Councilor of Putnam, I am qualified to perform the marriage ceremony."

Helen buried her face in my shoulder. "Of course I knew that all the time," she murmured.

"Then marry us here and now," I commanded.

THREE months have passed. We are living in great comfort in a suite in a Charleston hotel which we found to be in good condition on the upper floors.

We have splendid magazine rifles and a great quantity of excellent ammunition. Helen has become an accomplished marksman. She has acquired a liking for caviar and *paté de foie gras*, of which we have found a great quantity. There are enough canned goods here to supply us with good food for a lifetime and we are clothed decently in garments found in various shops. Helen has at least a hundred costumes and, womanlike, changes two or three times a day.

No living being has entered the city, but we have discovered that the surrounding country is becoming increasingly populated by people who have followed the warm weather up from the south.

During short airplane excursions we have sighted herds of sheep and cattle,

whose survival of the period of rarefield atmosphere and great cold I cannot explain.

We are consumed with curiosity regarding the fate of Putnam Community and have no means of gratifying it, but I have discovered great drums of gasoline and I am experimenting with the engine of our machine in hope of finding a way to make it burn gasoline instead of Odine, of which we have only a very small quantity left. If I am successful we shall return to Putnam, with, however, no expectation of finding it in existence.

The summer was very hot and long, and Stein is convinced that a great thaw must have taken place in the vicinity of Lake Champlain which has probably caused floods that drowned those who survived the excesses of the Revolution. If we find survivors we shall find means to transport them south as the nucleus of a colony here. Eventually we shall probably settle in New York or Philadelphia.

It is our intention to make friends with the people who inhabit the outlying country and induce some of them to overcome their fear of cities. I tell Julius Stein that, in ten years, we shall be heads of a civilized community.

Eureka! Just this afternoon, I found a vast store of Odine in drums at the Naval Station. We will equip our plane and start to-morrow for Putnam, in high hopes. Till then, I close my account.

GEORGE PUTNAM.

EDITOR'S NOTE (2149 A.D.)

The manuscript of the great George Putnam, just discovered in his home in Charleston, ended at this point. Of course, as every schoolboy of the Twenty-second Century knows, Putnam's expedition to the Lake Champlain Community was successful. He found a thousand or more survivors there, and brought them to Charleston. It is probable that he was too busy to resume his journal in the ensuing years, due to his superhuman and amazingly successful efforts toward colonizing the dead cities and establishing order and education among the groups of "savages," our ancestors.

Undoubtedly he intended to finish his narrative in his old age, but his death with his wife at the height of their glory, many years later, while flying to the Pacific Coast, put a stop to his manifold activities. He is justly revered as the father of the new United States of America, as it is to him that we owe the rebirth of civilization.

(Continued from page 10)

denholt's Million" I'd have raved over it. Competition was pretty tough.

Lawrence was below par with the cover when one remembers the unsurpassable masterpieces he has given us in the past. I'm glad that Saunders has joined the staff. He can turn out some pretty good stuff—witness the April A.M.F.M. I am inclined to think that if you alternated between Lawrence, Saunders, Finlay, and Bok (thereby giving each a little time in which to become inspired) superior work from all four would result. Please, let's have some Bok covers. The same idea applies to the interiors (more Paul!) I notice that both Lawrence and Finlay (but especially Finlay) turn out some beauties followed in the next three or four issues with decidedly inferior work. I'm beginning to suspect Finlay of pyromania—at the most casual mention of the word fire he proceeds to draw wavy lines up and down his paper and pass it off as a work of art. (There are oodles of examples—p. 49 May F.N. is quite typical.) Come on down off your laurels, boys, we know you can do better.

I shall now register an ardent plea—one that has been on my mind since I bought the first issue of your magazine. Why, oh why, do you insist on blazing out your magazine's name against a brilliant yellow background that covers up more than a quarter of the usually beautiful artwork? You took a step in the right direction by removing the red strip from below the lightning flash. From a practical point of view, don't you think the complete painting spread before a prospective buyer's eyes would sell it to him quicker than the yellow splash? I'm pretty sure that there's no better eye-catcher than a Lawrence cover girl.

A couple of letters have been appearing in the letters section lately from some self-conscious people who claim they blush when buying or reading your magazine. They cry, "There's a girl on the cover!" Well, pity. Perhaps the Burgess Bedtime Story Books are a bit more in their line. Mr. Lane is being bit unfair to the astronomers and physicists by insinuating that they are not interested in Ziegfeld cover girls. Yes, Mr. Lane, consider yourself as ostracized.

Mr. Elsberry's interesting letter piqued my curiosity. I was amazed to read that Stilson was ahead in requests of Burroughs, England, and the rest. So I checked through myself (with the aid of a fan neighbor). I lack two issues, the first and fifth. I imagine there were no letters in the first issue, so my figures would be affected somewhat by that. In many cases I skimmed through the letters pretty fast so undoubtedly I missed a few. At any rate, here are my results for whatever they're worth (the number following the name indicates times requested): Stilson 44, Merritt 43, Kline 36, Flint and Cummings 33, Burroughs 30, Smith—Serviss 29, Stevens 27, England 26, Leinster 21, Lovcraft 19, Farley 18, Robbins and Hall 13, Haggard 11, Zagat and Giesy 10, Rousseau 8, C.L. Moore & Stapledon 7. As you can see, it agrees pretty well with Elsberry. The few discrepancies may very well be due to carelessness on my part (I assume Mr. E. left out

Merritt because of the new magazine). The Sept. issue will take care of Stilson.

I am in complete agreement with eliminating the letter section to avoid cutting the story. Also, I appreciate the fact that you recognize a good story when you see one even if it deviates a bit from the strict fantasy path. Otherwise we would be denied such classics as "The Terrible Three" and "The Flying Legion".

Inasmuch as I seem to have left very few stones unturned in my verbal wanderings there's not much left to say except to wish the best of luck in the future to a splendid magazine.

RETLAW SNEVETS

1041 Cayuga St.,
Santa Cruz, Calif.

Here's wishing you a long life, dear editor, in which to keep editing F.N. the way you have been. You're bringing some of the greatest fantasy in the world to the readers through your magazine. After finishing the novel "Earth's Last Citadel" in the July issue of F.N., I realized what heights fantasy can attain. It is a superb, magnificent story, well written and exciting all the way. I believe that I have never read its equal. "Death's Secret" by Schoolcraft was also excellent. Finlay did excellent work in illustrating them. However, Finlay should not be left inside all the time—let's have him do some covers for a change. I would really appreciate a Finlay cover in the near future. Don't get me wrong, though, the covers are swell—Lawrence and Saunders both do very good work, but please use the master.

Now, since I'm reforming you, how about changing your mag—that's right!—I think it should be published *monthly* from now on. See what you can do about it, will you? You have an almost unlimited field, so there's nothing to stop you. By the way, here's a request to fantasy fans. I am very new at Fantasy. By that I mean that I have just begun reading Fantasy magazines, and therefore I have not read any of the older classics or the better known novels. If any reader could help me out I'd be everlastingly grateful. I would like to beg, borrow or buy (I can't trade yet because I haven't collected any mags yet) some of the better known stories. Especially the "Polaris" stories, and the "Palos" stories. I am also interested in other long, classical novels. Can anyone help me? Well, that's enough for now except, let me offer my thanks to Miss Gnaedinger for her selection—"Polaris and the Goddess Glorian"—for the next issue. I've been dying to read it.

Yours for more Fantasy,

BILL CALKINS

c/o C. A. A.,
Panguitch, Utah.

TRI-STATE FANTASY CLUB

I am writing this letter not only to comment on your mags but also to make an announcement. But that comes later. Right now—

To my notions, your three reprint mags are about tops in the fantasy field. Those old stories

(Continued on page 123)



Grantley aimed the strange weapon, squeezed the notch. . . .

CROSS OF

CHAPTER I

THE WORLD BEYOND THE VEIL

F AINT morning light seeped through one low, cobwebbed window into the basement to dance glintingly off a fragment of mirror lying against the opposite wall. Grantley sat up stiffly on the barrel that had been his seat during his night-long vigil. Body and mind were numb, weary with puzzling over what he had seen. By daylight, the thing seemed

only more fantastic. He hadn't dozed, hadn't dreamt it. There were his finger marks on the dusty window, where he had wiped a space clean in order to see more plainly what simply shouldn't have been there.

Not unless there had been a masquerade ball next door last night!

But it wasn't the sort of house that would ever see such an affair again. Decades ago, perhaps, when this was a fashionable part of New York, when Jim Fisk held high revelry at the Twenty-third



MERCRUX

By
Harry Walton

Street Opera House, it had been the scene of such things. But its day was past. A gloomy two-story brick house, once red, now a smoky, weather-beaten grey, it had the familiar high stoop and barred basement windows of its type. Ruined shutters hung awry on their hinges. The windows themselves were opaque with grime, inscrutable, like eyes covered with the scale of death. A sullen and a gloomy house—such a house as Andrew Hathaway might well have chosen in which to seclude himself.

But what was the connection between

●
The city that Time had forgotten . . . a house of forbidden mystery . . . a doorway where life and death were brothers . . . a story of two parallel worlds behind the streets of old New York!
●

Hathaway and that absurd vision, and how did Daniel Wharton's disappearance fit in?

There was no answer as yet to either question. Grantley stood up, stretched his cramped limbs, felt of the reassuring bulk of his automatic, and wondered whether he had been a fool to come here alone, with no clue but Wharton's letter. The scheme had seemed far more feasible back in Des Moines than it did now, faced as he was by the gloomy mystery of that silent house and the riddle of what he had seen in it during the night.

But Wharton's disappearance shrieked for solution, and Grantley meant to solve it. Perhaps Hathaway was insane with brooding and disappointment—a not too remote possibility, considering the man's history—and was holding Wharton a prisoner there—Daniel Wharton, inventor of the trenetone tube and a world authority on electronics, who had always treated Grantley more like a son than a laboratory assistant.

Grantley determined to get into the house even if he had to break in. If he found nothing, he could turn to the police as a last resort. If that house swallowed him, as it had perhaps swallowed Wharton and others, the envelope he had left at his hotel would be forwarded within thirty-six hours to the Federal Bureau of Investigation.

Leaving the cellar the way he had come, he walked through a bricked-over passage and emerged on the street. It was a lonely neighborhood, even in broad daylight. The block was one of those long ones that stretch between Manhattan's avenues on the lower West Side, close to the Hudson waterfront. There were small empty warehouses and loft buildings, an unfenced lot, a row of tumbledown, deserted tenements. It was a lifeless street, a street of derelict houses, apparently without a single tenant. At the far end of the block an el train rattled over the gaunt structure of the Ninth Avenue line.

This was the street, and this the house named in Wharton's last letter to Grantley. That letter was safely enclosed in the envelope Grantley had left for the F.B.I., but he knew its every word as though it had been branded into his brain.

"Dear Ralph," Wharton had written, "I told you when leaving Des Moines that I was going to consult an old friend on my theory of neutron reaction. That was less than a half-truth, for the man I have come to see is not my friend, although his name is well known to both of us. Having

never met him, I was surprised to receive his urgent invitation to visit him, and his promise to astound me with something 'altogether beyond your boldest theories or mine', as he put it. Today I arrived here in New York, and tomorrow I shall call on this man, who has urged me to keep my visit and his name in strictest confidence. I break that confidence in writing you because, despite all reason, I have a sense of uneasiness amounting to a premonition.

"If I have any excuse for this weakness, it is this: You know that up to the time of his disappearance I kept in close correspondence with James Fargo. We had been friends for years, and there was little that we kept from each other. But in his last letter Fargo grew mysterious, in a manner quite unlike him, and hinted that he was on the track of something new, something 'altogether beyond your boldest theories or mine'.

"Those were his words. Could he have unconsciously culled them from such a letter as I received? Did he accept a like invitation—just before he vanished forever? A fantastic theory. And yet, Ralph, it leaves me no rest. Fargo was the fourth of us to go. What of Henderson and Minton and Franks? Minton knew more about electronics than any man alive. Henderson was working with micro X-rays when he disappeared. Franks' work on neutron bombardment was only half finished. Only two of us remain at work along these lines—Andrew Hathaway and myself. It is Hathaway who has asked me to come here—yes, the same Hathaway, whose theory of etheric planes was treated with such brutal contempt, and who dropped out of sight completely several months ago. On this account alone I can understand his request for secrecy, and I impose it upon you in turn. Keep all that I have written confidential—unless my foolish presentiment turns out to have a basis after all, in which case you will know what to do."

SUCH were the last recorded words of Daniel Wharton, who had walked calmly out of his hotel and never returned. But at this moment, Grantley had to confess, he was by no means sure what to do—except to knock on the door of that strange house and let events shape his course.

Windswept refuse littered the brown-stone steps. Paint had flaked from the wooden door and left raw, weathered patches. Grantley knocked hard with the rusted iron knocker, the blows echoing hollowly from within. He had a fleeting sen-

sation of being watched, but shrugged it off as imagination. After an interval he knocked again, harder.

The door gave, inching inward under the impact of his blows. He felt a keen shock of disappointment. All too obviously the unlocked door declared the house abandoned. Unless this was a trap. . . .

With a hand on his gun, he entered a dark hallway. He closed the door, which had been fitted with a new and massive lock, the bolt of which was latched back. He left it so.

The hall was quite bare, with dark woodwork and stained, cracked, plaster walls. Floorboards creaked under his weight as he walked through the nearest doorway, to enter a sombre, unfurnished room overlooking the street. It held nothing but dust and the withered remnant of a Christmas wreath thumbtacked to one window frame. His footsteps echoed from the empty walls.

Through a short connecting hall he passed to the kitchen. Here were a bare wooden table and three chairs, all grey with dust. Two dingy towels hung from a rack over the sink. There were canned goods, coffee, and a set of stacked dishes in the cupboard, all apparently untouched for weeks. He walked to the stove and turned a jet. Instantly gas hissed forth.

But the next room was again empty. Its single window overlooked a rubbish-filled back lot and the rear of buildings facing the next street. A closet door stood open. Grantley walked around it and looked inside.

With a gasp of astonishment he clawed out his automatic, cursing his carelessness at being taken by surprise. But the figure in the closet never moved, and rather sheepishly he let the gun drop to his side.

This, then, was what he had seen the night before—with the difference that it was empty now, whereas then a man had worn it. Now it stood inert, a suit of milk-white armor, richly enamelled in black and gold. It was complete, even to helmet and gauntlets. Upon the breastplate was engraved a globe, above which an eagle hovered on outspread wings, bearing in its beak a square and massive cross. Grantley raised the visor on noiseless hinges. The inside of the helmet was padded with black velvet. His glance traveled downward. The leg armor and the shoes of mail were thickly spattered with dry, reddish mud.

There was a trail of muddy footsteps leading to the closet. He followed it, with the aid of matches, to the rear of the main

hall and a door set under the stairway. It opened readily upon a downward flight of stairs. For thirty seconds he listened intently. The house was absolutely still. With his automatic again ready, he descended the steps. The light from above rapidly faded, but at the first landing he made out a switch and snapped it on. A small bulb glowed softly—and from above came a sharp little click.

He swung around, instantly relieved to see that it was only the door, which had apparently blown shut. Nevertheless he went back up the stairs to open it and keep his way of retreat clear. The door had no knob on this side; it was a perfectly flat surface of solid wood. He pushed against it, then laid a shoulder against it and shoved. It rattled but did not open, and the stair tread was too narrow to afford footing for any more vigorous effort.

There could be no returning the way he had come. But there should be a rear door from the cellar to the back yard. Or he might escape through that cellar window behind which he had seen the armored figure.

He ran down a second flight of steps and snapped on another bulb. There was nothing unusual about the ancient furnace, the ash cans, boxes and other cellar litter. But the window over the coal bin, open last night, was now covered with a half-inch thick steel plate locked in place.

The door leading outside was not only fastened with a heavy hasp and lock, but planked over with heavy boards. The cellar, like the stairway, was a prison.

IT WAS plain that he had been trapped, that his every step had followed a planned path. If Hathaway was mad, he had also a madman's cunning. Silently Grantley cursed his rashness. This was the end of his "investigation"—to be caught like a fool. He could have been of more use by giving the information he held to the police.

There was a sudden creaking behind him. He swung around, the automatic ready. A four-foot section of the brick wall was swinging outward on unseen hinges. Mystery book stuff! Secret panels, and doors that locked behind you. Old, time-worn tricks that had admirably served their purpose, thanks to his carelessness. And would serve another, if and when the police followed him here. With that brick panel shut, the cellar and the house upstairs would seem deserted. Detectives wouldn't waste much time on an

empty house. The last-minute help he had counted on in case of trouble would never come.

"You will enter the wall," said a cold voice. "Refuse, and I blast you where you stand. Drop your weapon."

For just a moment Grantley hesitated. He couldn't locate the speaker, but everything that had happened to him so far showed that he had been expected. The unknown held all trumps, and there was nothing to indicate that he was only bluffing. Grantley let the automatic drop to the floor.

"Enter the wall," repeated the voice.

It rasped across his taut nerves like a file on thin wire, but he stepped through the opening, walked through a short tunnel, rounded a corner, and came to a dead stop in astonishment.

An immense underground chamber, that must have extended far beneath the empty back lot behind the house, blazed with light. It was filled with a gleaming miscellany of great flasks and ponderous electrical machinery. Dynamos hummed upon a single monotonous note. Viscous liquids bubbled in grotesque glass containers. It was a strangely incongruous collection of equipment, the purpose of which he could not guess. Across what might have been an alcove at the far end of the room hung a beaded curtain, aglitter with that strange device of globe, eagle and cross.

"Walk forward," came the order, and if Grantley had any thought of disobeying he abandoned it as a small, hard object was pressed against his back. Only when he stood before the curtain did that dry, contemptuous voice order a halt. Grantley turned around slowly.

The man was in his vigorous prime, and there was about him an unmistakable air of authority, of absolute mastery over others, of a will accustomed to unflinching obedience. It burned coldly in the black slits that were his eyes; it spoke in his bearing, with a tone of implacable purpose. But physically also the man was astonishing. Grantley realized with a wild quickening of heart that it was he who had worn the armor standing upstairs, that none could have worn it more fittingly.

The lean body, encased now in tight-fitting breeches of a rich black material and a jerkin of white velvet, was every inch that of a soldier. Upon the chest of the garment was embroidered the now familiar device of globe, eagle and cross. The man's face was swarthy, with high cheek bones, a long, arched nose, and a small, smartly

trimmed beard. The hair on that proud head fell to the shoulders. In every feature and lineament this man might have been a captain of the ancient Conquistadores, a Pizarro or a Cortez.

"You are Ralph Grantley," the man said, in unmistakably foreign accents. The weapon he held, a thing of red copper with a huge black handle, jerked impatiently until Grantley nodded. "It is well. You will give me the letter from Daniel Wharton."

"That letter," said Grantley, "is now on its way to the police. Within a few hours this place will be surrounded. What have you done with Wharton?"

The other's face remained impassive. "Wharton is dead. His letter to you has served my purpose, and not his, for you were the last who might have carried on his work. Your police will find nothing—even if they come in time."

GRANTLEY found it impossible to doubt those cold, even words. Wharton was dead—and God knew what tortures he had suffered before admitting Grantley's existence, and the letter's. This man had killed him, or ordered him killed—and very probably Henderson and Minton and Franks also—and even Hathaway, whose name had deceived those others to this place. This was a man who would kill again and again to gain his ends, without compunctions, without fear or mercy. Knowing nothing else about him, Grantley was yet certain of that.

A hand felt him for weapons. That icy voice spoke again.

"You will pass through the curtain. *On-diak!*"

Grantley dropped his arms. He could feel his heart beating furiously against what seemed a dead weight in his chest. Death seemed very close, and he was certain now that Wharton and the others had passed this way, through those beaded strands a-tremble with the vibrations of boiling flasks and screaming generators. What lay behind? Some murderous engine? A vat of acid? Or a tunnel emptying into the river? And if it was to be death after all, why not meet it here and now, where at least there was light and an enemy to throttle if he could?

His muscles tightened for a leap at the man's throat. But that same instant there was a sound behind him. He turned halfway around, had a single swift impression of hot black eyes in a painted face, of a man gigantic, a naked red-skinned body

clad only in a breech clout and copper ornaments. Then one steel-sinewed arm encircled his chest in a crushing embrace, pinning his arms from behind. The other locked under his chin. He was held like a fly, in steel forceps.

The man in white velvet loomed over him, metal gleaming in one upraised hand. Grantley struggled desperately, futilely. He gave himself up for lost as the hand fell. On his forehead blazed stinging pain.

Then the beads of the curtain swept his temples.

Behind those glassy strands shimmered nothingness—a blue-black haze, pregnant with unseen horror. He heard himself cry out as he was thrust into it. And abruptly its aspect changed. No void now, but an enormously elongated cone, a pyramid of blackness dwindling into smallness at an infinite distance.

Suddenly the grip that held him fell away. He felt himself tumbling through space. The cone of darkness collapsed upon itself, so that he was at one instant at its peak and the next plunged into a bottomless pit whose concave walls were shrinking in upon him. As in a dream, the fall seemed endless.

Then abruptly, blindingly, the cone vanished in a noiseless explosion of brilliant white light.

He struck hard earth with stunning force, and lay there, wretched and sick, while wave upon wave of nausea rolled over him. His groping fingers felt a straw-littered earthen floor under him. Slowly his flash-blinded eyes accustomed themselves again to sight, to a dim twilight that filtered down from a great vault of stone overhead.

He lay at the bottom of a square stone tower, a structure that must once have had five or six levels, but which was now a mere shell. The broken, jagged ends of floor joists protruded here and there from the masonry. What light there was entered through a number of small, slot-like openings at various heights.

Fifteen feet above the floor on which he lay, a great circle of shimmering nothingness obscured the stones—a pit of emptiness in the solid wall. Against the opposite wall was hinged a lifted drawbridge. Behind it the lift mechanism must have been located, and a rope spanned the gap between the walls and vanished into the black haze.

Grantley stood up, found himself unhurt but for a bruise or two. The darkness, the uncertainty as to when and where he was

to strike, had caused him to hit relaxed, and perhaps prevented serious injury. He struck a match and examined at closer range the walls of his curious prison. Despite their obvious age, the stones were smooth and close-fitting. He quickly gave up all hope of climbing back the way he had come. Slowly, guiding himself largely by touch, he followed the circuit of the walls. He had covered two-thirds of it when he stumbled against something soft. He lit another match.

The body was bent almost double—and it had almost ceased to be a body. Moldering bits of flesh clung still to the gaunt bones. The face was unrecognizable. A plain gold ring dangled loosely from a fleshless finger. One of the leg bones exhibited the jagged ends of a fracture. One hand, outstretched as though in desperate hope, clawed the rough surface of a stone step.

Who was the dead unknown? Some unfortunate of even earlier date than Henderson and the others? A victim, either luckier or unluckier than the rest, whose brittle bones had snapped after the drop, and who had crawled this far, only to die in the darkness?

BUT the step was one of several, Grantley saw with a quickening of hope. He climbed the short flight and by match light discovered himself at one end of what seemed a long stone corridor, for a glimmer of light appeared at the far end. Over deep rubble he stumbled toward it. The opening was unbarred, and at last he stood upon a platform of logs driven into the outer wall from which another short flight of steps led to a flagstoned courtyard hemmed in by stone walls. There was a gateway, but the tall iron gates stood ajar, and beyond them cobbles glistened in harsh sunlight.

From the street came a hum of sound—a clatter of hoofs and the rattle of wagon wheels.

He took a deep breath and scarcely noticed that his nails bit fiercely into his palms. Ten minutes ago he had been in New York. Now the city had vanished. Not a single familiar trace of it remained. Against the horizon stood a fantastic skyline of peaked roofs and gables, none of them more than three stories high. The courtyard, with its ancient, scroll-ornamented gates surely had no place in New York.

And then there were the smells.
New York has its smells—of automobile

exhausts, coffee roasters, hot asphalt, gasoline stations and coal smoke. But the stench that came to his nostrils here was unlike any he had ever known. The smell of animals, the stink of offal, carrion odors of decayed flesh and vegetation, the sharp tang of wood smoke polluted the air.

He crossed the courtyard and stood in the gateway. His heart pounded unmercifully, and something that was more than fear clutched his mind.

Something in the scheme of things had gone madly askew. Not within memory of Aving man was there such a city as this. He wondered whether he were suffering from some strange delirium, a hallucination of time and place.

A narrow cobbled street twisted crazily between overshadowing houses that seemed to lean upon one another for mutual support. Down the center of that mean thoroughfare a stone channel served as a filthy open sewer. Along one side, broken flagstones formed a narrow walk, littered with rubbish.

Medieval! The word clanged and roared in Grantley's brain. Medieval this street was, and all upon it. Medieval the crazy architecture and random chimneys, the filthy gutter, the wolfish dogs snarling about the offal heaps, even the soldiers lounging in the shade.

Had the black, swirling depths of the cone carried him back through time? Was this a living scene of the past into which he had been miraculously projected? Was time travel actually possible?

And then he suddenly had the answer. Only hypnotism could account for it—that, or the wild dream of delirium. Was he even now lying unconscious or injured in the house in New York? Were the things he now saw, smelled and heard the self-created phantasies of the subconscious mind, and nothing more? Those could be as vivid as life itself. Hypnotists could make a man suffer agony when he was physically whole and unharmed. The man in the cellar, with that cruelly ascetic, emotionless face, resembled a Hindu. Grantley had once known—and there were mysteries in India which no occidental mind has yet explained. Mass hypnotism was one of those. Was it not possible that everything about him now was a mental fabrication, a delusion originating either in his own or another mind, but in any case without objective reality?

The illusion remained complete. Two-wheeled carts and great, broad-tired wagons rumbled over the cobbles behind oxen

and donkeys. Here a broad-faced peasant drove a flock of honking geese before him; there a plump farm wife waddled beside a laden ass. No detail was omitted. The women wore wide, heavy skirts of coarsely woven brown stuff, bright-hued blouses laced across the breast, and small peaked hats of white cloth. Men affected long hose, tight at the ankles, and colored sashes about the waist. A few, perhaps of higher rank or station, wore white neck ruffles. The footgear of men and women alike consisted of simple wooden or leather sandals.

Grantley stepped out of the gateway. If this were illusion, could he push into the stream of life that flowed up and down this medieval street? He stood for a moment, undecided, on the flag-stoned curb.

A ragged, bold-faced boy grinned toothlessly up at him and ran off. A tottering old man looked up for a moment into his face; Grantley's eyes met his squarely. The effect was galvanizing. With a terrified moan the ancient turned aside and hurried off as though demons pursued him.

Astonished, Grantley looked down at himself. His neat business suit, although somewhat dusty from that night in the cellar, was in good order. Was the strangeness of it sufficient to send the old man off squeaking with terror?

CHAPTER II

DRUM FORTH THE DAMNED

WITH a sense of unreality that gave him strange comfort, Grantley walked up the street, away from the knot of noisy soldiers lounging in front of what was obviously a tavern. Clad in stained fragments of armor as they were, some wore only a breastplate, while others had no more than a battered helmet or blotched and dented plates of leg armor. But here and there through the grime shone the strange device of globe, eagle and cross. It disturbed Grantley to see it, and he had an uneasy feeling that the soldiers were to be avoided at all costs.

Were the lot of them not thoroughly drunk, they would certainly have noticed him by now.

At a corner, where a second twisted street intersected the first, he paused uncertainly. Fifty feet away an enormous Indian sat against a house wall, indolently smoking a clay pipe. Grantley frowned, remembering the gigantic red man in the cellar. But this one was taking his ease,

with the air of one secure in privilege, his legs stretched out across the narrow walk. An elderly man stepped cautiously over them. The woman following him forsook the walk and passed by way of the filthy gutter, but eyed the redskin sullenly as she did so.

Then another man came hurrying toward the corner where Grantley stood. This one was dressed in the sombre robes of a priest, but wore a white sash of satin across his breast like a badge of office. He stumbled over the Indian's legs in passing, whereupon he dealt them a vicious kick and broke into loud cursing—in Spanish, which was a language Grantley knew well. And yet the oaths themselves were strange.

Intent upon avoiding the black-robed one, he hurried on. More and more the conviction grew upon him that the city, the people, and his own presence here were unreal—of the thin fabric of fantasy, and nothing more. Were they real, he would have attracted far more attention than he did. He was instead pointedly ignored, although sometimes a woman hastily crossed herself or a man looked intently elsewhere as he approached. But none spoke to him; only a child now and then stared frankly.

From the dark interior of a clap-boarded structure he was passing rang the blows of a hammer. Inside a fire glowed redly.

He hesitated, then obeyed an impulse to enter, pushing aside a half-finished suit of armor that hung from a peg in the doorway.

From the glowing forge a hearty voice rang out.

"*Buenos días!* Can I serve you?" The smith spoke without looking up from the hot metal he was forging. He was young, Herculean of build.

Beneath his blows the red iron took shape like pounded wax.

Grantley remained in the shadows, beyond the fire glow.

"If you will," he replied in Spanish. "But I wish only to ask a question. You may think it a strange one . . ."

The smith grunted. "Men must watch their tongues these days, stranger, and not all questions will I answer. But say on."

Grantley took a deep breath. The illusion, thus far, remained perfect. He could speak with and understand the people of this dream. He felt the heat of the forge fire, saw the sparks fly, saw motes dancing in a sunbeam that had stolen through a crack in the roof. And the smith was real—at least as real as any character

in a dream. But was this a dream of hypnosis, or had the black cone, despite all paradoxes, hurled him back through time, back to an age that never was, when American Indians sat in the crooked street of a medieval city of old Europe—built on the site of Manhattan!

"I have been ill," said Grantley. "For how long I know not. So ill that I can remember nothing of journeying here. I was cared for by kindly but ignorant folk, who, when my plight was at last known to them, cast me out as one accursed. Hence I ask you, where am I and what may the date be?"

"*Madre de Dios!* You have my pity," responded the smith. "Know then that you be—for good or ill—in the colony of New Spain, under the governorship of my Lord Mercur."

New Spain! Then this was the new world and not the old, this the age of Cortez and Pizarro and Spain's power upon the seas, the gold-greedy age of the—the Conquistadores!

"This city," continued the smith, "is New Madrid. Perchance you come from one of the southern colonies?"

Grantley shook his head, genuinely puzzled. If there had been a New Madrid, history had not recorded it. Nor had it recorded the name of Mercur.

"And the date?" Grantley prompted.

"What but the twentieth day of August, in the year of Holy Church one thousand nine hundred and fifty?"

Grantley almost grinned with relief. This last absurdity branded the whole thing as illusion. It was mad, impossible. It was just as mad and just as impossible as most nightmares, and he was convinced—or almost so—that it was made of the stuff nightmares are made of. Nineteen fifty! This village and this medieval people, co-existent with Times Square and transport planes and radio! Even hypnotism couldn't rationalize *that!*

THE smith thrust his iron back into glowing coals. Fire flared yellow and scarlet as he worked an enormous bellows, for the first time staring curiously at Grantley, who as curiously stared back.

This huge-framed young man, he felt, was *real*. His broad, good natured face glowed ruddily in the firelight. His eyes were clear and questioning—yet they widened suddenly, as though at once aware of danger. The bellows stopped.

"Accursed! Aye, you spoke truly, stranger. Leave my shop. Leave quickly,

lest spies of Mercrux find you here and drag us both to the Cross. Cunning you were to bespeak me in the dark, you to whom no man will speak—you who are an Accursed One!"

His huge hands thrust Grantley back into deeper shadow, toward the rear of the smithy where a single tiny window alone gave scant light. The smith dropped a shutter over it. In the man's manner Grantley read keen alarm, but also an overt friendliness.

"I shall go," he said. "But first tell me why you call me an Accursed One, and one to whom no man will speak."

The smith sucked his breath in. "Know you not that the brand of Mercrux marks your brow, sealing you unto death? You walk already doomed, as others have before you—others as strangely garbed as you, it is said. Now go—God have mercy on you."

He pushed Grantley toward a door, but before he opened it, he snatched a cloak and a cap from a peg.

"Wear these," he said. "Go to the Street of the Weavers and knock on the door where hangs a green lantern. Tell the porter that Diego has sent you. There it may be you can find refuge—scant though it will be. Now go."

Hastily Grantley donned the cloak and the beretlike cap, pulling the latter low over his forehead. The smith grunted approval and opened the door. Grantley found himself in a furrowed, muddy back street—little more than a cart lane. A brittle crust of dried earth crumbled beneath his feet. It had the reddish color of the mud he had seen upon the armor in Hathaway's house.

The discovery only added to the chaos of his thoughts. Could any form of hypnotism induce so complete an illusion of reality? He felt keenly alert, alive to danger of which as yet he scarcely knew the true nature. Was this illusion—this archaic city with its medieval people, its alien sights and sounds and smells?

Or was it all stark fact?

If it were, how was he to regain his own world? The smith had spoken of other "Accursed Ones." Could those have been Henderson, Minton, Fargo and others who had vanished from earth during the past six months? If so, they had found no way to return. But if return was possible, it must be through that cone of darkness that appeared as a black disc upon the tower wall, a fabric of forces giving access, through undreamed of dimensions, to the

hidden cellar near New York's waterfront.

The lane along which he trudged was forsaken. The naked backs of houses reared up beside it. Here, too, stinking rubbish heaps fried in the sun and feasted swarms of flies that buzzed up at his approach. A short distance west of the lane there sprawled a jungle of hovels. Beyond these, near the broad expanse of a river, fish nets were hung on posts to dry, and small boats bobbed gently beside rickety little wharfs.

Grantley cursed softly. That river could be only the Hudson. Along this very shore were docked at this moment tugs, several great luxury steamers, and a score of lesser ocean liners. Above this muddy alley, on the West Side elevated highway, sleek automobiles were purring north toward the Hendrik Hudson Parkway.

Yet here reality appeared as a cluster of shacks, a stinking alley, fish nets glistening with slime. For him, this monstrous fantasy was fact. He was further from New York than he would have been if he were halfway around the globe.

A rooting dog stole into the open doorway of a nearby house. An instant later it ran out howling, followed by a disheveled, red-faced woman and a volley of oaths. Spying Grantley, she stopped shouting and eyed him with interest. He quickened his step, grateful for the disguise afforded by cap and cloak. Behind him the flow of curses began again.

PRESENTLY he abandoned the lane for another leading toward the river, where he hoped to find a boat in which to cross. The Palisades, fringed with haze, loomed high on the northward shore, above forest and brush that grew thickly to the river bank. Directly across the river, where Weehawken and Hoboken should have been, with their factory chimneys, railroad sheds and wharves, stretched an unsettled wilderness. He felt that it offered the nearest haven of safety, for he had little hope of finding the Street of the Weavers, of which the smith had spoken.

He was already beyond the last of the houses. The lane had dwindled to a mere trail through a waist-high tangle of grass and brush. There was not a soul in sight, and he allowed the cloak, which had already made him unbearably warm, to fall open. Thanks to the smith, he had passed safely out of the city. The river's edge was now only a few hundred feet away.

From nearby rang suddenly the sharp cry of a woman, and immediately after it



Who was the dead unknown? Grantley wondered.

a man's angry voice. With no other desire but to pass quickly by, Grantley found himself suddenly in sight of the two, who stood in a tiny clearing surrounded by thick brush on all sides but one. The man wore the black breeches and white velvet jerkin that probably indicated high rank. He was furiously wiping blood from a scratched cheek. The girl had her back to the wall of a rocky little *cul-de-sac* in which she was trapped. As the officer again approached her a triumphant leer upon his swarthy face, her eyes fell upon Grantley and widened in astonishment. Too late he realized that the open cloak had betrayed him.

"Careful!" she cried instantly in English. "Take his sword—from behind!"

And as though the words had been an involuntary part of her struggle, she continued with piteous appeals in Spanish. The officer, paying no heed to her words, and probably ignorant of English, advanced unaware of Grantley's presence.

Startled though he was, Grantley at once strode into the clearing. The girl's cries drowned the sound of his footsteps, but at the last moment something warned the other man. He released her and whirled about, reaching for his sword. Desperately Grantley closed in, swung for the bearded jaw. His fist crashed solidly into thick lips. The soldier fell back, mouthing oaths through bloody teeth. His furious eyes narrowed as they fell upon Grantley's clothing.

"Ho! An Accursed One! Come, my part-
ridge, and meet thy spit!"

Like silver lightning his blade sprang forth. Before its advance Grantley could do nothing but fall back. Within three steps his back was against the rock, toward which the other had skilfully manuevred him. The officer roared with laughter.

"A lady's knight—and so quickly bested? Verily the men of your age are no men, but slaves scarce fit to wear the livery of Mercrux. So die, slave!"

The rapier pricked Grantley's throat—and the sneering face before him reddened and grew hideous with blood lust. But even as the sword arm straightened for the death thrust, the girl flung herself at it. The blade flicked up and away, and the soldier, enraged, dealt her a cruel blow in the face with his gauntleted left hand.

Something exploded in Grantley's brain. He sprang for the officer's throat, and the shock of collision hurled them both to the ground. No illusion here—the man's fingers clawed his throat, and Grantley knew beyond all doubt that he was battling for his life. He hammered furiously at the other's face. The man brought his rapier into play, dagger fashion. Its point slashed Grantley's calf, and he felt a warm gush of blood. He jerked back convulsively, tearing free from the other's throttling hold. As the man's guard went down for a moment, Grantley crashed a fist solidly against the point of his jaw. The officer went limp, the rapier clattering from his fingers.

Grantley stumbled to his feet, staring again at the emblem of globe, eagle and cross embroidered upon the white velvet vest. He was breathing fast. There was a bubbling tension in his veins, an exhilaration. For the first time he had fought that sign—and beaten it.

"You're wounded!" The girl's low voice reminded him that she also was a link in the snarled chain of mystery which he had to untangle. "Here, stop the blood. I'll bandage it later."

He took the kerchief she offered and bound it around the deep scratch in his leg. She was bending over the unconscious officer, unbuckling the white jerkin, and from a concealed pocket she now drew a copper-red instrument, with a barrel shaped like an X in cross section. It was about five inches long, with a thick black handle. Almost gingerly she held it out.

"It's deadlier than any gun," she said. "Don't use it unless you have to."

He took it from her, but any curiosity about the thing was submerged just then in his amazement at the presence of this girl, who spoke English and exhibited such characteristic coolness in the face of emergency. She was dressed precisely like the other women he had so far encountered. But the white peaked cap failed to entirely conceal a wealth of copper-red hair. Her chin was small but firm, her luminous brown eyes shadowed with tragedy.

"Thank God I've found you," he blurted at last. "You're the first sane thing I've met here. I had begun to think I was mad. What is this—world? Does it really exist?"

She nodded quickly. "I know how it must seem. But it's real enough. And a terrible danger to our world. But we can talk later. Your leg!"

Despite his protests she tore a long strip from her skirt and bandaged the wound. She also took the strange weapon from his hand and fastened it to his leg, where his trousers would conceal it.

"They won't think of looking for it there," she said hurriedly. "It may help—if you're taken. Now come, quickly."

"You have some place to go?" Grantley asked. "I meant to get across the river."

"Indians!" she said succinctly. "No white man would live the night through. Come with me."

She led the way before he could protest, giving him no choice but to follow and stifle the questions that sprang to his tongue. Who was this girl? What did it mean that she spoke English and talked of "our world"?

THEY followed a narrow trail northward, through cultivated fields waist-high with Indian corn.

"Can't we talk here?" he asked. "I want to know lots of things. Who you are, for instance."

She flashed him a quick glance and slackened her pace a little.

"I'm Nona Hathaway. And you?" she said.

The name took him by surprise. He told her briefly of following Wharton, but said nothing of his suspicions of Andrew Hathaway.

"You trapped yourself," she said. "Mercrux must have known from Daniel Wharton that you would come. To trap the others Mercrux used my father's name and forged letters."

"But you," he said. "When did you come here, and why?"

"I've been here eight months. It began when father announced a new theory which everybody saw fit to ridicule."

"The theory of etheric planes," Grantley said. "They claimed it would upset all the known laws of mass."

"It has!" she flashed. "They will learn that much—when it is too late. Oh, why must the whole world suffer because a few were too blind or too jealous to look further than their own prejudices?"

She fell silent for a time, and Grantley waited for her to speak again of her own accord.

"Father took it very hard. He resigned from the college and bought that old house downtown to carry on his work in. I took care of him there, but he was never the same again. He worked so intensely that his health broke down. And then, about eight months ago, he finished something he was doing. I didn't know then that it was the Tunnel. He only told me that he might stay in the cellar for a number of days, and that I must not let anybody touch his apparatus if I ever wanted to see him again.

"Of course I was frantic, but there was nobody I could turn to. We were estranged from everybody by then. He disappeared downstairs, and I could only wait. It was four days before he came back—and I will never forget his face then. It was only later that I learned what had happened. He had gotten through to this age, and had been captured by Mercurx.

"Imagine his surprise to learn that in this world his theory was well known! But even here nobody had applied it to the formation of a Tunnel, as father had. Mercurx listened to him, but wouldn't let father come back alone. Instead Mercurx came back with him, was in the cellar right then, when I thought our troubles were at last over. The Time Tunnel was already in Mercurx's hands."

"What is this tunnel?" Grantley asked. "Is it a manner of time-travel?"

She shook her head. "It is impossible to travel in time. But there is something else—a way of moving at right angles to the time flow. That's what father had done, to reach this age. He was already afraid of Mercurx—terribly. But he told me that someone else was coming upstairs, and that I must do as I was told. You see, Mercurx had men posted below, ready to shoot anybody who left the house—they could see the front and rear steps from the basement windows.

"And then—Mercurx came. He was

dressed in full armor, and looked splendid—and terrible. He begged us to follow him and be his guests at his palace. It was nothing but a disguised command, of course. Father knew that. We had to go through the Time Tunnel, and so came here.

"At first we were treated as guests, but soon enough we knew that we were prisoners in this age. Mercurx rebuilt the Tunnel so that we couldn't escape through it, and I was allowed to go freely about the town. Father was kept busy writing an account of his work and telling Mercurx about our world. Then, two months ago, I saw a squad of soldiers arrest a man dressed in the clothing of our age. He was waving a letter about and screaming that he would have my father arrested for kidnaping. When a soldier knocked the letter from his hand, I picked it up. It was a forged letter, supposedly from my father, to a scientist named Henderson, asking him to come to the New York house.

"Of course Father would have died rather than help Mercurx in such a thing. I took the letter with me, and both of us confronted Mercurx with it. He dropped his mask of courtesy then, told my father he had no further need of him. And then he told us his terrible plan.

"Have you ever thought what the world would have been like if the power of the Spanish Inquisition, the domination of Old Spain, the greed of her Conquistadores, the might of her Armada had overspread the earth? This is that world come true. This is earth, and this land called New Spain is our North and South America—an immense empire under the heel of such a Spain as our world never knew, thanks to the defeat of the Spanish Armada by Sir Francis Drake. Here, Spain rules the earth. The government is a powerful oligarchy, with Mercurx at its head. He is a scientist as well as a soldier; all the officers are. And when he heard of our age, he conceived a conquest of it such as only the Conquistadores could have planned.

"He plans war and pillage and death beyond anything our age has known, even in the Dark Ages. So he told father and me, laughing at us meanwhile. That, he told us, was the reason he meant first to remove every scientist in our age who might rediscover the theory of etheric planes or the secret of the Tunnel or the Cross, without which our world is helpless before him. The Cross is his chief weapon. It outdates all ours just as our cannon outdate his cross-bows and halberds.

"A week ago he was ready. He told father and me that he had taken Daniel Wharton. You understand that Mercrux simply sent these men through the Tunnel, first branding them so that any soldier would know they were to be captured. Once captured they were questioned—as only Mercrux understands questioning. So he learned that Wharton had warned you, and he swore to us that when you were taken, the invasion would begin. His armies and allies are ready. He even has treaties with the Indian tribes here. They are worked up to fever pitch. Every night they hold war dances across the river, eager for the loot and massacre he has promised them—in our age."

SHE fell silent. They had turned toward the city again, and the path had widened to a dusty lane. But the houses were smaller than they were farther south, and more scattered.

"And your father?" Grantley asked.

"My father is dead," she said simply. "He died trying to repair the mischief he had unwillingly done. You see, Mercrux is the only man who understands the Time Tunnel, and the moving spirit behind the whole scheme of conquest besides. From somewhere Father got the parts to make a weapon—a miniature Cross. He tried to kill Mercrux with it. But father was old and slow. Mercrux shot him first. That was a week ago, when he told us that his armies would march as soon as you were captured."

The story, and her manner of telling it, increased Grantley's admiration for her tenfold. At the same time it made it plain that their situation was desperate. Far from being illusion, it was plain and terrible fact. And the danger extended far beyond themselves, to a world unconscious of the forces gathering to destroy it.

They entered the town, a street rank with odors of a new sort—the smell of flax and linen and other things unidentifiable. Men and women sat before crude wooden looms in open, shed-like buildings.

"The Street of the Weavers!" said Grantley. "A blacksmith told me to come here—to the door with the green lantern."

Nona flashed him a quick glance. "So you've seen Diego? It's like him to try to save an Accursed One. And it is to the green lantern I meant to take you—although what welcome you'll get from my staunch friends of liberty I don't know." There was a trace of bitterness in her voice. "Diego and Father José are the only

real men among them. And now you . . ."

He felt a tingle of pleasure at her last words.

"Friends of liberty?" he asked. "You mean a rebel group of some kind?"

"You might call it that, although they have done nothing so far and probably never will." Her voice was tired with loss of hope. "What right have I to blame them? Generations of slavery have made them what they are. Even by thinking of revolt they risk death on the Cross; give them credit for that much courage at least. Naturally the people suffer under the rule of Mercrux. All the wealth of this world belongs to the government. The people are nothing but serfs, with less voice than the Indians in their own destiny. It would be strange if some did not secretly resent it. Those are my friends of liberty—"

She stopped, tense and expectant.

Startled, Grantley looked about to see the cause. But he had pulled the cloak close about him again since entering the town, and nobody had given them more than a glance.

It was no visible danger that had made the girl pause. She seemed to be listening.

At first Grantley heard nothing. The very air seemed hushed, expectant. And then he heard it—the far-off, muted roll of drums. At the looms men held their shuttles poised, waiting . . .

"The recruiting drums," gasped Nona.

The rumble of sound gathered volume, became pulse-quickenings, louder and louder, deeper and more resonant, a strange, compelling cadence of rolls and beats with a single monotonous undercurrent of meaning. *March! March! March!*

He told himself that he was imagining it. How could the rattle of distant drums carry such a distinct suggestion? *March! March! March! March!* Why should the word obsess him? Was it because that was exactly what he most wanted to do? The drums were calling, and he wanted to answer. Their rhythm urged him. Why was he standing here, when with all his soul he wanted to march, to answer the call of the drums? Nothing must keep him. Nothing mattered but the drums. He saw Nona's anxious face as through a haze, and pushed her aside. Couldn't she see he had to go, as others were going?

The booming of the drums swelled deeper—not in his ears, but in his very bones. His body throbbed with it. And now it was agony to stand still, exquisite agony which would end if only he would answer

the thudding of the drums. So easy to answer. What was he waiting for?

"You mustn't go," said Nona. "You mustn't!"

He looked past her without hearing. In the nearest house a weaver rose from his loom, cast the shuttle aside, and walked into the street like a puppet moved by invisible strings. A boy stood trembling in the doorway, his face twitching, until with a wordless cry he too stalked forth with that same mechanical step. And the drums rolled louder, deeper, their rhythm a torture to soul and body so long as he stood still. But he could no longer stand. He must march. March!

"Listen to me!" Nona was speaking quickly, desperately. "The drumbeats only put your mind in rapport with the hypnotic thoughts of the governors. Anything you feel or think then is planted in your mind by suggestion. But you needn't listen. You needn't do as they say. The drums have no real power—and you cannot be hypnotized against your will. *The drums are powerless!*"

It was like a light flashing on in a pitch-dark room, like awakening from a nightmare which otherwise he would have followed to its terrible end. In a flash of comprehension Grantley saw that the sensations, the very thoughts that had almost swept him away, had been planted in his mind. They had never been his own. He still heard the drums, but now, lacking the false support of suggestion, they were faint and meaningless, although it made him shudder to think how nearly they had had their way with him. Mass hypnotism!

"Thank God!" said Nona fervently. "For a moment I thought you were going. You could resist, because you have a heritage of mental freedom. These people have, instead, centuries of bondage, of slavery to New Spain. Is it any wonder they answer the drums—when Mercrux needs an army for conquest?"

CHAPTER III

BLOOD ON THE CROSS

A GAIN she led him, past staring-eyed men who marched oblivious to those who would have held them back, blind to wives and children who ran weeping beside them. Apparently the drums called only men, and of those only the young and middle-aged. Mass hypnotism reduced to an exact science!

The drums were still rolling when Nona

paused before a small oaken door set in a low stone wall. Twice she tugged at a small knotted cord dangling from a pulley set in the wall, and after a long wait they heard feet shuffle along a stone path. The door was slowly opened. Nona entered, and Grantley after her. The man who had let them in, a pock-marked little hunchback upon whom the drums seemed to have no effect, drew back with a low hiss of alarm.

"It is well, Carlos," she said impatiently. "He can be trusted. Unlatch those many doors behind which you barricade yourselves, and we will go within."

The man again locked the wicket, then led the way to a low stone building where, after fumbling with a huge bunch of keys, he opened another door. The interior was a cool stone chamber where barrels were heaped in orderly pyramids. The place was evidently an oil or wine storehouse, for there was no furniture. The hunchback lifted a trap door, waited until they had descended the dark flight of steps below, and shut and bolted the trap from beneath before following them.

In pitch darkness they walked through a short tunnel to another barrier. Again the keys came into play. Behind this door a lamp burned smokily in a niche in the wall, and with it to light their way they continued through a far longer tunnel. From ahead came a murmur of voices. Nona stopped short.

"What is wrong, Carlos? Our friends of liberty are wont to make no more noise than a nestful of mice, so fearful are they of being heard by the Tribunal, a full league away. Who is there?"

The hunchback shrugged. "Those whom you know well, and whom I shall not name before a stranger. Perhaps they bewail the loss of Father José."

"Father José! But what has happened to Father José? Say quickly!"

"How should I know?" retorted the man sulkily. "I am but a despised porter, without voice or ear in your councils. They tell the tale that he was taken by the guards, but who am I to say it is truth or lie?"

"Then hurry—hurry, Carlos!"

The man shrugged, and Grantley was puzzled by the glint of satisfaction in his black eyes, which narrowed suddenly in startled recognition.

"*Madre de Dios!* You have brought an Accursed One!" The hunchback stood a moment, undecided, then turned and led the way so swiftly they could hardly keep pace with him. Grantley felt of his cap,

It had brushed against the low roof and slipped back far enough to reveal the brand on his forehead. However, there was no help for it now.

Once the porter stopped to strike a small bell hung in the passageway. Its clang echoed and re-echoed in that narrow earthen tunnel, and abruptly the voices ahead fell silent. In complete stillness the three went on. They stood at last before a sturdy oaken door.

Grantley was uneasy, by no means certain that the hunchback was to be trusted. Nona slipped a warm, trembling hand into his. At the porter's knock, a bolt thudded back, and the door opened wide enough for them to enter in single file. It slammed shut behind them, and Grantley felt Nona's fingers tighten about his.

Vague shadows filled the chamber, cast by the flickering light of a single candle in the farthest corner. An almost tangible presence of hostility, of danger, brooded in that tense room. Grantley felt the keyed-up alertness of waiting men. He sensed that Nona was frightened, that she had expected nothing like this. A voice laughed suddenly, harshly.

"Seize them! Open lights."

HANDS clutched Grantley from behind, pinned his arms, held his struggling, steel-taut body as in a vise. Nona screamed as her fingers jerked free from his. A hooded lantern was opened. Its yellow gleam flashed back from polished armor.

"The Tribunal's Guard!" cried Nona. "Oh God!"

A looped cord bit into Grantley's wrists. A bearded guardsman jerked him about, stared in amazement at Grantley's head, from which the cap had been knocked in the struggle.

"A prize, my *Capitan!* We have taken an Accursed One. Mercrux will reward us."

"And me also! Me also!" shrieked the pock-marked Carlos. "But for me you would never have taken any of them—"

The white-clad officer sent him sprawling with a flat blow of his sword. "If free pardon is not reward enough for your betrayal, wretch, only ask once more—and we'll see if your traitor's blood is as spotted as your skin."

More lanterns were opened, revealing a score of men of all ages standing bound amid their captors. Their silence, the ashen greyness of their faces, spoke eloquent despair. Only one held his head firm—an old, white-haired man clad in a

simple black robe. His eyes were upon Nona, and his lips moved in silent prayer of reassurance. Grantley looked for the young blacksmith, Diego, but he was not among the captured.

The prisoners were herded out of the cavern in single file. The porter, Carlos, closely prodded by a soldier's sword, opened one after another of those locked doors which his treachery had rendered worthless. They emerged at last into golden daylight. Nona, Grantley saw, had been chained to the officer.

Swiftly the grim procession marched through the Street of the Weavers, where none dared accost it, out upon the narrow main street, past the four-walled tower from which Grantley had first looked upon the city, and into a wider thoroughfare. Here the character of the buildings changed. Structures of white stone and granite replaced those of wood. The clamor of the market place, the bray of asses and creaking of harness were hushed in the distance. Once a gold and scarlet chariot, drawn at a furious gallop by three coal-black horses, thundered recklessly past.

Now came into view a great square edifice of white stone and marble, flanked by four squat towers. Above the great arched gateway, rising high above the battlements, a gigantic copper cross flashed scarlet sunlight, like some lurid emblem of destruction.

At the brink of a wide moat, the company came to a halt, while a massive drawbridge fell with a thunderous rattling of chains. They crossed it, marched under the great iron portcullis beyond. The bridge groaningly raised itself skyward behind them.

Grantley guessed the place to be a combined garrison post and prison. They were marched through two courtyards filled with silent, fearful men—victims of the recruiting drums, whom a few mounted and cursing officers herded like so many sheep. In a third courtyard stood a huge scaffold, so high that its superstructure was invisible. But underneath the platform, between the supporting pillars, was an intricate grouping of metal spheres and glass flasks and heavy copper bars.

The prisoners were marched into one of the stone buildings that flanked the courtyard, and down an interminable flight of winding stone steps. The guards carried no torches, but jagged lumps of crystal fastened in sconces along the curved wall emitted a flickerless blue glow. They made a great luminous spiral winding down—

ward out of sight. Grantley held his cheek close to one in passing. It was cold; the very air near it was frigid. Did the crystal absorb heat, re-emitting it as light?

In a low-ceilinged corridor far underground, before a row of cell doors, the guards halted. A double line of the prisoners was formed, and Grantley managed to fall in beside the old man who had signaled to Nona. The girl was no longer with them, nor was the officer to whom she had been chained. But the black-robed man looked far more intelligent than any of the others, and Grantley hoped to learn from him whether she was in danger.

Two by two the prisoners were locked up, after a perfunctory search for weapons that cost Grantley his silver cigarette case. His hands were untied, but the guards overlooked his wrist watch. As he hoped, he and the old man were put into the same cell—a stone cubicle furnished with a cot and a three-legged stool. A small crystal fastened overhead shed a feeble blue glow that just relieved the place from utter darkness. The heavy wooden cell door crashed shut behind them, and Grantley heard a bolt thud into its socket.

He could not repress a thrill of fear that amounted to despair. The eerie blue light was unnerving; darkness would have been less so. He touched the nearest wall, dug a fingernail into the crevice where block met block. Mica dust sparkled in the stone like microscopic blue diamonds. Fantastic shadows of deepest indigo followed his movements. The scrape of the stool, as the old man sat down, was magnified by silence.

And this was real! This fortress existed somewhere in the very heart of Manhattan—a medieval dungeon approximately on the site of Pennsylvania Station. The strange and ancient city he had come through occupied the very space of skyscrapers and traffic and subways. And this was 1950!

Fantastic paradox on all the laws of time, space and matter as his world knew them!

HE STARED broodingly at his raw fingers, bleeding where he had unconsciously lacerated them on the rough stone. Then he saw the old man gazing at him from those deep-sunk, calm eyes of his. He looked like a priest or a monk, Grantley decided.

"I am Father José," said the man in English. "I speak your tongue in proof

that I am Nona's friend, for she taught it to me. She has taught me much in the time she has been here. And you, whom she brought to what should have been a place of safety, must also be her friend. Shall we talk—in Spanish, for this tongue is hard to speak and harder still to understand?"

Amazed, Grantley simply nodded.

"Let me first explain," continued the other, "that although I am called Father José, I am no longer of the priesthood. When Mercurux gained power over the church, the curse of excommunication was laid upon me. Since then I have preached revolt. I had little success until Nona came. Hostage though she was, she had the freedom of this city and was wise enough not to escape into the wilderness, where she would have perished. So I met her, and she became a staff to me. In these few months we came closer to action than ever before. But now we have failed. It is a pity, as much for the sake of your world, as for ours."

"I do not understand," Grantley broke in. "What is the relation between these worlds? Have Nona and I spanned time? Or if not time, what then?"

The old man raised a gnarled hand.

"I am no scientist," he said quietly, "nor can I answer the turmoil of questioning that I sense in your mind. But for my own ends I have sought to comprehend Mercurux's secrets—to learn the meaning of his knowledge, if not that knowledge itself. Of the secret of the passageway between our ages, Mercurux alone is now master. But the broad truths I know.

"Time, my son, is not a simple river flowing from creation into eternity. Rather must we conceive of it as a thick and turbid stream in the dim beginning of things, holding within it all the seeds of untold chance and circumstance, some to prosper, some to wither and die, in each of the many streams into which that river divides. All time was one in that beginning, yet from the beginning that force which we call time began to spread, as all forces spread to their dissolution—even as a ripple in a pool grows broader until it dies in stillness.

"So the fundamental time-stream divided, and each of its branches again divided, and all the myriad branches again must, and again—until all shall have broadened into timelessness, until the ripple that is time shall cease to be on the face of eternity. Then all chance, every possibility that was in the beginning, shall

have come to its fruition in one or more of those time-streams.

"You understand? The fundamental pattern of the time force allows neighboring branches to be almost but never quite parallel. Your age and mine are two such. Our calendars are derived from a period when our time streams were one and the same; the Martyr of Calvary is common to both. But some time later the dispersion of time brought about two sets of probabilities. The single time-stream became two. In yours, those Spaniards who came to the New World conquered only to be conquered in turn.

"Also there was a Sir Francis Drake who defeated Spain's mightiest armada in the old world. In our time-stream, Spain grew mightier than ever, until now it rules the world. Our histories are such that they must by their nature exist in different branches of time. Yet both are true, veiled from each other by horizons of time and space which we can scarcely understand."

The old priest fell silent, while Grantley struggled with the eerie possibilities unfolded by his words. Here in this space, on the site of the New York of his age, stood not only Mercrux's stronghold, but perhaps other cities and villages forbidden and impossible under the cycle of events his age had known.

Here perhaps spread a new Rome, peopled by a race that ruled the world as once its Caesars dreamed it should. Perhaps here was a seaport thick with the masts of Viking ships, where descendants of that first new world discoverer, Leif Ericsson, had taken sturdy root.

Or again, this island might be an unfeeling wilderness known only to Indians who had repelled the invasion of the whites. It might be that, in still another time stream, this land was sunk beneath a strange ocean that elsewhere washed the shores of a living Atlantis.

Each of those contradicting possibilities must be actual—and thousands more besides. Yet each was hidden within the narrow walls of its own time-branch.

"What about Nona?" Grantley asked.

The old man shook his head. "Under the law of Mercrux, she is as guilty as we. Yet she may escape death, if some officer takes a fancy to her—as I believe one already has."

That didn't help much, but the girl would probably not be badly treated for the present. Meanwhile, the chances for escape looked slim. They were far underground—and escape, to be worth winning,

must include getting back to their own age. If they got back, it would have to be in time to warn their own world of the coming invasion. That anybody would take their warning seriously Grantley doubted very much, but the question at hand overshadowed that one by far. The odds against them were enormous.

HE LOOKED at his watch. Four o'clock. Only a few hours since he had entered Hathaway's house. Already he had lived a lifetime since then. Strange how events dragged time out—as though the hours had to stretch to accommodate them.

In the infinite realms of possibility, of course, there had to be one time-branch in which they *did* escape, in which they *did* warn their world, or somehow thwart Mercrux. Or could the individual follow only a single, predetermined time-stream? Obviously nobody could be imprisoned or executed and at the same time free; one was conscious only of one individuality, one ego, at a time. What was it that determined which time branch the individual should follow? *Something* had to.

Obviously, it had to be the individual's own character, tendencies and actions.

From the corridor came the sound of armor, the shuffle of reluctant feet. Cell doors opened and slammed shut. Their own was flung wide, a man pushed into the cell, and the bolt again pushed home. The newcomer, whose clothing was torn and blood-stained as though he had fought bitterly, was the smith who had lent Grantley the cap and cloak.

Father José sprang up.

"You also, Diego?" he murmured. "I had thought you at least were spared."

He wiped a trickle of blood from the smith's face, which lighted with a wry smile at sight of Grantley.

"Spared I might have been, Father," he returned, "had it not been that I answered the witchdrums. Even so my lot had been no worse than any soldier's, but the porter Carlos was brought to point out all who had ever called themselves friends of liberty. And you may well believe he could not overlook me!"

He turned to Grantley. "Ill met, friend. I had not thought to see you so quickly caged, although I know now that I sent you unwittingly into a trap. But take consolation from seeing me snared beside you, thanks to that same pock-skinned traitor who betrayed you. Meanwhile, shall we whom Mercrux makes companions also be friends?"



"Unlatch those many doors behind which you barricade yourself," Nona told the hunchback.

The booming voice of the young giant rang with sincerity. Grantley held forth a hand. Diego stared at it, but Father José soberly caught up the smith's hand and placed it in Grantley's.

"A pledge this is, son, among another people and in another world. Take it. Bide you friends, for together you may yet do what neither could alone."

To the kindly authority in the priest's words both men nodded agreement.

"If time be granted us," said the smith, "we'll not fail in the trying. But the mills of Mercrux grind swiftly. One or all of us may die tonight."

Startled, Grantley turned to the old priest. "Without trial? Without defense?"

Diego lightly touched Grantley's forehead. "There, friend, is writ trial and sentence—and judgment is swift for those who once see these walls." His ringing voice grew bitter. "As for defense—against Mercrux there is none. Each sundown men die on the accursed Cross—and some, I vow, less guilty than we, whose only guilt is hatred of a tyrant. Each day these cells are emptied, and no man, it is said, knows whether he goes forth to witness the executions or himself to embrace the awful Cross."

The very ruthlessness of this age, so frankly declared, bewildered Grantley with its threat of swift and terrible finality. He had expected anything but this. A mock

trial perhaps, a farce of justice, days of agonized waiting during which a man could at least form some desperate plan of action. He had even thought of bargaining with Mercrux for Nona's safety. And now, in a moment, Diego's brutally frank words had dissolved all hope. Death—perhaps within the hour!

Like fire to the wick came remembrance of the weapon Nona had given him. The hands of the soldiers had overlooked it, wrapped as it was in the bandage about his leg. As a last desperate resort he would use it, would try to fight free and find Nona. But he had no delusions about the probable end of such an effort. One man, one puny weapon, against a garrison! He considered taking the other two into his confidence, but decided against it, not because of distrust, but because to arouse hope now was needless cruelty.

He contrived during the next hour to remove the cross-shaped weapon from its hiding place and put it in his trouser pocket. The smith and Father José, deep in murmured conversation, had their backs to him as he did so. He retied the leg bandage and sat down on the cot. Hours dragged leadenly by.

TIME, he had heard, passed swiftly for the condemned. Yet inaction and uncertainty here had the opposite effect. It seemed a timeless age before the corridor again echoed to footsteps and their cell door was again opened. A grinning squad of pikemen escorted all the prisoners upstairs, into that narrow courtyard where stood the huge scaffold they had seen earlier in the afternoon. The planked floor of it was ten feet above the ground, but underneath the rough boards, trestles supported a number of curiously shaped crystal globes in which oily liquids foamed and bubbled.

Up wooden steps the prisoners were marched, and formed in two ranks along the scaffold, in the center of which a gleaming copper cross, large as a man, rested horizontally upon a slab of black onyx. Cross of Mercrux! This was that weapon which Nona had said outdated all the weapons of their own age. This was the instrument that faced outward, from the roof above the drawbridge. This, monstrously enlarged though it was, resembled the weapon he carried in his pocket.

The guards drew apart from the two score prisoners ranged upon the scaffold. The same white-armored officer stepped forward and glanced over that wretched

assembly, which ran the gamut from defiant to craven, from very old to the very young. A few stood with downcast eyes, refusing even to look upon that weird engine which drew the fearful stares of others. How many times, Grantley wondered, had some of them undergone this daily ordeal?

Daylight was fading. Already the courtyard was, for the most part, in shadow. Beside the western turret the red-gold ball of the sun was sinking. There was an utter silence, upon which the officer's voice broke like the crack of a whip.

"Bring now the Rat!"

At once, from the close-packed ranks of the guards, a figure was spewed forth, propelled by the kicks of two guardsmen. It was that of a boy, who willingly enough shuffled toward the prisoners. But Grantley's pity revolted as the loutish creature came closer. He was plainly an idiot. Matted filthy hair hung down over a too-broad forehead. The drooling mouth was twisted into a fixed leer, and rendered more repulsive still by two inordinately long and thick teeth which evidently gave the boy his name. Restless, beady little black eyes glittered with an insane light as he marched with grotesque step and gesture up and down before the condemned.

Suddenly, with a squeal of delight, he jumped forward and put a skinny hand upon the arm of a cowering man in a blue jerkin. As though upon a signal, guards sprang upon the one so indicated, stripped him to the waist. With a shudder of revulsion Grantley realized the truth—that no man knew who was to die because the idiot alone chose the day's victims. A brutal, barbarous way of prolonging the anguish of the condemned, who must await the very death they dreaded, to free them from the daily torture of uncertainty.

Now the guards strapped their naked victim face down upon the copper cross, one limb to each cross member, and sprang back.

The officer struck a gong, pushed down upon a wooden staff projecting from the floor. The peal of the bell rolled forth thunderously.

The copper cross flickered with vagrant light, with vanishing colors that chased each other across the burnished metal surfaces and gave place at last to a brightening green glow, a virescent aura before which the prisoners shrank back as one man. Yet there was no heat from it. A breath of coldness, instead, seemed to

emanate from the illuminated metal cross.

But the man strapped to it surged against his bonds as though red-hot iron burnt his flesh, screamed and struggled in agony. A warm flush suffused his naked back, turned crimson and deep scarlet. Blood! Blood that was welling upward, drop by drop, from literally every pore.

Heavier grew that incarnadined sweat, shriller the shrieks of the man beneath that gory mantle. Red veinings now spread through it. Blotches of pale amber and white pushed to the surface—tissue and muscle ripped from its place by the ghastly power of the Cross. Grantley turned away sickened. It seemed cruelly long before the dying man's voice trailed off in a last bubbling cry. The green glow of the Cross died. Soldiers sprang forward to cut loose the body.

"Even death is cruel," murmured Father José, who stood beside Grantley. "Has your age as devilish an engine as this, with which Mercurx means to conquer your world? Think not that he dreams vainly; fully powered, the Cross can hurl its death across a vast space, further than a crossbow throws its bolts. Here it is feebly powered, to prolong the suffering of its victims and put the fear of Mercurx into all hearts. You wonder what it is? I know only that it acts upon the void we call space, which is not empty as some think, and through that void upon matter. Also, its power is akin to that which Nona's father used, in opening the gateway between our worlds."

GRANTLEY did not answer. This was how Daniel Wharton had died. And how many others besides? What would not a man shriek out under the skillfully prolonged torture of this thing? No wonder Mercurx had known about the letter Wharton had written. And this was the weapon which would be pitted against the frail armaments of his world! This Cross that would explode cannon at a distance, bring planes down in fragments, shatter a battleship like a cordite bomb planted at its heart.

Again the idiot pranced before the condemned. Again his scrawny fingers closed upon a victim. Again soldiers lashed a living man to the Cross, and minutes later, when screams and struggles ceased together, removed the incarnadined wreckage of a man.

And again the idiot leaped before the waiting file. His empty, glittering eyes met Grantley's, fixed in a fascinated stare

upon the brand on Grantley's forehead. By an effort of will Grantley kept his face expressionless, strove by neither fear nor show of defiance to hold that deadly, vacant glance. And like the purposeless gliding of a snake, it slid off him and fastened upon Diego.

The smith met it defiantly. Foolish it was of him, yet Grantley felt a swift thrill of admiration, which instantly turned to horror as the idiot's clawlike fingers plucked Diego's sleeve, and a cawing shriek of triumph left those misshapen lips.

Shock held Grantley immovable for the space of seconds, while soldiers advanced upon the smith. His hand closed upon the copper cross in his pocket, found a notch where the trigger should have been, and jerked the weapon out. He got between Diego and the nearest guard. As the man turned upon him, he chopped downward with the thing. The heavy metal crunched against bone, and the guard collapsed with a grunt, cheek and chin laid open in a curving, bloody gash.

The other guard blanched at sight of the cross. Diego's eyes gleamed with triumph as he planted a solid fist in the midriff of his late attacker. Other guards sprang forward—but stopped in their tracks as Grantley's weapon covered them. The officer behind bawled oaths and orders. His right hand, fumbling within his armor, came forth with a second ebony-handled cross.

Grantley aimed the strange weapon, squeezed the notch. Bloody ruin blossomed upon the officer's chest, armor vanishing beneath a froth of blood and flesh. As he crumpled, Diego snatched the cross from his fingers, thrust it at Father José.

"Take it, Father! A pike fits my hand better." He ripped one out of the grasp of a gaping soldier, bowed the fellow over with it. Grantley felt a grim satisfaction in the smith's deadly coolness. The priest also had risen to the occasion, his eyes calm as ever, the deadly cross held unwavering in his gnarled fingers.

"I can hold these wolves," he said quietly. "Do you and Diego find Nona, who, I'll warrant you, will be locked in this officer's quarters."

Grantley pulled Diego about, picked out one of the cowed guardsmen. "You, fellow! Take us to this officer's rooms. It may be, if you serve us quickly, and well, that we'll let you live. March!"

The man obeyed in almost comic haste. He led the way into a barrack-like build-

ing, through deserted corridors from which opened individual rooms. Twice the voices of men reached them. Once a door opened and shut again behind them.

But nobody challenged them. Their trembling guide halted at last. Grantley tried the door. It was locked, but of much flimsier build than those of the cells. Diego brushed him aside, thrust a brawny shoulder against the boards. With a splintering crack the door swung inward.

CHAPTER IV

CHARIOT OF THE TITAN

THE chamber beyond, furnished in a luxurious fashion, was empty. But from a second floor came a slow succession of thuds, as though someone was beating wearily upon it. A key lay on the floor, where it had probably fallen out of the lock. Grantley picked it up, fitted it, flung the door open. Nona would have fallen if he had not caught her. She struggled blindly for a moment before she understood. Her eyes brightened with sudden hope.

"You're free—you're both free! And Father José—"

"Waiting," Grantley told her. "Come on; we've got to get out of here."

He spied a row of garments hung on the wall of the little room. Quickly he snatched up a white cloak and helmet, donned them both. Diego thrust the trembling soldier within, locked the door upon him. The three of them hastily marched back the way they had come, fortunately meeting no one. At the scaffold they found Father José still in command of the situation. Guards and soldiers stood disarmed, their erstwhile prisoners now bearing their weapons.

"I have promised these a chance for life," explained the priest. "We are to see them across the moat, after which they will scatter, every man for himself."

"Fair enough," Grantley agreed. "But the alarm will be broadcast any minute. Probably they'll use the drums. We'll never reach that tower in time on foot. Horses! Are there stables here?"

"Stables, aye—and a chariot large enough for the four of us," returned the priest. "In my robes I can go about without danger. Do you others take the bridge and I'll meet you by the gateway."

He stooped, searched the fallen officer, rose with a key. Grantley, Nona, Diego and the prisoners followed him to the

gate which locked this court from the others. He opened it. When all had passed through, he relocked it upon the soldiers within, and hurried off.

Grantley proceeded with a hastily formed plan. While the prisoners remained where they were, out of sight, he, with Nona and Diego, who had been reluctantly persuaded to relinquish his pike, boldly entered the huge center court yard and approached the gateway with its great iron portcullis and drawbridge. The guardsman standing on duty there saluted, but stared curiously at the three of them.

"I leave these two in your care," said Grantley in a harsh voice. "See that you keep them safe against my return!" Without waiting for a reply he entered the door beside the gateway, which could lead only to the bridge tower. A narrow flight of steps ended, as he expected, in a chamber where were housed the mechanisms for lifting the portcullis and drawbridge. Two men, playing at dice at a rough table, rose to astonished attention at his entrance. But one of them let a startled curse escape him, and Grantley recognized him as one who had watched the prisoners being marched in.

"Tis no captain, but an escaped Accursed One!" he bellowed. "Ho! The Guard!" He snatched at a bell rope dangling from the rafters. Grantley's cross suddenly appeared in his hand.

The fellow's hands fell limp in trembling surrender.

"Raise the gate. Lower the bridge," Grantley ordered quietly. "No harm to you if you obey—but beware of any further devilry!"

The warning was unnecessary. One sight of that ghastly weapon had rendered both men eagerly obedient. They toiled willingly at a creaking winch until the great portcullis rose high in its guides, and Grantley saw to it that pawls firmly held it. The drawbridge in turn fell into place. He forced both men to walk ahead of him down the steps. As they reached the courtyard, the prisoners flowed out in a great tide. Diego, with a broad grin, flexed his muscles by bending the shaft of the sentry's pike between his great hands. The guard lay sprawled on the ground.

"I did but test his mettle," boomed the smith, "which proved unequal to the task you set him. And now behold the good Father José, with three of the noblest beasts I have ever beheld!"

He jerked a thumb toward a cloud of

(Continued on page 116)

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(Continued from page 114)

dust at the far end of the courtyard. Swiftly it resolved itself into three magnificent bay horses, their glistening bodies almost hiding the broad, huge-wheeled chariot behind. The equipage thundered to a stop beside the gate. Father José, trembling a little, leaned over and gave the reins into Diego's hands. Grantley doffed the white cloak, flung it about Diego's shoulders, and placed the helmet on the smith's head.

WITHIN the semicircular body of the chariot were low seats, richly covered with soft black velvet. The charioteer alone was obliged to stand, but a broad harness fitted about his waist to brace him against the lurch and sway of the vehicle. Diego buckled it on. The others having taken their places, he flicked the whip over the restless horses, which sprang at once into a swift trot.

The chariot clattered noisily over the planks of the bridge, took the sharp turn beyond with a sliding of wheels that sent up showers of dust and pebbles. Then, feeling the hard cobbles of the street beneath their hoofs, the horses leaned against the traces, settled into a furious gallop. Diego gave them their heads, to which the beasts were evidently accustomed. They whipped the heavy chariot along as though it were nonexistent, at a rate that made Grantley's pulse beat faster than even the danger-fraught action of the past ten minutes. Nona, whom he held tightly beside him, smiled tremulously.

The whirl of huge wheels, the creak of strained harness and clank of metal trappings, drowned out all other sound. They raced between the narrow-set curbstones with so little room to spare that the side sway of the chariot frequently caused iron tires to scrape on stone.

Then came the one thing Grantley had been most dreading. Around the corner of a street, hard ahead, shot three other horses, another chariot, turning into their path, filling the narrow thoroughfare from curb to curb, and coming on at as furious gallop as Diego's own steeds. Both teams seemed utterly oblivious to each other; evidently both had been trained in the same school of reckless, headlong speed, taught to yield ground to neither man nor beast.

The opposing charioteer was apparently of the same mind. Far from pulling up, he was whipping his horses on to inevitable collision. The lathered animals responded,

raced on madly—a hundred yards away, then fifty, then thirty. Sparks flew from beneath their iron-clad hoofs.

Diego, his face set in stony lines, pulled back on the reins until knuckles showed white under the strain. The horses fought their harness, made as if to plunge on, bucked nervously, and finally came to a trembling halt. But the other chariot kept on, its driver plying the whip like a madman.

Nona screamed. Grantley rose, helpless as Diego himself. Father José, white of face, suddenly seized the brawny smith's shoulder.

"On! Drive on, Diego! 'Tis the black art of the priests of Mercrux and nothing more. Small wonder our horses saw it not! Drive on quickly—quickly, before we hear the drums!"

The chariot loomed before them, huge as though it would blot out all else. Its horses thundered on—*silently*. No sound came from those flying hoofs. The blurred wheels rolled soundlessly. The whip fell, the horses strained, the chariot rocked madly—in utter silence. And abruptly, as that phantom equipage appeared about to crash in a mad mêlée of maimed horses and splintered wood, it vanished.

Hypnotism! The sound of their own flight, Grantley realized, had lent audible reality to that visual illusion. Already their escape had been discovered. Already the agents of Mercrux were bending devilish mental devices to encompass their capture. From behind, echoed between the narrow, winding walls of the street, came still more tangible evidence of pursuit. Hoofbeats! And something else—omnipresent, inescapable—the thrumming boom of drums.

Grantley's fingers dug into the palms. He made himself shut out the compulsion of that sound, the inner meaning that underlay its coercive, mesmeric rhythm, to know that though he heard he need not obey. Nona and Father José, he knew, could do the same thing. But Diego?

A heritage of slavery, Nona had called his. Would the smith, son of this people, be able to cast it off now? Or would he heed the message of the drums—the unequivocal command: Come back! *Come back!* COME BACK!

Diego stood like a fear-struck colossus, legs wide apart as though still straining against the reins, his broad red face twisted in anguish. Sweat rolled down the corded veins of his great forehead.

And like a colossus pricked into life he

CROSS OF MERCURY

acted. His arm went back; the whip sang its hissing song and bit the steaming flanks of the horses. With his other fist he shook the reins over their backs. Huge muscles rippled into action, picked up the chariot like a chip flung about by the wind. With outstretched necks and flying manes the animals again settled down to a furious gallop.

They reached the end of the street, the point where it abutted upon the wider common thoroughfare. Diego pulled the horses sharply to the left, swinging them around in a dangerously close curve that sent the chariot skittering sidewise along the rough cobbles.

To the left!

But the tower, their only remaining refuge, was to the right. Diego knew that. But Diego had succumbed to the drums, was obeying their command to return to the prison fortress. The street was too narrow to allow him to turn back, hence he was returning by another route, blindly hurling himself and those with him into the arms of the soldiers.

NONA cried his name again and again. Father José laid a hand upon Diego's arm. The smith roughly cast it off, his eyes fixed firm ahead.

Grantley gauged time and distance. His right fist crunched solidly against Diego's jaw; his left hand seized the reins as the smith dropped them and collapsed into Father José's arms. Grantley found himself on his feet, fighting the sway of the chariot, fighting the tug of the maddened horses on the reins. Behind grew the thunder of pursuit, closer now.

The priest was standing also. His hand closed over Grantley's wrist. "A turn close ahead—a sharp turn to the right. Do not fall to take it."

Grantley saw the street indicated, slowed the horses just a little, and swung the leader around. The three circled as one, so sharply that the broad vehicle tilted crazily behind them. It crashed back to earth, jounced viciously over a rough, rutted back street as the animals again hit their stride. The street itself wound crazily, and soon they were heading almost due west, into the last fading glow of dusk.

Again the priest's fingers warned Grantley. He led the horses into a second turn, more cautiously this time. Directly ahead, the tower that was their goal loomed—a black finger against a sombre sky. But behind them a second chariot thundered



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FANTASTIC NOVELS

around the turn, so close that they could see the figure of the charioteer outlined against the faintly glowing sky, and the ominous shape of the copper cross which he drew from his tunic.

Grantley seized the reins in one hand, took crazy aim with his own weapon, and fired. The cross seemed to explode in the man's hand; the startled horses bolted in the direction which offered them most room to run out their fear—straight down the somewhat wider main street, which Grantley's own team had just crossed.

He hauled back on the reins as they raced through the ruined gateway. Wheels crunched on the flagstones of the courtyard, rocked to a halt as the trembling, wild-eyed animals finally stopped. On the sudden silence rode the throbbing of the drums. *Come back! Come back!*

Grantley laughed, his own voice strange in his ears. He dragged the limp body of Diego from the chariot, hoisted it with difficulty to his back. He had a fleeting impression of running figures beyond the gateway. The stairway he had descended to the courtyard actually rose a second flight. He shouted to Nona and the priest to go ahead. When they had done so he staggered after with his burden. He reached the first landing, started on the second flight, the steps of which consisted of stout logs sunk into the masonry. There was no hand rail. It was a thirty foot drop to the flagstones below, now dotted with running men.

Something whizzed up out of the darkness and struck twanging into the step he stood on. He swayed, almost pitched over as the result of Diego's dead weight. A hand steadied him—that of the priest. A second missile thudded against the wall with a shower of red sparks.

"Crossbows!" declared Father José.

But they were poor targets in the darkness, and they reached the upper landing which Grantley firmly believed could lead only to the drawbridge he had seen within. But his heart sank as Nona tremblingly tried the door. It held, evidently barred from within, or locked. Father José stepped forward, laid the copper cross squarely across the crack between door and jamb. It glowed virescent fire—and the door swung free, the massive lock fastened to its inner surface reduced to a mere lump of knotted iron.

The priest hung back as Nona and Grantley stepped into the pitch-black passage beyond. Again the cross glowed

CROSS OF MERCURY

green in the old priest's hand. There was the shriek of a soldier and a rumbling crash which Grantley guessed to be the stair logs, sheared from their support, striking the courtyard flagstones. Again he laughed harshly, buoyed up by an insane sense of unreality.

NONA was waiting in the darkness. He managed to fish a booklet of paper matches out of a pocket, called to her to take them. An instant later a tiny flame of light glowed in her hand.

They were in the winch chamber, of which the lifted drawbridge itself formed one wall. The rope he had seen, which spanned the tower, here was attached by a system of pulleys to the pawl which would release the winch shaft. He laid Diego down, strained against the winch handle while Father José lifted the pawl. Grantley lowered the span cautiously, afraid that to let it crash down might give alarm to anyone remaining in the cellar of the Hathaway house. It came to rest at last on a ledge on the opposite wall, just before that disc of swirling darkness that was the passageway between alien ages.

Nona's match had burnt out, but as he again lifted Diego, torchlight glowed up from the tower floor. A score of soldiers milled about below; more poured from that same passageway through which Grantley had left the tower. He shouted to the others to cross on hands and knees, in order that the bridge itself might shield them from the marksmen below. He was almost glad for the din of the soldiers. At least it drowned out the drums. But to cross the span erect, carrying Diego, would be to make them both a target for the crossbow missiles already whizzing past with deadly force. He saw one strike the bridge planks—a murderous bolt.

Grantley crawled out on the bridge after Nona, pulling the limp, heavy bulk of Diego after him. Progress was snail-like. And, even so, it demanded almost superhuman effort. Something thudded against the drawbridge. The two shafts of a ladder appeared as if by magic beside it. A face appeared between the shafts, a caricature of fury holding a naked dagger between bared teeth. Grantley tore the cross from his pocket, fired.

The soldier dropped, his head dangling from a riven neck.

Diego moaned with returning consciousness, opened his eyes in utter bewilderment.

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FANTASTIC NOVELS

He could, Grantley knew, no longer hear the drums. The furor below was too great for that—shouts, trampings, the clank of armor, the twang of crossbows hurling their deadly bolts. Pausing only long enough to see that the smith was rapidly coming to himself, he crawled on, heard Diego follow. The soldiers below maintained a constant fire, but evidently had no stomach for a second sally up the ladder. One man seemed insanely engaged in throwing crossbow missiles by hand. Some fell short. Others clattered harmlessly upon the bridge. But a few disappeared completely into the black disc of fog that shimmered at the end of the bridge.

A warning! More intelligent than the rest, the man was sending the bolts through the passageway, into the cellar where they must arouse the gigantic Indian and his master. Grantley rose, crouching, ran past Nona into the swirling mists. The cone of space engulfed him. He felt that same sensation of falling endlessly, was again blinded by a tremendous flash of light, weakened by nausea—and found himself behind the beaded curtain, through which filtered the white glow of incandescents. The strands parted suddenly.

He looked into the fierce eyes of the Indian.

The cross in Grantley's fingers seemed to glow of its own accord. The redskin glared in agonized surprise, coughed blood as something red and pulsing burst through his naked breast, and collapsed.

Grantley pushed through the curtain. The cellar beyond, though brightly lit, seemed empty of life. He walked the width of it. A rustle, a mere faint scrape of sound, made him whirl about—and drop instinctively. In an opposite corner stood the man in white velvet, the same who had sent Grantley through the curtain, with a copper cross aglow in his hand. Where Grantley had stood, the brick wall cracked, dribbled red dust under the weapon's bolt. Frantically he rolled aside, without trying to rise. He gained the shelter of a heavy work bench as the cross glowed again. The earthen floor burned saffron before it.

Diego burst through the curtain, stopped. "Mercuri!" The cry was a wall of despair, as though the one so recognized were the devil incarnate. The smith made no effort to escape the weapon leveled at his heart. Grantley left cover, fired his own cross frantically—and futilely. Its charge

CROSS OF MERCURUX

was spent. He threw it with all the force he could muster at that proud, evil face. It struck grazingly, but sent Mercurux staggering back and deflected his aim. The bolt missed Diego by inches, but seemed to rouse the smith from his lethargy of fear. He ran forward, grappled with Mercurux before the latter could use his weapon.

Nona was through the curtain now. Father José lurched after her.

"Mercurux!" he gasped. Then to Grantley, "Soldiers—following me!"

From behind the curtain burst two pikemen, then, in quick succession, four more. Father José's cross glowed death, brought man after man to his knees. Grantley accounted for one with a pike snatched from one of the dead. The last man fled back through the curtain.

Nona's scream seared across the confusion in Grantley's mind. He turned uncertainly.

"Stop Mercurux," she cried. "The Tunnel."

SOMETHING hit Grantley in the back, almost knocking him down. Mercurux ran past him toward the curtain, disarmed in the struggle with Diego, and intent now only on escape. This man alone, Father José had said, now held the secret of the corridor between the ages. If he won free, earth would again, sometime, somewhere, face the horror of the Cross.

Grantley threw his pike. It flew wide, and he hurled himself headlong after it. His outstretched hands caught an ankle. Mercurux fell heavily, kicked backward with his free foot. A metal-shod sandal caught Grantley on the temple. Dazedly he felt the other foot wrenched from his grasp, saw Mercurux crawl through the curtain. He followed, half stunned as he was. The black haze shimmered before him.

Mercurux had reached it; his head and shoulders were already invisible in that veil of unknown energies.

Grantley put his heart into one last desperate lunge, felt his clawing fingers slip from the scant hold they caught on one heel—and earth and heaven and mind rocked in sudden, soundless confusion. A welter of light smote him. He felt a blast of terrible, sub-zero cold air.

Before him was the brick wall of the cellar. The black, swirling disc was gone. The Tunnel was no more. Before Grantley lay a body—a headless, shoulderless trunk, a dead thing that had been Mercurux,

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FANTASTIC NOVELS

slain by the collapse of that veil of energies.

Grantley stumbled back to the others. Nona, sobbing bitterly, ran up and buried her head on his chest. Diego stood soberly amid the shambles wrought by Father José's cross.

But the priest lay beneath one of the tables, the fragments of a crystal globe all about him, his body drenched with its contents, a scarlet liquid that hissed and foamed against his shrunken flesh, and gave forth a bitter and sulphurous odor. One hand still clutched the copper cross. The soft, red metal was bent.

Then Grantley understood. The priest, seeing Mercrux escape through the curtain, and finding his weapon discharged, had smashed one of the flasks whose bubbling liquors, probably by some electrolytic action, held open that passageway in time. The fluid had gushed out over him, corrosive and deadly. But the corridor between the ages had been instantly destroyed. Father José had given his life for a world he never knew.

Grantley and Diego buried the dead under the floor of the great laboratory. They found the switch controlling the door in the wall, and Grantley closed it behind them by reversing the switch from outside with a length of cord, so sealing the great cellar that only blasting would again open it. Sometime, perhaps, he would come back and study the machines and flasks, and publish a vindication of Hathaway's theory, but that was no part of his present plans. He would recover the letter left for the F.B.I., for only two-thirds of the thirty-six hours had passed, and nothing could be gained now by revealing the truth.

Nona packed a bag with a few needed belongings, found some clothing for Diego. Gladly enough they left the house.

The soft night air relieved some of the tension within them. Nona, close beside Grantley, slipped a warm little hand into his. Diego sniffed the air, sighed gustily, and grinned. Then, as a deep, reverberating whistle boomed from the water-front, he jumped in alarm. Grantley reassured him with a few words.

He didn't know, himself, whether the whistle came from a ferryboat or an ocean liner. He didn't care whether it belonged to the meanest tug on the Hudson. Its hoarse screech seemed to him sweeter than the music of the spheres.

It was part of the voice of New York.

WHAT DO YOU THINK?

(Continued from page 93)

have something—an atmosphere, maybe?—that the newer tales, for the most part, lack.

"Earth's Last Citadel" was good!! But the gems of the issue were Lawrence's cover painting and the Finlay pics on pgs. 81 & 97. Don't think I'm one of those guys who put art before reading matter. I buy the book to read but I had to say something about those pics. They were great.

Now a couple of suggestions. "The Sea Demons" by Rousseau and "Brand New World" by Cummings. In fact any of Cummings, although (sob) I missed "The Man Who Mastered Time".

By the way, if anyone has "The Secret People" (F.F.M.), "The Purple Sapphire" and "Morning Star" (F.F.M.) and "The Flying Legion" (F.N.) I'd like to hear from you.

Attention!! Announcing! The fans of the tri-state area, centering approximately around Kiokuk, La., have organized The Tri-State Fantasy Club. Anyone wishing to join get in touch with me. We need members.

Yours Fantastically,

FRANK E. McNAMAR

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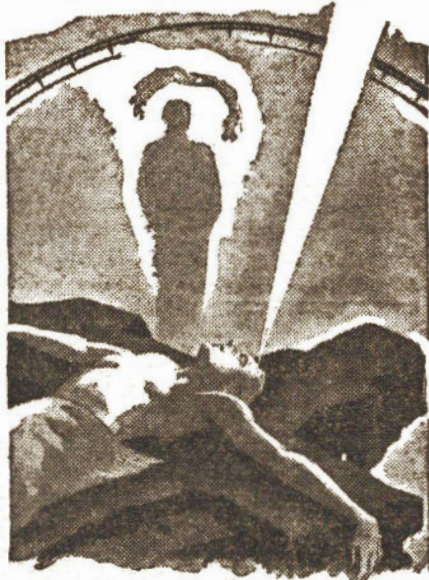
THANKING THE BOYS AND GIRLS

I was very much thrilled, and filled with emotion to see Bruce Lane's letter, which followed mine in the July *Frantastic Novels*. I'm nearly speechless—so filled with gratitude, joy, happiness, thanks—well, just *everything*! I wish to express my thanks to friends, pen pals, and U.S.C.O. Club Members, and the SFS. for their helpful advice, books and mags, stamps, paper and envelopes. And, too, the financial aid they've given me in the way of buying some of my mags (which incidently I hated to part with but in my circumstances—I must get hold of every cent I can to live on so they've just got to go.) By the way, if anyone else cares to do so they may write to me and enclose a stamped, self-addressed envelope, and I'll send them a list (I hope they can read my printing) of all the mags I have for sale.

I'm unable to buy any mags now—(I'm trying to exist on what my aunt lets me have—five bucks a month—plus the few cents I get now and then selling a couple or three magazines) but I have been very lucky in having a couple very swell friends who've let me have their copies of F.N. and F.F.M. and A.M.F. after they've read them (though I honestly believe they buy two and give me one. If that doesn't prove Stfans are really swell, I don't know what does) and that's how I've been able to keep on reading my favorite mags.

I'm going to try and keep my F.F.M., F. N., and A.M.F. mags till the last but I'm going to try my doggonedest to get some sort of light work to do. Where my bad heart and bad right arm won't hinder my work. Though you've printed my description before, here it is again, plus my hindrances. I'm 29 (Sept. 28, 1920), 5'10" tall, weight 130 lbs, have light brown

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FANTASTIC NOVELS

hair, blue eyes, a bad heart due to rheumatic fever, and quite nervous, and with a bad arm. I guess that's about all. Oh, yes—I do gilding of greetings cards—making personalized ones. I like to do signs and laying out advertisements too. Though I cannot draw any pix for the ads.

To get back to the ish—I sure enjoyed "Earth's Last Citadel"—though I believe the best was a tie between "Death's Secret" and "The Soul Trap"! (I haven't read "Lost—One Mylodon" yet—maybe it will equal or even exceed them, but I don't think so.) Thanks again for everything.

Sincerely,

PAUL GLEN WRIGHT

138 Humboldt Parkway,
Buffalo, 11, N. Y.

ENJOYABLE

Breaking a self-imposed silence, I have decided, (impressive roll of drums) to forward this little missive to you.

First of all, a comment on an enjoyable, if not particularly impressive issue. "Earth's Last Citadel", enjoyable, but vague. One wonders if the author is "making it up" as he goes along. A definitely readable item, though. "Death's Secret". Although a well-done rehash of a very familiar plot, it becomes rather tedious. Actually it could have been cut down to a masterful short story. Good, "The Soul Trap". Well-done. Is not true Stilson style, though. "Lost—One Mylodon". Amusing. 'Nuff said.

Comment: It 'pears to me that you could improve F.N. tremendously. For instance, you occasionally use slick paper on every other page. Why not every page? Be consistent! I must control myself, though!

Imagine, using harsh words to an Editor! (gasp).

Note: Have a few books to trade. "Vathek", by E. Arnold (1868), "Not Exactly Ghosts", Caldecott, "Tales of Men and Ghosts", Wharton, "Twenty-five Ghost Stories", Holland, "Pause to Wonder", Fischer, Humphries, "Pan's Garden", Blackwood. Want "Beyond Time and Space", Derleth, "Conquest of Space", Ley, "Marginalla" HPL, with illos by Finlay and Bok, and what have you? Please send stamped self-addressed envelope.

Futile Requests Dept! "Shadow Over Innsmouth" by HPL, with illos by Finlay or Bok. Something, anything, everything by Weinbaum. Incidentally, a story that no one, to my knowledge, has ever requested, is, "Lord of the World" by R. H. Benson. This might be more suitable for F.F.M. though.

Re: Bill Calabrese. Sorry I haven't written in such a long time, Bill, but have been pretty busy. Don't give up hope.

Till next time, Almighty Editor, the blessing of Ishtar (or should I say Nergal) be upon ye.

Yours FANTASTICALLY,

BEN JACOPETTI

1892 Green St.,
San Francisco, Calif.

WHAT DO YOU THINK?

BACK ISSUES NEEDED

I am a boy eighteen years old and paralyzed from my waist down. I do a lot of reading as I'm bed-ridden. I would like to know if any of your readers have any Science Fiction or Fantasy Magazines, prior to 1949. I would like very much to buy them. Anyone interested please send me the names of their magazines and the price they wish for them. I want to buy as many magazines as I can. I'll be glad to hear from some of you folks.

MR. SHIRLEY BOBLITT

554 Phillips Lane,
Louisville, Ky.

NEW READER

I was curious, I picked it up, glanced at it, and read the contents of the book. I was amazed. Here was a magazine I had spurned before, but now there seemed something different about it. The appeal of the stories and the luring illustration swept through my mind.

The plot was well cultivated and the characters were true to life.

"How come?" I ask myself. It just doesn't seem possible that publishers would go through the trouble of putting out such a wonderful magazine.

After I finished "Earth's Last Citadel" I went into the other stories eagerly. I was very pleased until I came to "Lost—One Mylodon". Why on earth did you put an adventure story in a Fantastic mag?

Now I am happy to notify you that I am adding *Fantastic Novels* to my list of books.

May I make a request. If any of the *Fantastic* fans have an extra copy or a copy of the mag with "The Worm Ouroboros" in it, I would consider it a triumph to receive it. I will pay a reasonable price for it or will take good care of it. Please write so I will be able to notify you, since I won't need but one copy.

Thank you for a swell mag., and here's hoping it will continue to be as great as it was in this issue. I extend an invitation to all fans to write if they so desire.

E. C. BURNETTE, JR.

Box 335,
Jackson, Ken.

BACK ISSUES FOR SALE

I have just finished rereading a few of your back issues and find the stories in them just as interesting as the first time. Your work has been excellent and I am sure it will continue in the same vein in the future.

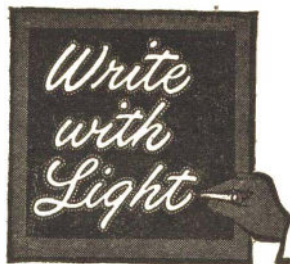
I would appreciate it if you would let your readers know that I have almost complete sets of *Astounding*, *F.F.M.*, *F.N.*, *Unknown* and *Amazing* which I would like to sell. If they will send stamped, self-addressed envelopes, I will give them the particulars.

LEON LAPIDUS

Department of Chemical Engineering
University of Minnesota,
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Minneapolis 14.

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FANTASTIC NOVELS

FINE FANTASY

"Earth's Last Citadel" by C. L. Moore and Henry Kuttner, except for minor flaws, is woven around a fantastically clever plot. I was held spellbound from the initial sentence to the smashing, intriguing climax. The end, by the way, almost begged for a sequel, but I don't suppose a sequel was ever written. Congratulations, authors, editors, et cetera for a fine bit of fantasy.

The July issue, in fact, contained all good stories. "The Soul Trap" by Stilson rates a bull's-eye. It should be a classic, if it already isn't. As I read "The Soul Trap," it reminded me somewhat of one of my favorite authors, H. P. Lovecraft. "Death's Secret" by Schoolcraft and "Lost—One Mylodon" both were interesting reading.

Lawrence's cover for July was fair. Virgil Finlay seemed to dominate inside. His best was on page 97, illustrating "The Soul Trap." The one on 49 by Finlay should have been substituted or left completely out. It had little sense.

Even the paper seems to be improving in F.N. At least it is better than most other magazines of this type. The others are even printed poorly (this does not include your companion magazine F.F.M.).

I understand that A. Merritt wrote a story titled "Pigeon Blood". I would like to see it printed soon. Another story I would be pleased to see is "The Lost Garden" by Max Brand.

A note of appreciation for printing my letter in the July F.N. I still rate Finlay as tops.

FRANCIS M. MULFORD.

512 Linwood Ave.,
Buffalo 9, N. Y.

F.N. HER FAVORITE

I am a newcomer in the fantasy field, and have enjoyed your magazines so much that I subscribed to *Fantastic Novels*, *Famous Fantastic Mysteries*, and *A. Merritt's Fantasy*, and also sent in a subscription for the same trio for my parents.

I have combed our newsstands for this material since I was first presented with a copy of your *Famous Fantastic Mysteries*. It contained "Morning Star" and I was so enchanted with this tale that I at once tried to find similar reading matter. I have dug up about twenty mags, but alas, few carry any such material other than your three mags.

I enjoyed your July issue very much. "Earth's Last Citadel" was just great. I had to finish it when I started, for it was that exciting and interesting. "Death's Secret" was also very good and the other two were of equal merit. I also liked the cover.

The June issue of F.F.M. was far behind the July number of F.N. I found "The Adventure of Wyndham Smith" so frightfully dull and boring that I could not finish it, nor did I like the cover illustration; too lurid and horrible. "Mrs. Amworth" and "The Outsider", were of far more interest than your lead novel.

I like straight fantasy tales, and though so

WHAT DO YOU THINK?

new in this field that I cannot judge authors, etc., I do know already that I like Haggard and Merritt very, very much. "The Face in the Abyss" in your other mag was superb. I would like to read many, many more tales along these lines. I hope you can find living authors who can write such tales. I dislike straight horror stories, believing them to be detrimental in the extreme for sensitive and psychic people to read. Such things sink into the subconscious and give rise to later troubles. I do not care too much for the science tales, I do not understand mechanics, nor too much science, math and such.

I would like to hear from readers who are interested in occult science.

MRS. NAOMI HOLLY.

1142 Rancho Ave.,
Colton, Calif.

THANKING F.N.

On behalf of the Outlanders, allow me to thank you for the three fine cover paintings and the black and white originals you sent us for the Westercon III auction. We are sure they will help to make our stf conference one of the most successful ever held!

We also are grateful for the publicity you gave Westercon III in F.F.M. and F.N.

Now I would like to speak for myself. I am thankful, for you have made my job—as auctioneer—an easier task by sending us such attractive originals.

And as a reader of your mags for many years, thank you for reprinting "The Adventure of Wyndham Smith", which—in my opinion—is one of the best stories you have published lately. I am looking forward to re-reading the Kuttner-Moore novel too. That is, re-reading the first part of it. I started to read it (as a serial) several years ago and for some reason was unable to get the issues of the mag which completed the story.

Again, Many Thanks . . . and Best Wishes!

LEN MOFFATT.

5969 Lanto St.,
Bell Gardens, Calif.

MOORE-KUTTNER NOVEL SUPERB

I first read "Earth's Last Citadel" back in the old *Argosy*, and it was quite nice to re-live that fine story once again—my *Argosy* copies having long since gone the way of All Old Pulp. That is the best fantasy novel you've printed for quite a while; you'll have to go some to find a better one than that.

Naturally, any collaboration of the talents of C. L. Moore and Henry Kuttner would be something special. But this one was actually superb. So rich with color and imagery, such lavish Merrittesque description—indeed that adjective might be used to classify the entire story. This is probably the finest imitation of Merritt's style since Hannes Bok's "Sorcerer's Ship." I can't seem to praise the novel enough. So seldom does a work of such heights of imagination appear in print, that it almost paralyzes one's powers of description.

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FANTASTIC NOVELS

In a word: it was terrific!

The Finlay illustrations, though inferior to his original one in the *Argosy* printing, were still better-than-average for him. I wish you could use Mister F on the cover more often; Lawrence's cover pic was poor this time.

"Death's Secret" was also good, with a fine suspense element its chief feature. Again the illustrations were excellent: particularly the drawing of the great cat leaping across the page.

As a whole, this was the best issue in months and months. I can't recall your printing a better fantasy than the Moore-Kuttner novel, in many an issue.

Thanks ever so much, and keep up the good work!

LIN CARTER.

1734 Newark St. So.,
St. Petersburg, Fla.

CALLING SAN DIEGO FANS

I am going to start out, this issue, by condemning one of your letter writers. For the information of one Richard Elsberry, Ray Cummings is one of the top writers in the Fantasy class. His works have always sparked the interest of many new readers. His stories have a quality about them that few writers ever achieve. He weaves his fantasy stories like Van Vogt his science fiction. Who, I ask you, can compare in artistic ability with an author who creates the effect of actually living a story like Cummings?

I say, give all the stories by him that you have. His stories helped to make *Argosy* famous, they will add to the spreading interest in F.N. Let's have the rest of the Atom stories. Or maybe some that do not deal with this topic which is displeasing to some people. Oh, am I burning!

Your July issue was tops. Moore and Kuttner can hardly be beat. They are the finest, if not the only, husband and wife team writing Fantasy. More please. Thank you.

I am glad to see that you are publishing the last of the Polaris stories. They were always favorites with me.

Maybe some place in a future issue you could find room to print one of Farley's stories that you have not yet reprinted.

I am extremely eager to get in touch with fans here in San Diego. I am trying to start a Fan Club here in Heaven On Earth. That is what the Chamber of Commerce calls it.

Fantastically yours,
ROGER NELSON.

627 Robinson,
San Diego 3, Calif.

CORRECTION

In the August issue of *Famous Fantastic Mysteries* you published my letter, but you gave another address than mine and you misspelled my name. I realize that the fault is mine, because of my writing.

WHAT DO YOU THINK?

My name is Joe Neugroschnel.

My address is: 565 West 139 St., New York, 31, N. Y.

Would it be possible to print this in the October issue of F.F.M. or even if possible in the Sept. issue of S.S.S. or F.N., for the benefit of those who wish to sell me back issues of these magazines? I would appreciate it very much. Thank you. I am very sorry.

JOEY NEUGROSCHNEL

WANTS ZAGAT'S STORIES

"Earth's Last Citadel" by Moore and Kuttner was very, very good. In fact, with the exception of most of the Merritt stories it was probably the best to appear in F.N. since the great revival. Am I right in thinking that Kuttner wrote the prelude, Miss Moore the story up until Alan came to the Terasi cavern, with Kuttner again taking over and finishing up?

"The Soul Trap" was also very good, as was "Minos of Sardanesh" by the same author. I'm looking forward to the Polaris story in the next issue.

If you have any more good modern fantasy available I hope you will run it. Except for Merritt's stuff, the older stories are generally too drawn out, lack good characterization, and are apt to have too many scientific inaccuracies. The Zagat story, "Drink We Deep", suggested by Robert Silverberg, sounds as though it would be good. If you must run the older stories I prefer Kline, Stilson, and Austin Hall.

How about either getting some original fantasy novels for A. Merritt's *Fantasy* by Kuttner, Sturgeon, Brackett, Moore, etc., or else reviving *Astonishing*? Three reprint mags featuring mainly fantasy to one original featuring Sff seems a little out of balance.

SEYMOUR SARGENT

R. F. D. 10,
Penacook, N. H.

Editor's Note: We don't know how the Kuttners wrote the story originally, but your guess is interesting. You will note that we are running some of the best from *Astonishing* in F.N.

OUR STORIES UNBEATEN

Thanks a million for printing my letter in the July F.N.

I haven't had that issue yet but I have heard from some readers and am getting in touch with them with a view to exchange.

I also wrote to Mr. Rothstein whose letter appeared in the June F.F.M. Sent him some stamps and hope he will respond. If any other readers would like to exchange mags for stamps they should get in touch with me.

I get F.N., F.F.M., and S.S.S. regularly by direct sub. I enjoy them all and I think your standard of stories is unbeaten.

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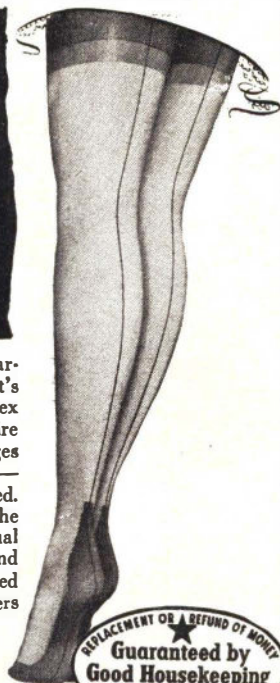
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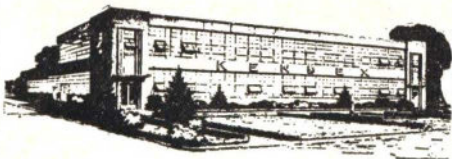
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