

*It is our custom, when wishing to introduce a story with some few details about an author, his works and views, to hand our Mr. Pet-tifogle a subway token and send him in quest of what we call "bio data"—wherefrom we winnow a few facts and fancies, salient or otherwise. Mr. Robert F. Young, author of this story of land and sea, and love transmuted by a terrible yet glorious change, pro-vided us with information of such unexpected largesse that we decided to throw precedent to the unnumber'd winds and print it in toto. Anyone concerned with either reading or writing should find interest in what he has to say—and a fig for nay-sayers.*

Looking back, I realize that Tarzan of the Apes had quite a bit to do with my becoming a science-fiction writer. Through Tarzan, I met John Carter, and through John, I met Julians V, IX, and XX, Jason Gridley, Waldo Emerson Smith-Jones, Bowen J. Tyler, Jr., and a host of other luminaries in the Burroughs realm. This was a long time ago, but the fictitious friends we make in our youth, however absurd they may sometimes turn out to be when we revisit them, cast a spell over us that lingers down through the years, and it distresses me no end, when I watch an old Tarzan movie, to see Johnny Weismuller try to climb a tree or to hear him speak without benefit of the first person singular. Tarzan was noth-ing if he was not agile, and less than nothing if he was not intelli-gent, and for him to be demeaned in so flagrant a fashion is a crime against Burroughsiana. A more recent—and even more flagrant—crime was committed in the name of E.R.B. on the Jack Benny program last week. In a spoof about Tarzan and Jane, Jane was given parents who spoke with an English accent. Shades of Professor Archimedes Q. Porter! Everybody knows that, for all her jungle lord's renowned English ancestry, Jane Porter was an *American* girl. Sometimes I wonder what the world is coming to.

Rummaging through the shelves of the local library long, long ago (probably in search of an as yet undiscovered Mars or Tarzan book), I came upon a volume entitled *Men like Gods*. A new door was forthwith opened, and the light streaming through from the room beyond made the light in the room in which I stood seem lusterless indeed. From that moment on I began reading Wells, and even today I go back and read him occasionally. He does not dim with time, and—as a certain editor so ably put it in a recent book review—he "towers and sparkles, like a giant dressed in jewels, high over all who came after him."

The third spark that ignited my ambition was a story that I read at the age of nine or ten either in *Boy's Life* or *The American Boy*. I recall little about it, save that it was a fourth-dimension story, but it harked the first true awakening of my sense of wonder. I am still afflicted with that sense of wonder, though to a lesser degree; I hope I am always afflicted with it. I should very much hate to become one of those many people who go through life moved by nothing except new cars, new hi-fi sets, new boats, and new electric can openers—the kind of people, in short, who throw a dithyrambic fit when they win something on "The Price is Right."

After I graduated from high school (I never went to college), I had an ideal opportunity to write. The latter years of the de-pression were in progress at the time, and you couldn't buy or steal a steady job, so what more logical thing could I have done, in view of the fact that the plant where I began working operated at most but six months out of the year and in view of the fact that I was single, than to have put my pen to paper? But did I? Not me. Save for a few half-hearted attempts in this vein and that, I spent most of my spare time reading. I had the notion, probably, that the more I read, the better I would be qualified to write—once I finally got around to doing so. I did not know then that a person can live in a thousand houses and still not have the faintest idea of how to build one. In order to be able to build a house, you have to be a carpenter, and in order to get to be a carpenter, you have to serve an apprenticeship. Well anyway, at least I got to live in a lot of houses. I lived in the house of John Galsworthy, the house of Warwick Deeping, the house of Sinclair Lewis, the house of Somerset Maugham, the house of Dorothy Canfield Fisher, the house of O. Henry, the house of Jack London, the house of Joseph Hergesheimer—I lived, in short, in the house of just about any-one I came to, and in addition I made occasional stopovers in a rather large and imposing structure entitled "Dr. Eliot's Five Foot Shelf of Books." Since those years I have of course lived in many other houses, and some of them have been resplendent indeed; but after I began writing I lost my ability to live in a house for the sake of

living in it alone, and now, whenever I walk down some literary corridor—lofty or not quite so lofty, as the case may be—I keep an eye peeled for this example of workmanship and that.

With the passing of the depression years, I found myself with a 1-A classification, and not long thereafter I found myself in the Army. Meanwhile, I had gotten married. Three and a half years later, finding myself a civilian once again, I went to work in a local factory spraying castings, moved on to another local factory where I worked as a machinist, moved on to a nearby steel mill where I worked as a third helper, a stopper-maker, a slagger, a clerk, and a mud-man, moved on to a non-ferrous foundry where I worked as a metal pourer. I was pouring metal when I sold my first story. After that, I got a job in another machine shop and became what is known as a "setup man." When the machine shop transferred to another town, I became an assembler, and then a shipping clerk, but long before this I had become a writer, which was the only thing I had really wanted to become in the first place.

I am 47, 5' 9", and wear glasses. I was brought up a Republi-can, but I seldom vote the same ticket two times running. My wife and I have one daughter, who is now married, and we are grand-parents of some eight months standing. We own our own house, and the house is located some several hundred feet from the wa-ters of Lake Erie. On clear days I can look through the windows of the enclosed front porch where I do my writing and see Can-ada. Or rather, I would be able to were it not for the fact that I usually keep the drapes drawn. Looking at Canada is fine, but you can't look at Canada and write too. I have no hobbies, unless you can call reading a hobby. Or feeding the birds (this morning I saw a white-breasted nuthatch). I belong to no organizations. I don't believe in organizations. I like: opera, cold weather, "The Defenders", trees, roast beef on kummelweck, and the works of Virginia Woolf. I dislike: rock 'n roll, hot weather, "The Danny Thomas Show", superhighways, pizza, and housewife-writers who extol their own literary achievements on the pages of writers' mag-azines. I dread having people come up to me and say, "I have an Idea that will make a real Jim-Dandy of a story," or, even worse, having people come up to me and say, "You should write my Life Story—wow!"—and then proceed to tell it to me.-R.F.Y.

## IN WHAT CAVERN OF THE DEEP

by Robert F. Young

SNOW LAY ALONG THE CLIFF top and more snow was slanting in over the Atlantic, pitting the leaden waves that one by one were assailing the narrow strip of beach at the cliff's base. The trees along the cliff top were black, their leaves long torn away by Novem-ber storms. The cottage sat some distance back from the trees, blu-ish smoke rising from the chimney and fleeing with the wind. In front of the cottage and on the edge of the cliff was a small gun-emplace-ment, and beside the emplace-ment, mackinaw collar raised against the slanting snow, David Stuart stood.

*And he took his staff in his hand, and chose him five smooth stones out of the brook and put them in a shepherd's bag . . . and his sling was in his hand . . .*

Many summers had fled the cliff and the cottage, many springs and falls. Winter loved to lash the gentle grass that grew before the door, to whip the trees that stood along the cliff top, to belabor the little beach that lay below . . . In the cottage, storm-bound they had lain, flesh against flesh and breath to breath, warding off the bitter cold. Winter had tried with all its might to destroy the fortress that their love had built around them, and they had laughed in darkness, laughed in warmth, knowing that the fortress would not fall.

But now the fortress was gone.

Snow stinging his face, David looked out to sea. He looked for gold—the gold of a woman's hair. For golden tresses kelp-bed vast, for shoal-shoulders surging with the sweep of cyclopean arms; for the tempest-thrust of mast-long legs. There would be gulls and dolphins, too, if the reports were correct—the gulls circling high above her spume-crowned head, the dolphins romping all around her. Out of the deep she would rise, as golden as the sun—*comely as Jerusalem, terrible as an army with*

*banners*—and then his huge horrendous sling would speak, and she would be no more. . . . How lovely was thy gentle fore-head—*how beautiful were thy feet with shoes!*

The wind took on an added sharpness, and David turned his head to shield his numbing cheeks. The cottage came into his line of vision, and as he stood there gaz-ing at the memoried winter-bower a girl came out and started walk-ing toward him through the day--before-Christmas snow. A heavy coat muffled the tall figure he knew so well; a woolen kerchief restrained the dark-brown hair that sometimes fell about him in the night. The clear grayness of her eyes was forever taking him unawares, and it did so now as she came up to him and said, "I made some coffee, David. It's on the stove. Drink some, and then lie down."

He shook his head. "I'll have a cup, and come right back."

"No. You've been up all night. If she comes, I'll call you the min-ute I see her. You'll have plenty of time to align the gun."

Awakened by the thought of sleep, his tiredness rose up and tried to overcome him. He fought it back. "The wind is raw," he said. "You should have brought a blan-ket to wrap around you."

"I'll be all right."

He said, "I wonder if she's cold."

She said, "You know she can't be. That she's not human any more. Go inside and sleep."

"All right—I'll try."

He hesitated, wanting to kiss her. Somehow, he could not. "Call me if she comes then. Call me anyway in three hours."

"I put some blankets on the sofa. It's warmer there. Now don't worry—everything will be all right."

He left her side and walked across the snow-covered lawn. Vic-torious, his tiredness climbed upon his shoulders. They sagged beneath the crushing weight. He felt like an old man. Old before I am forty, he thought. Old before I am even thirty-five. *This day will the Lord deliver thee into mine hand; and I will smite thee . . .*

It was warm in the cottage. Wood that he had split the day be-fore burned brightly in the fire-place, the reds and yellows of the flames playing over the blanket-covered sofa. David removed his mackinaw and hung it on the rack beside the door. He hung his hat beside it and kicked out of his ga-loshes. The warmth laid soothing fingers upon his brow. But he knew that he could not sleep.

The aroma of fresh-brewed cof-fee came from the kitchen, and he went out into the little room and poured a steaming cupful. All around him, memories hovered: in plate and bowl and saucer, in pot and pan and stove; in the color of the curtains, in the panels of the walls. Honeymoon mornings she had made coffee, fried bacon; broken eggs into a crackling pan. The table where they had break-fast-ed stood like a shrine in the middle of the floor. Abruptly, he turned and walked away, leaving his coffee forgotten on the stove.

In the living room again, he sat down on the sofa and took off his shoes. The heat of the fire reached out and touched his face. His woolen shirt began to prickle, and he removed it and sat there in his T-shirt and his trousers, staring at the flames. He could hear the wind, and her name was on its breath. *Helen*, it whispered again and again. *Helen!* . . . Far out to sea, the sunny tresses he had once caressed spread out like gol-den kelp-beds; far out to sea, the lovely head he had once cradled on his shoulder plied cold and dis-mal waves; far out to sea, the sup-ple body he had once adored rolled to and fro in leviathan un-dulations. . . . In the gray morning light he saw that the backs of his hands were glistening with tiny drops of moisture. He stared at the drops uncompre-hend-ingly, and as he stared another one appeared. He knew then that they were fallen tears.

## I

Oddly enough, he had received an impression of tallness the very first time he saw her. The impres-sion was a false one, arising from their different positions—she had just stood up on the raft and he was climbing onto it—but in the years that followed he never forgot how goddess-like she seemed when he emerged from the blue water at her very feet and gazed up at her. It was the first faint sounding

of a leitmotiv that was destined to grow in sound and grandeur until it dominated his life.

The fullness of her pectorals and the deepness of her chest led him to suspect that she was an excellent swimmer. Her long legs, smoothly yet powerfully muscled, strengthened the suspicion, and the golden cast of her skin did nothing to disaffirm it. But she was not a particularly tall girl, he saw when he stood up beside her; tall, yes—but no taller than the five feet, four necessary to put the top of her golden head on a level with his chin. The brown-haired girl who had also been sun bathing on the raft and who had also stood up was unmistakably the taller of the two. She gave David a penetrating glance out of cool gray eyes, then donned a yellow bathing cap. "Come on, Helen, we've got to dress for dinner," she said to her companion, and dived into the water and struck out in an easy crawl for the white strip of beach with its decor of piers and cot-tages.

The golden girl donned a white bathing cap and was about to follow when David said, "Don't go yet—please."

She regarded him curiously, and he saw that the September sky had copied its color from the blue-ness of her eyes. " `Please? Why please'?"

"Because I'll probably never swim out here again and find someone like you standing in the sun," David said. "Because I'm a miser as regard to moments, and when I find a golden one like this I'm compelled to do everything I can to keep it from slipping through my fingers before I get a chance to hoard it."

"You're strange. Do you joust with windmills, too?"

He smiled. "Sometimes." And then, "I already know your name," he went on. "Or at least the first part of it. For the record, mine's David —David Stuart."

She removed her bathing cap, and her golden hair came tum-bling softly down around her cheeks and neck. Her face some-how managed to be both oval and heart-shaped, and the line of her eyebrows was a logical and natu-ral extension of the delicate line of her nose. "For the record," she said, "the last part of mine is Aus-ten." She seemed to make up her mind. "Very well, I can spare a minute—three, if I skip my show-er. But no more than that."

She sat down in the sun, and he sat clown beside her. White- caps danced around them on the blueness of the lake and above their heads a lofty family of cir-rus clouds hovered sedately in the sky. "I thought I knew everyone at the resort by this time," she said. "My sister Barbara and I have been here for almost a month. You must be cryptalocic."

"No," he said, "I just arrived this morning. Not long ago, I found myself the inheritor of quite a number of things, among them a beach house. I wanted to get some benefit out of it before the season died."

"You won't get very much. To-morrow's burial day, you know."

"Not for my season. I've struck Labor Day from my calendar. I've always had a penchant for Sep-tember beaches, but this is the first time I've ever had a chance to in-dulge it. I'll probably hang around here till October, keeping com-pany with the herring gulls and old memories."

She looked out over the dancing water. "I'll think of you when I'm back in the salt mines laboring over dictation pad and typewrit-er."

The line of her neck and chin was faintly childlike. Somehow, she made him think of a little girl. "You're hardly more than nineteen, are you?" he asked won-deringly.

"I'm twenty-one, and secretarial school is far behind me. I wanted to go into training and swim the English Channel, but my sister Barbara, who is wise in all things, convinced me that I should settle for a more staid career."

"You don't look like your sister," he said. And then, "Tell me about your swimming."

"I took the women's long-dis-tance A.A.U. championship in 1966. Does that contribute any-thing to your golden moment?"

"It enhances it no end. But it also gives me a feeling of infer-iority. I can't even swim a mile."

"You could if you went about it right. Swimming is a more natural form of locomotion than walking is." She donned her bathing cap again—this time for keeps—and stood up. "I'm afraid your three minutes expired some time ago, and now I really must go."

He stood up beside her. "I'll swim in with you," he said.

They dived together, emerged glistening in the sun, and struck out for shore, she with a lazy play of arms and legs, he with a laborious side stroke. On the beach, water dancing down her smooth, tanned skin, she said, "I hope the moment makes a distinguished addition to your collection. And now, I must run."

"Wait," he said. "I wouldn't be a true miser if one golden moment didn't make me greedy for another."

"But one more will only make you greedy for still another— isn't that so?"

"It is a sort of vicious circle, at that," he admitted. "But I can't help myself, and time is running short, and—"

"I'll be at the pavilion with Barbara tonight," Helen said. "You may buy me one glass of beer, if you like—but only one." She turned and ran toward the flight of stairs that climbed the low bank along whose crest the summer cottage stood. "Good by now," she called over her shoulder.

"Good by," David said, the late-afternoon sunlight warm upon his back, the song of her sounding deep within him. Yes, she was the one; he was sure of it now. The song said so over and over. His footsteps were airy as he made his way toward the beach house. There was none like her—none, the song sang. None like her—none. Arrayed beside her, the windfall of his inheritance was a scattering of withered apples. She was the single golden apple that had not yet fallen, and he would climb high into the branches of the tree and taste the golden sweetness of her and put to rout the hunger of his lonely years.

His uncle's beach house—he hadn't yet grown accustomed enough to his new way of life to think of the various items of his inheritance as his own—was one of the three residences among which the old man had rationed the last years of his long life. The other two were a cottage on an isolated section of the Connecticut coast and a bungalow on Bijou-de-mer, a small island in the Coral Sea. In addition to owning the bungalow, the old man had also owned the island, and on it in his younger days he had pursued two of the very few hobbies he had ever permitted himself—the cultivation of rice and the production of copra.

The beach house was more than a mere summer home—it was a young mansion. Compared to it, the ordinary resort cottages brought to mind a collection of caretakers' dwellings. On the beach side, a green lawn patterned with elms and weeping willows spread lazily down to a low breakwall. The motif of trees and grass was repeated on the east and on the west sides, and was varied slightly in the rear by a black-top driveway that wound in from the resort road to a three-car garage.

American Colonial design, the house stood three stories high. A high-ceilinged living room ran the entire width of the first story, and from the living room two archways led respectively to an elaborate dining room and a king-sized kitchen. The second story was given over to a spacious den, a period-piece bar, a large library, a three-tabled billiard room, a big bathroom, and a huge master bedroom. The third floor was devoted entirely to guest rooms, each of which had its own bathroom. The servant quarters were just off the kitchen and could be reached by a separate outside doorway. This was the doorway David used. He hadn't as yet shed the awe of the rich that his middle-class parents had instilled in him before they broke tip, and he felt more like a trespasser than he did an owner. Moreover, the mere thought of getting sand on the thousand-dollar living-room rug appalled him.

The servants had been discharged after his uncle's death, and, other than making arrangements with someone in the nearby village of Bayville to come around twice a week and do what needed to be done to keep up the grounds, he had hired no one to replace them. Even if he had known exactly how to go about getting a butler and a cook and a maid he would have balked at the idea, not because he considered it wrong for one human being to wait on another but because having always done for himself he instinctively shied away from the idea of having someone else do for him. Besides, all his life he had yearned for the privacy that only wealth can bring, and now that he had it he had no intention of sharing it with strangers.

After undressing in the modest guest room that he had chosen for his own, he shaved and showered in the adjoining bathroom. For the evening he donned a slacks and shirt ensemble that had cost him more than he used to pay for his suits. "For casual wear," the clerk had said, but David felt anything but casual

as he stood before the mirror and surveyed himself. He felt stiff and awkward and out of place, and he looked exactly the way he felt.

He drove into Bayville for dinner. Shadows were long upon the lawn when he returned, and he sat on the colonnaded porch till they grew longer, till they fled before the soundless footsteps of evening; then he set off down the beach toward the pavilion. He had never visited the place, but he recognized it the minute he saw it sprawling on the shore, its lights leaking through its poplar-guarded windows and spilling onto the sand. The second he stepped inside, he felt lost. Young people lined the bar and crowded around the tables. All of them, it seemed, were talking at once, and their voices blending with the juke-box blare created a background roar that was downright nerve-racking. This was a place for children, not adults. David, who was only twenty-nine, felt forty.

He edged into a narrow space at the bar and ordered a beer that he didn't want. He was beginning to wish that he hadn't come; then he saw Helen and Barbara come in and take a table by one of the wide windows that looked out over the lake. He ordered two more beers, and, carrying them along with his own, made his way across the crowded room. Helen's eyes were on him all the way, and when he set the three glasses down on the table at the end of his precarious journey, she rewarded him with a warm "Hello". "This is David Stuart, Barbara," she said to her companion. Turning back to David, she said, "This is my sister Barbara. She writes love stories for the magazines."

Barbara gave him a long cool glance. She was wearing a white dress that brought to mind a Grecian tunic. Helen's dress was pastel pink and clung like morning mist to her golden skin. *Thy two breasts are like two young roes that are twins, which feed among the lilies . . .*

"You *are* the David Stuart I read about some time ago, aren't you?" Barbara asked him after he sat down. "The one who harvested the golden grain?"

David nodded. "My uncle's golden grain."

"Helen wouldn't believe me when I told her you were filthy rich."

"You talk as though being rich were a crime."

"It's only my envy showing. I have no uncles, but if I did have you could depend on every one of them being as dirt poor as I am."

"Well I have no uncles either," Helen said, "and I don't feel a bit bitter. Do you like being rich, David?"

"I don't know. I haven't got used to it yet."

"You should read Fitzgerald," Barbara said. "He had a complex about rich people. Perhaps you have read him."

David nodded. "Poor Julian."

"Poor David," Helen said. "Get off his back, will you, Babs?" Then, to David, "I've been thinking about what you said about gulls and old memories. It *will* be nice after all the people have gone."

"But not after you've gone. I wish you could stay."

"I wish I could too. But come tomorrow night, it's back to Buffalo."

"And back to Steve," Barbara said. "Don't forget Steve."

"Steve?" David asked.

"Steve is her true love. Didn't you tell him about Steve, Helen?"

"Don't be such a shrew, Barbara. You know perfectly well I haven't had time to tell him about anything."

David looked into his beer glass. He should have known there would be a Steve. How could there help but be?

Barbara was speaking again: "What will you do with all your delightful dough, Mr. Stuart? Buy a yacht?"

He forced himself to smile. She was beginning to bug him a little, but he wasn't going to give her the satisfaction of knowing it. "I already have a yacht. What I'd like to do is buy a typewriter and write the Great American Novel."

Barbara shook her head. "You won't, though, because you won't be pressed. Great books are written by men who need the money they bring in. Take Balzac. Take Dostoevski. Take—"

"Why not take Flaubert?" David interrupted. "He wasn't pressed."

"Not financially—no. But you may rest assured that he was pressed in other ways." She looked at him keenly. "I don't think you are, Mr. Stuart., I'll bet you've nev-er written anything in your whole life."

David grinned. "Oh well, it was only a passing thought. Probably what I'll really do is buy a castle with a moat filled with Cutty Sark and drink myself to death. Does that fit your preconception of a parvenu any better, Miss Austen?"

"Much better." She raised her glass, took a single sip out of it, and set it back down on the table. She stood up. "I'm going to turn in early for a change, so I'll be on my way."

"Wait, Babs," Helen said.

"I can't. Don't forget to tell him about Steve now."

Barbara walked away. Helen stared after her angrily. "I can't understand it—she's never acted like that before."

David said, "I have a hunch she doesn't like me." He touched glass-es. "I know you said only one, but please drink up and have one more."

"No—one's my limit. Anyway, I think I'd better be getting back to the cottage too." His disappointment must have shown on his face, for she added, "But you can walk me home if you like, and we can sit on the beach stairs and talk for a while."

"Fine. I don't like it here any-way."

Outside, she removed her shoes. "I like to walk barefoot on the sand."

He took them from her. "Here, let me carry them."

The stars were out, but there was no moon, and the shoreline lay in pale and dreamlike dark-ness. The lake sighed at their feet, and a warm breeze breathed against their faces. They passed dark blurs of blankets and heard lovers whispering in the night. When they came to the stairs, Hel-en said, "This is where I meant. I've sat here lots of time, looking at the stars."

"All alone?"

"Yes, all alone. You're the only boy I've met this summer."

David laughed. "I haven't been a 'boy' for quite some time."

"To me, you seem like one. Shall we sit down?"

The stairs were narrow, and they had to squeeze to make it. They sat there side by side, shoul-ders touching. "You were supposed to tell me about Steve," David said. "Remember?"

"There isn't much to tell. I've known him for about a year. He's asked me to marry him several times, but somehow I couldn't say 'yes'. I guess it was because I did-n't know for sure whether I loved him or not."

"Didn't?"

"Did I use the past tense? Yes, I guess I must have. Because I do know for sure now."

"That you do love him?"

"That I don't."

David realized that he had been holding his breath. He expelled it softly. "I think I'd better tell you a little bit about myself," he said. "I'm frightened of my wealth, be-cause in my heart I'm still poor. You get so used to being poor that you accept it as the normal order of things, and if you become rich overnight you try to reassure your-self by continuing to associate with the people you associated with when you were poor. And then you find out what kind of people they really are. They drive you from their doors with their envy and they hound you in public places, and there you are, stranded be-tween two worlds—the old one that no longer wants any part of you and the new one that you're too timid to enter. I'm at sea in another respect, too. Somehow, I've always had the notion that books are as important to a man as his daily bread, and I've spent half my life reading them. Good books, bad books, mediocre books—all kinds of books. When my mother and father got divorced—that's why my uncle disinherited them, incidentally—I was old enough to take care of myself, and I quit school and went to work. Since then, I've worked at all sorts of jobs in all sorts of different places. I drove truck, I delivered mail, I pumped gas. I did this and I did that, and all the while, I read, read, read. For about six months I worked on a Great Lakes ore boat and studied navigation in my spare time, but that didn't suit me either, and I

finally ended up in Lackawanna working at Bethle-hem Steel. When my uncle died, I was working the swing shift, and reading *The Forsythe Saga* in my spare time in a cheap rooming-house. You can't imagine anything more incongruous than that—or anything more pathetic. Beware of the man of many books who can't put what he's read to practical use. Beware of the dreamer. There, you can't say you haven't been fore-warned."

"Weren't there any girls?"

"A few. But the only ones that meant anything to me were the ones I met in books."

"It's a shame your parents couldn't get along. Did they try to contest the will?"

"My father did—my uncle was his brother. But it was no dice. As soon as I get straightened around I'm going to set up an annuity for him, and one for my mother too. They're both remarried and they're well off, and both of them have children and neither one of them likes to be reminded that I'm still around; but it wouldn't be right if I didn't do something for them."

"It's good to be kind to your par-ents. I never knew mine."

"You're an orphan then?" David asked.

"A foundling. Sort of a freakish one. Barbara's father—afterwards he became my father, too—found me one winter when he was vaca-tioning in Florida. I was lying on a public beach, and I was naked and all tangled up with seaweed and I looked as though I was half dead. I wasn't half dead, though—I was very much alive. But I couldn't walk and I couldn't talk and I had no memory of what had happened to me. I still haven't. When dad adopted me and brought me home he estimated my age to be ten years and figured out the day and the year of my birth accordingly. He was a widower and had no other children except Barbara. She and I grew up to-gether in his house in Buffalo. My first memory goes no further back than my eleventh "birthday." I could walk and talk by then, though not very well. After that, I recovered fast, but what I recovered from I've no idea, and I don't think any of the doctors dad took me to have either. Anyway, I wasn't mentally retarded, and with dad's and Barbara's help I easily made up for all the school I'd missed, and managed to graduate from high school before I was eighteen. Dad gave me his wife's name, and when he died three years ago he left the house to both Barbara and me. It's a fine house, and we've lived there ever since. She does all the managing, of course—she's three years older than I am. Three years is quite a lot when you're young."

"Eight must seem an eternity," David said. Suddenly he snapped his fingers. "I'll bet that's why your sister doesn't like me—she thinks I'm too old for you."

Helen shook her head. "No, that's not why. Barbara's very broad-minded about such things. Besides, I think she does like you. Sometimes she's hard to under-stand." She stood up. "I must go in now, I'm afraid. May I have my shoes, please?"

"I'll put them on for you."

When she did not demur, he knelt before her in the sand. Her feet were pale blurs in the star-light. His fingers trembled at the touch of her smooth cool skin. He slipped each shoe on gently. The starlight seemed to intensify, to become rain, and the rain fell soundlessly all around him in the soft summer night. For a moment he could not breathe, and when he could he said, still kneeling in the sand, "*How beautiful are thy feet with shoes!*" He felt her hand touch his hair, rest lightly there for a moment, then fly away. When he stood up, she stood up too, and standing as she was on the first step she was slightly taller than he was. Her starlit face was very close. The leitmotiv sounded again when he kissed her, stronger this time, then faded away as they drew apart. Yes, it was true, his heart sang. She was the one, and there could never be another like her. "Good night," he whispered gen-tly into her hair. "Good night," she whispered gently back, and he stood there in the starlight listen-ing to the sound of her retreating footsteps, and long after he went to bed he heard them in the deep dark recesses of the night, and in his dreams he saw her starlit gentle face again and rejoiced in her star-lit gentle kiss. There was none like her, none. None like her. None.

## II

The wedding had been a modest one. It took place on the twenty-fourth of December of that same



year in a little church not far from where Helen and Barbara lived. Barbara was bridesmaid, and for the best man David chose the only friend he had thus far acquired in the new world in which he had recently taken up residence—Gov don Rawley, the youngest member of the law firm that had handled David's uncle's affairs and that now handled David's. That same day, David chartered a plane and he and Helen flew to Connecticut, and night found them in the little cottage on the cliff. They could just as easily have flown to Florida, but both of them liked white Christmases too well to sacrifice this one—the loveliest, probably, either of them would ever know—on the altar of the tropics.

They remained in the cottage two weeks, hiking along the snow-crowned cliffs by day and drinking German beer in the warmth of pine-knot flames by night. Mornings, they slept late, and afterward they lingered over second coffees at the little table in the kitchen. It was here that the Great Inspiration was born. They would go for a long cruise in David's yacht, the *Nereid*, and visit his island in the Coral sea!

The *Nereid* was in Boston Harbor. After hiring a navigator and a crew, they set out on the 29th of January and braved their way down the wintry coast. When the Panama Canal was behind them, David took advantage of the serene Pacific days and nights and, with the navigator's help, supplemented his knowledge of navigation to a point where he could have plotted the course himself. Time passed swiftly. March found the *Nereid* passing between the Solomons and the New Hebrides, and not long afterward, *Bijou-de-mer* was raised.

David's uncle had loved *Bijou-de-mer* the way Stendhal had loved Milan, but to David it was a big disappointment. He had expected to find the sort of colorful tropical paradise that travel brochures depict; instead, he found an over-grown coconut plantation and an expanse of neglected rice fields. Backgrounding the coconut groves and the rice paddies was a series of jungle-clad hills. There was a good-sized harbor, however, whose waters were deep enough for a small ship to anchor and whose beach was pure coral. An aged pier jutted from the shore, and beyond the pier a trail led from the beach to a low embankment that ran between two acre-ages of rice paddies to the hill on which the bungalow stood.

In back of the bungalow there was a shed containing a generator, but the generator had seen its better days, and David couldn't get it to work. The bungalow, however, was in halfway decent condition, and there were plenty of candles available. He and Helen made the necessary repairs and cleaned the place up; then they settled down to a halcyon life of swimming and fishing and general all-around loafing. She loved the sea, and awakening mornings and finding an empty pillow beside his own, he would look through the bedroom window and see her romping in the distant surf and sometimes swimming out into the blue waters beyond the place where the *Nereid* lay at anchor. Upon her return, he would bawl her out for her recklessness, but she would only laugh, and say, "Don't be an old woman, David. The sea will never harm me."

They remained on the island for a week. Probably they would have remained longer if the rainy season hadn't set in. David had heard about the rainy season, but it was necessary to experience it in order to believe it. The rain fell in blankets, and water rushed down from the hills, turning once-gentle brooks into raging torrents. The rice paddies didn't just fill—they overflowed—and sometimes moisture hung so heavily in the air that it seemed to be raining inside as well as outside the bungalow. Everything was damp—the clothes they wore, the books they read, the towels they tried to dry themselves with, the sheets they slept on, and the food they ate. David endured it for three days, said, "I've had it, Helen—let's go home."

He decided not to go by way of the Panama Canal this time, but to proceed to Tacoma, Washington, and leave the *Nereid* with Reese and Harrison, Inc.—a ship-building concern in which he owned stock. The yacht needed innumerable repairs, and even though he knew that in the end the money he would save would be negligible, it pleased him to do business with a company that in part belonged to him. Rather than keep the navigator and the crew on his payroll any longer, he let them go at the end of the voyage and paid their plane fare back to Boston. Then, after turning the *Nereid* over to the ship-building concern and leasing space for it at their private dock, he bought plane tickets and he and Helen returned to Buffalo. They spent the summer at the beach house, and in the fall they rented a duplex on Delaware Avenue and moved into the city.

David had yet to decide, what he wanted to do with his life, and now he began trying this thing and that. But without the immediacy of having to make living to goad him on, his pursuits invariably fell into the hobby category. He bought the most expensive electric organ he could find, and he and Helen began to take lessons. It required less than a month for them to realize that at best their playing would never be anything more than wooden, and at Helen's suggestion they abandoned music and took up painting. David fared no better in this second field of endeavor than he had in the first, but Helen proved to have a latent talent of sorts, and in a matter of weeks she was turning out canvases that were remarkable for their subject matter alone. David found some of them upsetting, and one of them he found downright frightening. It depicted the interior of a huge cavern. Dominating it was an eerie castle built of crude stone blocks. Its towers were disproportionately tall and were covered with a slimy green growth that faintly resembled ivy. In places, the "ivy" had torn loose, and was trailing outward from the towers like ragged pennants streaming in a wind. The windows were high and narrow, and the darkness behind them was unrelieved by so much as a single light. The atmosphere was un-earthly. It had a cobalt-blue cast, and it was shot with strange rays and filmy phosphorescences. As though to intensify the unpleasantness of the over-all effect, Helen had painted in a scattering of weird, piscine birds.

He thought, for some reason, of Shelley's *The World Wanderers*, and the lines

*Tell me, thou Star, whose wings of light*

*Speed thee in thy fiery flight,*

*In what cavern of the night*

*Will thy pinions close now?*

When he asked her what the painting was supposed to signify, she seemed confused. "Should it signify something?" she asked.

"Well I should hope so! How else can you justify it?"

She looked at the bizarre scene for some time. At length, she shook her head. "I just painted it—that's all. Maybe it's surreal, or something. But if it has an underlying meaning, I don't know what it is."

He let the matter drop. However, he disliked the canvas intensely, and never went near it again.

At this time, the leitmotiv, which had lain dormant in the orchestral background all these months, sounded once again—this time loudly enough for him to hear it.

For some weeks he had been aware of a change in Helen's habits, but he had been unable to discover its cause. Formerly, she had gone to visit Barbara once or twice a week, and often the two of them had attended Saturday matinees together and dined out afterward. Now, Helen stayed at home virtually all of the time, and once, when he asked her to go to a concert at Kleinhan's Music Hall with him, she declined with a vehemence that startled him. It was shortly after this incident that he noticed that she had taken to wearing low-heeled shoes. When he asked her why, she said that her back had been bothering her lately and that she had hoped that low heels might help it.

He thought no more about the matter. Then, not long afterward when he was going through his mail one afternoon, he came across a statement that floored him. It was from a dress shop that Helen had never patronized before, and the amount ran way into four figures. Nevertheless, it was not the amount that astonished him—it was the list of items she had bought. For it added up to something more than a mere total—it added up to the fact that she had bought a new wardrobe.

Thanks to his insistence that she deny herself nothing, she already had more clothes than she knew what to do with. Why, then, should she suddenly have taken it into her head that she needed new coats, new dresses, new shoes, new negligees, and new underthings? And why had she kept their purchase a secret?

Maybe she hadn't meant to keep it a secret. Maybe it just seemed that way to him because he hadn't been home the day the clothes had been delivered. Still, it was odd that she hadn't made any mention of the matter—unless she wanted to surprise him. But if she wanted to surprise him she had waited a little too long.

Leaving the statement on his desk, he left his den, crossed the living room, and ascended the stairs to the second level. Helen had converted one of the three bedrooms into a studio, and she was there now,

hard at work on a new canvas. He paused in the doorway, drawing a long draught of her loveliness and drinking it down to the last drop. It was one of those phenomenally warm days that sometimes occur during In-dian Summer, and she had re-moved her shoes and stripped down to her slip. Her legs seemed longer and more graceful than ever, her arms and breasts and neck more goddess-like. A playful October wind was wafting through the open window and ruffling a se-ries of impromptu bangs that had fallen over her forehead.

She was so absorbed in her work that she didn't notice him till he went over and stood beside her. Even then, she didn't look up, but went on painting. The scene tak-ing shape on the canvas was a dis-quieting one. There was a chasm-like valley filled with strange green plants, the tenuous filaments of which were growing straight up-Ward in defiance of the law of gravity. Scattered over the valley floor were hundreds of tiny green disks, and farther up the valley, so deep in the background as to be barely discernible, was a series of upright rib-like timbers. In the foreground stood a copper-banded chest of the kind associated with seventeenth-century buccaneers, and on top of it lay a human skull.

Finally she laid her palette and brush aside and faced him. "Some-thing on your mind, darling?"

He forced his eyes away from the canvas. "Yes. I thought we might go out to dinner tonight. Don our glad togs and do the town."

Her blue eyes absconded. "No. I don't think I'd care to tonight, David."

"But why not? It's been ages since we've gone anywhere . . . I should think you'd want to show off some of the new things you bought."

Her eyes came back, rested briefly on his face, then ran away again. "You got the statement then. I was going to tell you, but somehow I—" Abruptly she turned away and walked over to the win-dow and looked down into the street. "Somehow I just couldn't," she finished.

He went over and took her shoulders and turned her around. "Don't be upset—I'm *glad* you bought new clothes."

"I wouldn't have bought them, only—" Suddenly she raised her eyes. "Look at me," she said. "Can't you see what's happening?"

"I am looking at you. What is it I'm supposed to see?"

"Look harder." She moved closer to him. "The top of my head used to be level with your chin—re-mem-ber? Now look where it comes to!"

His first impulse was to laugh; then he realized that his lips were brushing her forehead and that her hair was level with his eyes. In-stinctively, he stepped back to see if she was standing on tiptoe. She was not. For a moment, he could not speak.

"Now you know why I don't go anywhere any more," she said. "Now you know why I avoid Barbara. Seeing me every day, you haven't noticed; but other people would. Barbara would. When you don't see someone every day you can spot a change in them the min-ute you lay eyes on them."

"And this—this is why you bought a new wardrobe?"

"I had to—don't you see? Oh, I let the hems down on my dresses—that was no problem. But finally it reached a point where the dresses had to be let out, and I didn't know how to do it and I was afraid to hire someone to do it for me for fear they'd guess the truth. You see, I'm not just growing taller—I'm growing bigger too. My feet are growing bigger, my hands are growing bigger. I can't even wear my wedding ring any more. I—"

He took her in his arms before the tears had a chance to begin. "But don't you see," he said, "that what's happening to you is per-fectly normal? You're supposed to grow until you're twenty-five!"

"I'm supposed to fill out, yes—but I'm not supposed to grow tall-er." She rested her head on his shoulder. "Let's not pretend, Da-vid. I've known for a long time that I was growing taller—that I'd never even *stopped* growing taller. But my growth-rate was so gradual that I didn't think any-thing about it. Now, it's begun to accelerate. I've grown two inches in the last two months! I'm three inches taller now than I was when you married me! I'm ten pounds heavier!"

"All of which makes you the ex-ception that proves the rule but which certainly doesn't mean you're going to go on growing taller."

She didn't seem to hear him. "With high heels on I'd be as tall as you are!" A shudder shot through

her. "Oh, David, it's not fair!"

"I'll tell you what," he said. "To-morrow, we'll pay your family doctor a visit and let him put your fears to rest. But tonight, we'll get dressed and go out to dinner, and afterwards we'll take in a show. You've been cooped up here for so long that you've imagined yourself to be taller than you really are. Why, I'll bet if you measured you'd find that at the most you've only grown half an inch!"

"Don't you think *I have* meas-ured? Don't you think—"

"All right then—you have. But it's nothing to worry about. Come on, get ready and we'll go. If there's any worrying that needs to be done, I'll do it."

All the while he was getting dressed he tried to convince him-self that there was none, but he didn't quite succeed. He didn't know very much about gigantism, but he knew enough about it to ruin his dinner and to spoil the movie that they went to afterward. If Helen really was suffering from the condition, her continued growth wasn't necessarily going to stop at three extra inches and ten extra pounds. It could go on and on till she turned into the freak she already imagined she had be-come.

But Doctor Bonner, Helen's family physician, didn't share David's premonitions. After giving her a complete physical, he said that he had never seen a healthier woman. There was no indication that nor-mal ossification hadn't occurred, and she showed no signs of the physical weakness that usually ac-companies gigantism. Like David, he didn't believe that she had grown nearly as much as she thought she had, and he told her that she had gotten herself upset over nothing. "I hereby pronounce you physically sound," he said. "If you suffer from any more growing pains," he added with a grin, "be sure to let me know."

"I don't think he believed a word of what I told him," Helen said on the way home. "Why, he treated me like a little child!"

"But don't you think," David suggested, "that part of it might be your imagination? Maybe you grew an inch, or maybe even an inch and a half, but three seems a little far-fetched."

"But I tell you that *I did* grow three inches! Three and a quarter inches, in fact!"

David laughed. "All right—I won't argue with you. But appar-ently they're perfectly normal inch-es, so I don't see what harm they can do. It's stylish for girls to be tall these days."

Suddenly, she smiled. "Well if you don't mind, I certainly should-n't. Do you know what?—I think I'll go see Barbara this afternoon."

She did, too. She returned, ra-diant. "Barbara didn't even notice till she saw that I was wearing low heels. It's funny, isn't it, how ev-erybody thinks they're the center of the universe and that if they even so much as comb their hair different, the whole wide world will sit up and take notice right away? I feel like celebrating. Do you think you could stand a date with the same girl two nights run-ning, Mr. Stuart?"

"Only if she happens to be a lovely number I happen to know. Let's go as we are—I know a small cafe where it won't matter what we wear."

"I'll redo my face and be with you in a minute."

The evening that followed, he reflected afterward, constituted the last carefree hours they ever spent together. During the next week Helen grew another inch, and by the end of the month she was as tall as he was.

### III

The second time they had vis-ited him, Doctor Bonner's profes-sional joviality had failed to mani-fest itself. Doctor Lindeman, the specialist to whom he promptly re-ferred them, gave Helen another complete physical, but he couldn't find anything wrong with her ei-ther. He asked her to tell him the history of her life, and after she complied he questioned her about the years preceding her eleventh "birthday." But she could tell him nothing. Finally, he made arrange-ments for her to spend a week un-der observation at the hospital to which he was attached. At the end of the week he didn't have any more idea of what was wrong with her than he had had at the begin-ning of it.

They tried other specialists, both in Buffalo and in other cities. None of them could throw the slightest light on the cause of Hel-en's gigantism. Meanwhile, she continued to grow, and as her size increased, so,

too, did her sensitiv-ity. To ease her embarrassment, David began wearing shoes with Cuban heels. For a while, he was able to maintain the illusion that she was no taller than he was, and when she continued to grow he managed to maintain the illusion for a while longer by having a shoe-maker increase the thickness of the heels. But it was a makeshift sub-terfuge at best, and at length he abandoned it. By this time, Helen was two inches taller than he was, and almost equalled him in weight.

The only aspect of her affection that enabled her to endure it was the fact that she grew proportion-ately. For all her budding giant-hood, she still possessed the same symmetry and grace she had known before, and whenever he saw her at a distance with no fa-miliar objects to compare her to she looked exactly as she had looked a few short months ago. But this perspective was soon denied him, for the time came, as he had known it would, when she refused to leave the apartment.

Keeping her supplied with food posed no problem as yet, but keep-ing her supplied with clothes did. Her shoes, her dresses, her coats—everything had to be made to or-der. In view of the fact that she no longer went out, the coats could have been dispensed with, and she even said as much; but David wouldn't hear of such a thing. He was determined that she should have clothes for all occasions, whether she wore them or not.

When their first anniversary came around, she was six feet, six inches tall. The only visitor she al-lowed in the apartment was Bar-bara, and it was Barbara, dropping in every other evening, who was making it possible for Helen to go on. David did all he could to keep up her morale, insisting over and over that he loved her more than he had before; yet even though she knew he was telling the truth, the knowledge wouldn't have been enough to sustain her. She needed additional assurance that she was still wanted, and Barbara supplied it.

If anything, David's wife was even lovelier on this, their first an-niversary, than she had been the day he married her. Her complex-ion should have been sallow from lack of sunlight. Instead, it was radiant. Moreover, her skin had a golden cast, and seemed to glow as though strange fires burned within her. For weeks, he had hoped that in honor of the occa-sion she would consent to go out to dinner with him. But when the occasion actually arrived even he was dubious about subjecting her to such an ordeal, and he was more relieved than disappointed when she insisted on staying home.

He had a magnum of cham-pagne sent up, and engaged a ca-tering service to prepare and de-liver a special wedding dinner. With Helen's help, he set up the Christmas tree he had brought home that afternoon, and after-ward they trimmed it together. Then they exchanged presents. For David, Helen had bought—via Barbara—a calendar wrist-watch. For Helen, David had bought a new easel—taller, but not obtusively so, than the one she had—and a dozen canvases. They toasted each other in champagne, and sat down to dinner. The evening didn't be-gin to compare with their first eve-ning together in the Connecticut cottage, but the hours were pre-cious for all that, and David knew that he would never forget them.

Christmas went its way. The New Year honked its tinselly horns, and then was heard no more. Helen continued to grow. Her growth-rate involved a form of arithmetical progression now, and it seemed to David that every day she became perceptibly taller. And as her height increased, so, too, did his desperation. There was utterly nothing he could do. She was so sensitive about her condition by this time that she wouldn't have consulted a specialist even if he or Barbara could have found one capable of helping her. What both-ered him almost as much as her in-eluctable increase in size was the effect that severing herself from society would eventually have upon her. And there was yet an-other source of worry. He loved her more than he ever had, and she returned both his affection and his passion; but there was a ludi-crous quality about their relation-ship now—a ludicrous quality that had imposed a psychological hand-icap upon a race that was already half lost. The knowledge that eventually the race would be lost altogether preyed upon his mind with greater and greater frequency as winter gradually gave way to spring and the young giantess in his house attained ever more ter-rifying proportions. He began awakening just before dawn and lying sleepless between cool sheets, staring at the outsize bed next to his own and listening to her breathing, and sometimes his thoughts would match the gray cast of the early-morning sky and the grayness would linger with him all through the day.

No, it could not go on like this. There was nothing he could do about her gianthood, but there was

something he could do about her environment. The beach house, with its high ceilings and its com-modious rooms, would do for now. Later on, more permanent arrange-ments could be made. But he need-ed help; he could no longer hoe his row alone. On a rainy evening late in April, he went to see Barbara.

The rain was coming down in sheets when he parked his car in her driveway and ran across the lawn to the verandah. As he climbed the steps, *deja vu* tran-siently tinged his thoughts, bring-ing a frown to his forehead. Was Barbara somehow associated in his mind with rain? *Would* she be someday? . . .

From beyond the door came the clatter of typewriter keys. He rang the bell, and the sound ceased. Presently he saw her coming down the hall. She was wearing slacks and an old sweater. Her dark-brown hair, always recalcitrant, had an almost savage mien about it as it tumbled halfway to her shoulders. Her cool, gray eyes seemed to see him standing on the verandah even before she switched on the outside light. They regis-tered surprise for a fleeting second, then returned to their cool gray selves. "Come in, David," she said, opening the door. "It's not a fit night for either man or dog to be abroad."

He almost abandoned his plan then and there. He had never been able to cope with her cynicism be-cause he had never been able to determine how much of it was di-rected toward him in particular and how much of it was directed toward the world in general. Only his desperation saw him through.

Barbara helped him off with his trenchcoat, hung it on a rack in the hall, and showed him into the living room. "How's Helen?"

He shook his head. "The same."

She sat down on a low-backed sofa and he sat down facing her in a low-backed chair. Through a doorway on his right he could see the den in which she had been working. A rebuilt standard stood on a desk cluttered with papers. There were reference books piled everywhere. At the rear of the liv-ing room, another doorway gave into an unlighted dining room. On the wall above the sofa hung a framed collotype of Sargent's "Daughters of Edward D. Boit". David remembered the picture well from the days when he was courting Helen.

He leaned forward, rested his elbows on his knees, and looked down at his hands. "Barbara, I want you to come to work for me. I want you to help me take care of Helen."

There was a silence. Presently a lighter clicked on, and a moment later a bluish veil of cigarette smoke came between them. Final-ly, he heard her voice: "You're like everybody else in this tinker-toy utopia, aren't you? You think that the whole thing was set up for you and you alone, and that when crevices appear in your walls every-body should drop whatever he or she is doing and come to help you shore them up."

He lifted his gaze to her face. Her gray eyes were even cooler than they had been before. "You can go on writing," he said. "There shouldn't be too many demands on your time—and I'll pay you what-ever you say the job is worth."

"Money heals all wounds, doesn't it, O noble physician? Well, I can assure you that it won't heal mine. But that's beside the point." She got up and walked over to the mantel and leaned against it, staring at the wall. Ab-ruptly, she turned and faced him. "Yes, I'll come to work for you, noble David. But not because you've offered me a sinecure that won't interfere with what, pre-sumably, I really want to do. I'll come to work for you because you've provided me with an es-cape route from futility. Because you've freed me from the neces-sity of writing simpering boy-meets-girl fairy tales to earn my daily bread. I'll wash and I'll iron and I'll cook and I'll sew, but I'll never again demean my intelli-gence by using it to turn out fairy tales about silly paper dolls who meet each other on planes and trains and rafts and fall twodimensionally in love between Lucky Strike and Betty Crocker ads. Yes, I'll come to work for you, noble David. Indeed, I will!"

Dismayed, he said, "But I don't want you to give up writing, Bar-bara. That's the last thing in the world that I want."

"But don't you see?—it's what I want. A person can go on doing something in good conscience only so long as she believes in what she's doing. But when she stops believ-ing, it's time for her to stop. I should have stopped long ago, but somehow I couldn't bring myself to. Now, I've made up my mind . . .

How tall is Helen now?"

He shrugged. "An inch or so taller than when you saw her last, I suppose. I guess it's a process that goes on forever."

"Well she can't go on living in that apartment—it must seem like a prison to her. We'll have to take her some place else."

He nodded eagerly, aware that his burden had already grown lighter. "Yes. We can stay at the beach house till the cottagers start coming out. She'll have plenty of freedom there. Meanwhile, I can look around for a better place. If I have to, I can buy a whole farm and fence it in. An isolated one with a big house. There're plenty of them in the hills beyond Bay-ville." He got to his feet. "I'll go out to the resort tomorrow and get the place ready. You can be pack-ing and making arrangements to close up the house, and later on in the week I'll buy a van and we'll move."

She faced him across the room. "I make lousy coffee, but you're welcome to a cup before you go."

"I think I'd better take a rain check." (Now why had he used that expression? he wondered.) "Helen expects me back right away."

"You still love her very much, don't you."

"Of course."

"I'll bet you'd still love her if she grew to be a hundred feet tall . . . Would you?"

He felt uncomfortable. "I sup-pose I would."

The cool gray eyes were full upon him. "*And it came to pass in an evening-tide that David walked upon the roof of the king's house: and from the roof he saw a woman washing herself; and the woman was very beautiful to look upon . . .* And thus did David see Bathsheba and fall in love. But unknown to him he was victimized by a state of mind and a set of circumstances, and regardless of what woman he had seen at that particular moment he would have fallen in love."

"Which means?" David said, frowning.

"That Bathsheba was in exactly the right place at exactly the right time. I'll get your coat."

He followed her into the hall. Outside, the rain drummed on the verandah roof, made gurgling sounds in the eave troughs. Her hand touched his as she helped him on with his coat. It was the briefest of contacts, but suddenly he knew. Knew the way it was with her and the way it might have been—and still might be—with him. And simultaneously he knew that far from simplifying his prob-lem he had merely complicated it.

She opened the door. "Good night," he said without looking at her, and hurried out into the rain.

## IV

The last shoemaker had laughed in his face, and it seemed that he had been walking now for hours. He knew that this could not be so, that the time-lapse had been to a large extent subjective. Hours would have brought on the winter night, and dusk was still on hand. Lights were more in evidence, though—street lights and car lights, and the lights of colored bulbs strung on pine and spruce and ornamental arborvitae. Barabbas would have loved such a gaudy display, and maybe that was where everyone had gone wrong in the first place. Paying lip-service to the one and groveling at the feet of the other. Tinsel twinkles like a two-edged sword, and merchants are highwaymen in houses. Give us this days your daily dollar, for ours is the kingdom of commerce. It was Barabbas—not Christmas—Eve.

David fed the iron kettle of a gaunt, bell-clanging Santa, and turned down a different street. The lights were coming into full bloom now—the reds and greens and yel-lows of the Druid lights and the bright glares of the automobile lights and the fluorescent fires of the store lights. The garden of the city knew not Gethsemane, but it knew Prosperity. Hordes of last-minute shoppers trooped in and out of doorways. Carolers raised pious voices to stars that neither heard nor cared. The annual emo-tional binge was at fever pitch. To-morrow, there would be relatives and turkey, and stodgy afternoons. Dusk, then sleep . . . the rude awakening. Even Barabbas should have known that gold and glitter do not make for better dawns.

Snow began drifting down be-tween the rows of buildings in large and gentle flakes. *The poetry of*

*earth is never dead* . . . but ah for the poetry of a new pair of shoes!

There was a shoe store up ahead, but David's footsteps did not quicken. It was the creators of shoes whom he sought, not the sellers. Today, "shoemaker" was a misleading word. It meant "re-pairer" not "maker". Today, machines made shoes, and vague people in vague factories helped the machines along; but for one man to take on the job alone, for a shoe-maker to *make* a pair of shoes?—"You must be crazy, mister. I fix the shoes—yes. Make the shoes? Make such *big* shoes? You must be crazy!"

When he came abreast of the shoe store he stopped and looked into one of its two windows. It was the woman's side, and all manner of feminine footwear was on display. There were high-heeled shoes and low-heeled shoes and shoes with pointed toes; there were scuffs and step-ins and sandals. A pair of white pumps caught his eyes, and he stood there staring at them, shoulders hunched against the cold and the snow and the passers-by, ears deaf to the Christmas carol oozing ingratiatingly from a loud-speaker above his head. The sighing of the lake along the shore came sweetly back to him; he smelled the sweetness of the summer night. Kneeling before her in the sand, he slipped the white pumps on her feet, his fingers trembling to the touch of her smooth cool skin. The starlight seemed to intensify, to become rain, and the rain fell soundlessly all around him . . . *How beautiful were thy feet with shoes!* ...

Sitting in the house that afternoon, he hadn't been able to stand it any longer. The small house on the hill that overlooked the adjoining farms he had bought that spring. The small house in the hills beyond Bayville that he and Barbara shared like brother and sister. Through the living-room window he had looked down the snow-covered hillside to the big house where Helen lived—the big house that he had remodeled himself and to which he and Barbara had brought her in the van when the cottagers had started coming out weekends to cut their little tracts of grass. The big house with the outsize front door and the raised ceilings and the knocked-out partitions; the big house where Helen spent her lonely giant's life. There were woods all around, and enclosing the grounds was an electric fence. There was a small lake where she could swim during the warm months, and there were fields where she could run and play. The people of the nearby hamlet of Timberville were unaware of her existence, and, God willing, would remain so. Barbara made her clothes and cooked her food, and he had made the bed on which she slept and the chairs on which she sat and the table at which she ate. He had made her many special things, but he couldn't make her special shoes. Shoe manufacturers would have laughed at him if he had told them what he wanted, or, even worse, have tried to find out why. Yes, it was Barabbas—not Christmas—Eve.

A package brushed against his shoulder. "Excuse me," someone said. He did not look to see who it was, but continued on down the street. There was only one more name on the list of shoemakers that he had compiled from the Buffalo directory before climbing into his pickup and setting out. The shop was in the next block.

He would try once more.

It was a narrow shop, sandwiched between a false-fronted haberdashery and a false-fronted variety store. A single light burned in the window—a sad little light that hung from the ceiling and did more to betray the fact that the ceiling needed painting than it did to reveal the concomitant fact that the shop was open. Flaked letters on the window glass said, *Shoes Repaired While U Wait*, and above the narrow doorway other flaked letters proclaimed the establishment's name: FRANCONI'S SHOE SHINE PARLOUR.

A stooped old man was standing behind a small counter, buffing a pair of oxfords on an electric buffer. At David's entry, he laid the oxfords aside, turned off the buffer, and faced the counter. He made an almost imperceptible bow. "Good evening, sir," he said, giving the "evening" three meticulous syllables. "I am Mr. Franconi."

"Good evening," David said. "I wonder if you can help me."

Mr. Franconi stood up a little straighter. This did not make him tall, but it did something for his stooped shoulders that definitely had needed to be done. "It is shoes you want, sir?" he asked, eagerness in his voice.

"Yes."



"New shoes?"

"Hand-made shoes. Women's. But—"

Mr. Franconi stood up straight-er yet. Excitement colored his face, lent it an almost youthful cast. "You have come to the right place, sir. It has been many years, but I, Anthony Franconi, was once a first-class maker of shoes, and one does not easily forget an art one loves. How soon do you want them, sir?"

Hope had come alive in David's breast. "Tonight. They're to be a Christmas present."

"Tonight!" Mr. Franconi breathed in, breathed out. "I—I am not sure, sir, that I can—"

David said, "It may be even more difficult than you think. They are not . . . ordinary shoes."

"They are not?"

David swallowed. "I want them to be white. And they're to be quite big."

"How big, sir?"

Again, David swallowed. Then he took a notebook out of his pocket and opened it to the page where he had set down the dimensions he had carefully calculated before leaving for the city. After he read them, a silence settled in the shop.

At length, Mr. Franconi asked, "You said they were to be a Christ-mas present?"

David nodded. "To show you I'm sincere I'll pay you right now if you'll say you can make them. *Can* you make them?"

"No," Mr. Franconi said.

A heaviness came over David; a weariness such as he had never known. He said, "Thanks anyway for not laughing," and started to turn away.

"Why did you wait till the last minute?" Mr. Franconi asked. "Given enough time, I could have made such shoes."

"I didn't think. We'd been wrap-ping her feet in—It seemed im-possible that—I didn't think, that's all. Good night, Mr. Fran-coni."

"Wait," Mr. Franconi said. "I have such a pair of shoes."

Disbelievingly, David faced him. "You *have* such a pair?"

"Yes. They are just about the size you say, and they are white. It is almost like providence, is it not? I make them for an advertisement display five years ago, and the shoe company who give me the order say that after the campaign is over they are going to cut up the leather and use it to make regular shoes. So I tell them I will buy them back. It is a shame for such workmanship to be torn apart—workmanship their factories cannot even dream of . . . The shoes are stored above the shop. You would like to see them?"

"Yes," David said. "Very much."

He followed Mr. Franconi up a narrow flight of stairs. The old man switched on a ceiling light, reveal-ing a long narrow room cluttered with odds and ends. "Over here, sir."

In a dim and dusty corner, he drew back a length of canvas. "They are beautiful, are they not?"

David gasped. Then he stepped forward and touched the nearer shoe. It was as soft as foam. The line of the heel and the instep was as trim as the line of a clipper ship. The toe was slightly pointed, and, relatively speaking, the heel was of medium height. The material was calfskin, and as white as new-fallen snow. "Burke didn't under-stand."

"Burke?" Mr. Franconi asked.

David smiled. Where cold had once resided around his heart, warmth reveled. "Burke was an eighteenth-century British states-man who thought he knew a great deal about beauty . . . I would like to buy the shoes, Mr. Franconi, if you will be so kind as to sell them to me."

The old man was looking at him puzzledly. "You have a friend who is in shoes, perhaps? Who wishes to put on a display?"

"No. But they will be on display in a way. Will you sell them to me, Mr. Franconi?"

"They will not be torn apart?"

"Never. I can promise you that."

"That is what is important. For years, they have lain up here, col-lecting dust. Fine shoes should be worn. Of course, I know that such shoes as these cannot be worn, but they should serve a useful

purpose. You have a car, sir?"

"I have a pickup. It's in a parking lot a dozen blocks from here."

"Come then, we will take the shoes downstairs, and you will go and get your pickup and we will load them on."

Carrying a shoe apiece, they descended single file to the shop. From a nearby phone booth David called a cab, and when it arrived he went for his pickup. The aspect of the world had changed. The sound of carols was haunting now; there was beauty in the multicolored lights. Barabbas had forsaken the streets, and people were going home to firesides and families. David could go home now, too. For now he had the means to fill a Christmas stocking. *How beautiful are thy feet with shoes!*

When he parked the pickup at the rear of the small house, Barbara came out on the back porch. "David, where in the world have you been? It's almost midnight!"

He got out of the cab and walked around to the truck bed. "Barbara, wait'll you see! It was a miracle almost. Come here. Look!"

Hugging herself to thwart the cold, she descended the porch steps. He threw back the tarp with which he had covered his purchase. "Look!" he said again.

It had stopped snowing, and the stars were out, and to him the shoes had something of the aspect of a pair of Cinderella slippers. But not to Barbara. She took one look at them, then swung around and faced him. "David, you're a fool! After all the trouble we've gone to keep this thing a secret, buying our supplies in different towns and letting on that we're a pair of eccentric writers so that no one will come near us, you go out and pull a trick like this! Why, it's like hanging up a sign with the word 'giant' on it and with an arrow underneath pointing to our door! You know how people are. You know how newspapers are. How could you do such a quixotic thing?"

Hurt, he said, "I bought them in the city. From an obscure shoe-maker the world forgot about years ago. No one'll ever know."

"You *think* no one ever will. But you don't *know*. In our position we can't afford to take chances. We just don't have enough privacy to risk arousing curiosity. We—" Suddenly, she paused, looking at him. A moment ago, he had been standing tall and straight. Now, his shoulders had slumped, and he was staring at the ground. "Poor David," she said softly. And then, "They are lovely, aren't they? Come on, we'll take them in and wrap them."

His shoulders straightened, and he looked eagerly into her eyes. "Do we have a big enough box? And enough wrapping paper?"

"I saved the box that the new sewing machine came in. That should do. Come on, we'll manage somehow."

They carried the shoes through the kitchen and into the living room. The floor was covered with bolts of calico, percale, and jersey. David cleared a space, and they set to work. The sewing-machine box proved to be large enough, but wrapping it took all of the Christmas wrapping paper they had. "Darn!" Barbara exclaimed. "Now I won't be able to wrap your present."

"And I won't be able to wrap yours."

She smiled at him across the painted patterns of Christmas bells and holly. "We'll have to put them under the tree when the other of us isn't looking. Come on out in the kitchen and have your supper—I kept it warming in the oven."

He ate at the kitchen table, and she sat opposite him, sipping coffee. The meal was delicious. All of Barbara's meals were. There was nothing she couldn't do, and everything she did, she did well. When he finished, he pushed back his chair and stood up. "I'll help you with the dishes, then we'll take the present down to the big house."

She had been looking at him all the while he ate. Now, she looked away. "Never mind the dishes. You take it down now, and I'll join you later."

"All right. I think I'll use the pickup."

After placing the box in the truck bed, he climbed into the cab, started up the motor, and drove down the winding lane that led to the big house. Once, he had lived in the big house himself—before it

had grown too small. The shutters were closed, but some of them didn't fit snugly, and in places crevices of yellow light warmed the darkness. When he came opposite the portico, he turned the pickup around and backed up to the front steps. He braked, turned off the motor, and got out. The tailgate was on a level with the portico floor. Shouldering the box, he walked over to the outside doorway. He felt proud when she opened the door. Her giant's beauty rained down around him as he stepped across the threshold. He carried the box across the outside room and set it under the big pine tree that she had trimmed. She was wearing the white dress that Barbara had made for her out of one of the surplus parachutes he had bought. It was caught around her waist in deft plaits and rose up like filmy clouds around her Junoesque breasts and fell like swirling snow around the columns of her lovely legs. The surprise and pleasure on her face was like a sunrise.

"Merry Christmas, darling," he said. "Happy Anniversary."

She knelt beside the box like a little girl. She tore away the wrap-pings with gigantic girlish fingers. When she saw the shoes she began to cry.

## V

That spring, despite David's objections, Helen had begun swimming in the lake as soon as the ice melted. The temperature of the water didn't daunt her in the least, and he began to suspect that changes other than those pertaining directly to her increase in size were taking place in her. But he didn't have a chance to give the matter much thought, for, late in April, an incident occurred that caused him to decide overnight to sell the farm and to depart for the west coast.

Thinking back later on, he realized that he had been a fool to think that the citizens of Timberville would go on respecting his electric fence and his no-trespassing signs forever. No doubt, most of them would have, but it had been inevitable from the beginning that at least one of them would not. The exception to the rule, whom Helen described as "a gray-haired scarecrow of a man" when she told the story afterward, got past the fence somehow (probably by wriggling in under it), walked through the woods, and came out on the shore of the lake just as she emerged from the water. When he saw her, he turned into a real scarecrow, and his face went from dirty white to white. Finally, it turned blue. Apparently, he had planned on doing a little poaching, for there was a .22 rifle in the crook of his right arm. But he did no poaching that day. The rifle fell to the ground, and a moment later he was off through the woods, moving at a pace that would have done credit to the little animals he had come to kill.

Helen had been more amused than embarrassed, but her unexpected reaction didn't diminish the seriousness of the situation. It was a foregone conclusion that the man would talk about what he had seen, and, while it was also a foregone conclusion that no one would believe him, curiosity would be sparked and the farm would be the center of it. Sooner or later, others would manage to get past the fence, and it would be only a matter of time before someone spotted Helen's footprints or Helen herself. The ball would start rolling for real then, and before long the newspapers would take up the story.

David had known all along that there was only one place that could provide Helen with the privacy she needed—*Bijou-de-mer*, his island in the Coral Sea. But he had put off taking her there because it represented a place of no return. He knew now that he could put off taking her there no longer.

He knew also that there was only one way the job could be accomplished without betraying her secret.

On the morning after the incident, he drove the pickup into the city, sold it, and brought tractor and a thirty-foot trailer. He had never let his chauffeur's license expire, so all he had to do to get the job on the road was to get the necessary license plates and to take out the necessary insurance. This done, he visited Gordon Rawley, gave him the keys to the big and the small houses, and told him to arrange for the sale of both farms. Then he gave Rawley a blank check and asked him to get him a master's certificate, real or forged, and to send it to him in care of the Tacoma ship-building concern of Reese and Harrison, Inc. Rawley objected at first, but at length he gave in, and David departed, saying he would get in touch with him later.

His next stop was a public phone booth. Here, he put in a call to Reese and Harrison, Inc., and by offering them a handsome bonus got them to agree to make certain changes in the Nereid and to have it ready and waiting for him a week hence. Then he climbed into the tractor and drove back to the farm.

He and Helen and Barbara spent the rest of the day loading the supplies and the other items they would need into the trailer. They piled boxes, trunks, and suit-cases against the head and secured them in place by means of heavy eye-screws and a stout clothesline. There were eight mattresses available—the six that Helen slept on and the ones on David's and Barbara's beds. They arranged them two abreast on the floor of the trailer and covered them with blankets. In the remaining space they stored the sewing machine and the bolts of dress goods.

After the evening meal, David put up brackets on the trailer's inner walls for the three 6-volt flash-lamps they had on hand, and Barbara began roasting the three large cuts of beef that remained in the deepfreeze. The brackets finished, David installed the flashlamps; then he cut several inconspicuous vents in each of the side walls. Toward dawn, Barbara dyed her hair blond, and David and Helen went down to the big house, hauled the outsize furniture outside, and burned it. By sunrise, they were on the road.

A few miles west of Bayville, David pulled into a small filling station and gassed up. Had he forgotten anything? He didn't think he had. Barbara had faked a bill of lading showing a fictitious cargo of furniture destined for a fictitious factory in Tacoma; he was traveling under his own name, and she was traveling as his wife Helen; he had a thousand dollars in cash and a check book in which he could write five-figure amounts should the occasion arise; among the supplies in the trailer was an easy-to-erect sportsman's tent in which he could sleep nights while Barbara bedded down in the commodious cab. No, he hadn't forgotten anything—he was sure he hadn't.

Nevertheless, he had. He had forgotten that when people burn their bridges behind them and take to the open road the moral traces that otherwise would have been strong enough to keep them in line sometimes snap.

Owing to the nature of his cargo, David ruled out throughways and stuck to the regular highways where it was possible, though seldom easy, to find secluded spots to spend the night. Invariably, this involved turning off the main route and driving a considerable distance down some unfrequented country road, but it enabled Helen to get the exercise she needed.

On the third night, the road he chose wound through an extensive woods to the shore of a small lake. The place was ideal, with no sign of human habitations anywhere save for a few deserted cottages on the opposite shore. After "spotting" the trailer in a clearing some distance back from the beach, he pitched the sportsman's tent in a grove of willows that came almost down to the water's edge. Despite the time of the year, Helen went for a swim, while Barbara busied herself preparing supper on the small gasoline stove they had bought on their second day on the road. They ate on the beach, in the chill wind blowing in from the north. Helen, although still wet from her swim, didn't seem to mind the cold at all; but the wind went right through David, and he saw that Barbara was shivering.

It had been a bad day for both of them. Shortly before noon, one of the inner rear tires of the trailer had blown, and he had put in a grueling hour and a half changing it, with Barbara helping as best she could. An hour later, the spare had gone, and he had done then what he should have done in the first place—driven on to the nearest truck stop. After a delay of another hour they had hit the road again, with the original tire repaired and serving as a spare, and a brand new one supplanting it. Then, less than an hour later, one of the inner rear tires of the tractor had blown, and another hour and a half had gone down the drain. Yes, it had been a very bad day.

He wondered if Barbara was as tired as he was. As discouraged and as depressed. He looked at her, but darkness had fallen and he could barely see her face. Helen had returned to the trailer by this time, and they were alone on the beach. "I think I'll build a fire," he said.

She helped him gather the wood. They piled it in front of the tent, and after the fire was going good they sat down in the doorway and warmed themselves before the flames. Glancing at her sideways, David wondered whether he liked her better as a blond. He decided that he didn't. "The first thing you're going to do when we reach *Bijou-de-mer*," he said, "is to dye your hair back to its natural color."

She stared at him. "Why am I going to do that?"

"Because you look better with it natural. Anyway, I don't like the idea of my—my—" He paused, confused.

"Go on—finish what you were saying."

He forced himself to meet her cool gaze. "It doesn't mean any-thing. It's just that I've gotten so used to living in the same house with you and so used to having you cook my meals and wash my clothes that I—I—"

"That you've come to think of me as your wife—is that it?"

Wretchedly, he stared into the fire. "It's crazy, isn't it?"

"Positively insane."

He continued to stare into the fire because he didn't want her to find out what was in his eyes. But she didn't have to find out—she already knew. He felt her cool fingers touch his cheek. "Poor David. Poor virtuous, noble David. You did see me after all."

"See you? See you when?"

"When you climbed up on the raft. I thought you hadn't, and I was furious. I've been furious ever since. Because I saw *you*."

There was a dam, and his body was its concrete and its reinforcing steel and against him tons and tons of water pressed, seeking to break him apart. "People like you are different from people like me," Barbara went on. "Your idealism sets you apart from us, and we know in our hearts that you're better than we are. And so we try to drag you down to our own level. But we're not really trying to drag you down—it only seems that way. What we're really trying to do is to lift ourselves up."

Still, he did not look at her. But he no longer needed to. For she was all around him in the night. His golden moment had been but fool's gold. This was the way it had been meant to be all along.

When he finally turned toward her, her face was so close that he could feel her warm breath on his lips. The dam broke then, and the water raged around him. The stars dissolved in the sky, and the sky opened, and all was darkness; all was light. All was love.

After that, the trip to the coast had turned into a series of tense, drawn-out days and eagerly awaited nights. From sunrise to sunset, there would be Barbara riding at his side and his self-hatred riding on his shoulders. Then there would come the time of terror—the evening hours when they would watch Helen as she walked up and down in some unfrequented canyon or gamboled in some deserted dale. Surely, looking down upon their faces she must descry their guilt, must divine what would take place later on in the darkness of the sportsman's tent while she slept in her ten-wheeled bed. But if she either descried or divined, she gave no sign.

At last, they reached Tacoma. When David found that his master's certificate had arrived, he wasted no time in getting started. After settling up with Reese and Harrison, Inc. and making arrangements with them to store the tractor and trailer in one of their unused sheds, he bought the additional supplies and equipment that would be needed on *Bijou-de-mer* and had everything delivered to the private dock where the *Nereid* was berthed. Late that same night when he was sure the dock was deserted, he drove the tractor and trailer onto it and he and Barbara and Helen loaded everything on board, including the items they had brought with them from the farm. Among the new items were two refrigerators, a deepfreeze, a washing machine, a new generator, and twenty drums of gasoline. These, Helen handled like so many toys. When the job was finished, she secreted herself in the special below-decks cabin that the ship-building concern had converted the yacht's forward section into, and David drove the tractor and trailer to the Reese and Harrison, Inc. ship-yards. After turning the outfit over to the night watchman, he returned to the dock, and by morning the *Nereid* was well on its way down the sound.

The voyage to *Bijou-de-mer* proved to be even more nerve-racking than the trip to the coast. David had a good grasp of navigation and he was sufficiently familiar with the engine room to take care of the necessary maintenance jobs, but he wasn't used to being at sea with no one except himself to turn to should anything go wrong. And then there was his omnipresent fear that Helen would find out what was going on behind her back. All that made the long days and nights tolerable were her ever longer

absences from the yacht. At first she contented herself with swimming along beside it, but as time passed she swam farther and farther out into the sun-bright wastes, some-times so far that her golden hair blended with the sparkling waves and she became invisible. David would relax then, for he knew by this time that she belonged more to the sea than she did to the land, and if it was his tour of duty, Barbara would come to him in the pilot house, and if it was her tour, he would go to her.

They raised *Bijou-de-mer* on the 20th of June. Unloading the supplies and equipment was a simple enough operation with someone like Helen around, but it took the better part of a week to get the bungalow back into shape, to install the new generator, and to assemble the Quonset hut he had bought her. After that, time faded into a dreamlike sameness of days and nights interrupted only by the periodic—and care-fully prepared for—appearances of the supply ship he had engaged to bring in fuel and fresh provisions from New Caledonia. Helen spent more and more time in the sea, and the changes that he had suspected were taking place in her began to be visible. Weeks lengthened into months; Christmas Eve came, and was duly celebrated with champagne. David wished Helen a Happy Anniversary and she wished him one back; he spent the night walking the shores of the island and she spent it swimming far out to sea. New Year's Day came round, but no one paid any attention to it, and after a while it went away.

At length, the rainy season began.

## VI

It had seemed to David as he sat in the bungalow that day that the rain had been falling for centuries. Raising his eyes from the book he was reading, he looked through the window and out over the misted rice paddies to where the *Nereid* lay at anchor in the harbor. Beyond the yacht, the curtain of the rain became im-penetrable, but in his mind he could see through the curtain and out to sea—far, far out to where Helen swam, her hair golden on the gray, pock-marked waves, She was as much a part of the sea now as were the dolphins that some-times romped around her, as were the flying fish that sometimes skimmed the waves of her wake; as was the plankton that now constituted her only food. She had found her world, Helen had; but he had yet to discover what kind of a world it was.

He returned his attention to his book. It was a book on giants and he had brought it with him from the states, but for all the times he had read it, it had told him next to nothing. The giants and the giantesses it dealt with were mythological giants, and the giantess he was concerned with was real.

According to history, there had been no giants at all, but according to legend, there had been many. There was Poseidon's son, Polyphemus, whom Odysseus had blinded. There were the Titans, whom Zeus—presumably at least—had hurled into the sunless abyss of Tartarus. And there were the giants of the Asgard pantheon.

But in the last analysis, what was history? As far as the dim and distant past was concerned, wasn't it a sophisticated interpretation of the very legends it pretended to disdain? Who could say categorically which elements of those legends were true and which of them were not? Maybe there really had been a race of Titans, and maybe the forces of nature, as symbolized by Zeus, had destroyed them in some way. It was even possible that they hadn't been destroyed, but had returned to the sea. If it was going to be argued that all life originally came from the sea, then it could also be argued that all life eventually returned to the sea.

But if Helen was a modern-day Titan who had somehow been washed ashore as a child, how had she been able to survive on land?

"Why don't you give up, David? If she doesn't know what she is, how do *you* expect to find out?"

He laid the book aside and looked over to the couch where Barbara was lying on her side, watching him. "I suppose you're right."

"Of course I'm right." She sat up, swung her bare feet to the floor, and slipped them into slender sandals. She was wearing a white sunsuit that she had made herself. Her skin was dark from the sun—coffee-colored almost—and her hair—dark-brown once again—was as recalcitrant as ever. "I feel like walking."

"In the rain?"

"Is there somewhere else to walk?"

He was silent. She came over and stood by his chair and looked down into his eyes. "She's been gone a long while this time, has-n't she?"

"Since yesterday morning."

"I wonder where she goes."

"God knows," David said.

"I think her mind is changing, too—don't you?"

"Why do you say that?"

"Because of the way she looks at us. So coldly. So clinically." Barbara shuddered. "It's almost as though she knows, and is trying to figure out what makes pygmies like us tick."

"She doesn't know," he said angrily. "She doesn't even suspect!"

"No, I suppose not. But she frightens me just the same. I don't think she's quite human any more. Those little slits she's developing on the sides of her neck; that strange luster her skin is taking on; the way she spends almost all her time in the sea . . ."

David stood up. "You said you felt like walking. Let's walk then."

She went over to the door and stepped out onto the thatch-roofed verandah. He got their raincoats and followed. The rain sound was louder here. "I don't want a raincoat," she said. "I get wetter with one on than I do with one off. Wear yours, if you like."

She descended the verandah steps and stood in the rain. After a moment's hesitation, he cast the raincoats aside and joined her. The rain was warm. It soaked into his hair, penetrated his slacks and shirt. It ran down his face and neck. He tasted it on his lips. Some of the tautness he had known for days departed from him, and he felt almost carefree.

They crossed a small bridge that spanned one of the many brooks that wound clown from the hills. The brook was a muddy torrent now, rushing pell-mell to the sea, and the once-green hills had drawn gray sheets of mist around their shoulders. Barbara rounded the Quonset hut and started across the embankment toward the beach, David just behind her. The paddies were riotous with rice gone wild, and in some places the lush growth was so high that he could have reached out and touched it. The fertility evoked by the rain was almost tangible.

Erosion had narrowed the once-wide walkway to a precarious path, and when they were halfway across Barbara lost her footing. David grabbed her to keep her from falling, and in the process lost his footing too. For a moment they clung together, fighting to regain their balance; then, the battle lost, they went tumbling down the steep slope into the knee-deep muddy water. Gasping, soaked to the skin, they struggled to their feet. Barbara began to laugh. Presently, he joined her. It was the first time he had laughed for months.

There was a smear of mud on her cheek. He wiped it off, left a larger one. Her hair clung in dark streaks to her face and neck, and her once-immaculate sunsuit was unrecognizable. "You look like a drowned rat," he told her.

"It's worth it to hear you laugh again. Besides which, you look like one yourself."

They scrambled and clawed their way back up the slope and arrived on the path muddier and more bedraggled than they had been before. "It's me for a dip," Barbara cried when they reached the beach, and running through the brief shallows, she plunged into the water, clothes and all.

David followed. The water was warmer than the rain. He surfaced so close to her that her wet hair clung to his face. He kissed her, and they clung together with all their might, the rain pouring down upon them and then the waters of the sea rising above them as their interlocked bodies pulled them down. She broke free from his arms then, and waded through the shallows to the shore and began running along the beach in the foreground of one of the coconut groves. At length, she plunged into the grove and disappeared.

Heart pounding, he stumbled after her. In the wet and dripping underbrush that grew between the neglected rows of palms he looked wildly around for her. He did not see her, but she had left a trail. Her sandals first; then her sun-suit . . . her underthings last of all. She was waiting for him in a little clearing in

the brush. The rain made pattering sounds on the palm fronds as they kissed. The wet grass seemed to reach up and drag them down, and the sound of their breathing sub-merged the sound of the rain.

A long while later, when her breathing seemed to cease, he raised his head and looked clown into her face. She was staring straight upward, and her eyes were filled with terror. At first when he followed her gaze he saw nothing but the palm fronds that canopied their bower. Then he saw that the fronds had been part-ed and that someone was peering down through the opening. He saw the Brobdingnagian face then, and the enormous azure eyes. The sky seemed to lower; the thunder of the leitmotiv rolled awesomely in from the sea. And then the fronds fell back into place and the face disappeared.

Night had fallen by the time they got back to the hill. The Quonset hut was empty, and they knew that Helen had swum back out to sea.

This time, she did not return.

## VII

*The large and gigantic, though very compatible with the sublime, is contrary to the beautiful. It is impossible to suppose a giant the object of love. When we let our imaginations loose in romance, the ideas we naturally annex to that size are those of tyranny, cruelty, injustice, and everything horrid and abominable. We paint the giant ravaging the country, plundering the innocent travel-ler, and afterwards gorged with his half-living flesh: such are Polyphemus, Cacus, and others, who make so great a figure in ro-mance and heroic poems. The event we attend to with the great-est satisfaction is their defeat and death.*

—Edmund Burke: *On the Sub-lime and Beautiful*

David looked down at his hands. The heat of the flames had dried them, and the glistening drops were gone.

He remembered the cup of cof-fee he had poured and left for-gotten on the kitchen stove, and he forced himself to return to the memoried room. The coffee was cold now, but he didn't bother to pour another cupful. Instead, he carried the cup into the living room and set it on the mantle—and promptly forgot it again.

He looked through the living room window, saw Barbara stand-ing on the cliff and gazing out to sea. Snow slanted down around her and the wind whipped her coat. Even in the cottage he could hear the crashing of the waves on the little beach at the cliff's base.

Involuntarily, his eyes moved from Barbara to the small howitzer that crouched beside her. *And David chose him five smooth stones . . . and his sling was in his hand . . .*

He looked away from the win-dow, looked down into the flames. He resumed his painstaking search of his soul.

Had he been right in contact-ing the Pacific Fleet when he learned that it was in the vicinity of *Bijou-de-mer*? Granted, the search that he had asked the ad-miral to make would have been made anyway, but the fact still remained that for the second time in the space of three days he had betrayed the woman he loved.

He had expected to have a hard time convincing the admiral that she even existed, but it turned out that the admiral already knew about her. He showed David a picture after summoning him on board the flagship and listening to his story. "Is this your wife, Mr. Stuart?" he asked.

David stared at the picture. It was a blow-up of a high-altitude aerial photograph and it showed Helen lying on *Bijou-de-mer's* coral beach clad in one of the huge sunsuits Barbara had made for her. "Where—?" he began.

"Several days ago, one of our pilots took a number of high-alti-tude shots while he was on a prac-tice mission. That's a blown up version of one of them. At first when I looked at it and saw the woman lying on the beach, I did-n't think too much about it. I simply took it for granted that the island was covered with kunai and that her dimensions were perfectly normal. Then I saw that what I'd instinctively taken for grass wasn't grass at all, but trees, and it dawned on me that I was looking at a photograph of a giant. I didn't want to believe it, but photographs like that don't lie, and I had to believe



it. Now, you've told me that you think she's running away—although you haven't told me why you think so—and you've asked me to find her. Suppose I succeed—what then?"

"I'll see to it that she returns to *Bijou-de-mer*," David said. "And you'll see to it, I hope, that the whole thing gets as little publicity as possible."

"But what if she doesn't want to return to *Bijou-de-mer*?"

"I'll talk to her. I'm sure she'll understand that there's nothing else she can do."

"And after she returns?"

"Why, she'll go on living there for the rest of her life. Where else can she live? Where else can she find the privacy she has to have?"

"I'm afraid it's not quite that simple any more, Mr. Stuart. Even if I could guarantee you complete secrecy in the matter, which I can't, it wouldn't do you much good. The cat's already out of the bag. Just this morning I received a report that the crew of a New Zealand freighter sighted a deep-sea monster which they described as a 'giant mermaid with legs'. You can be sure that the item will find its way into the newspapers and you can also be sure that there'll be other sightings—unless your wife returns to the unfrequented waters in the neighborhood of your island. But in the long run, even that may not help you. You may find yourself with more publicity on your hands than the creators of the Cardiff Giant ever dreamed of, in which case your island will provide your wife with about as much privacy as Grand Central Station."

"Then I'll just have to find somewhere else for her to live. The important thing now is to find *her*."

"If we do find her, you'll be notified immediately, of course. But since there's no precedent for this sort of thing, I can't advise you as to what will happen afterwards. But if she's your wife as you claim, you certainly ought to have a lot to say in the matter." The admiral leaned across his desk. "Mr. Stuart, if what you've told me is true, you've lived with this situation for a long time. Do you have any idea *how* your wife could have turned into a giant?"

David remembered his tentative theory about the Titans, but he didn't voice it because to have done so would have been tantamount to admitting that he didn't think Helen was completely human. "No sir," he said, "I'm afraid I have no idea at all."

In the weeks and months that followed, Helen was sighted again and again, and the secret that David had gone to such lengths to keep came gradually into the public domain. The various specialists whom he and Helen had consulted were ferreted out by newsmen and interviewed again and again. One of them stated that Helen couldn't possibly have grown as large as the reports indicated for the simple reason that her bones would have been incapable of sustaining that much additional weight. Another of them said that it was ridiculous to suppose that her bones wouldn't have undergone compensatory changes. The poacher who had seen her swimming in the little lake stepped to the fore and told his version of the incident again and again, adding a little to it each time. His ghosted story, "I Saw the Sea Monster in a Lake" appeared in newspapers throughout the world, and he himself appeared on "I Know A Secret", "Truth To Tell", and, when it was discovered that he had an eidetic memory and could recite the novels of Harold Bell Wright word for word, on "Name Your Category".

Australia joined in the search. So did France, Holland, and Japan. Helen was sighted off Koli Point as she swam between the Florida Islands and Guadalcanal. She was sighted off the coast of Vella Lavella. She was sighted in the Bismark Archipelago. She was sighted between the Gilbert and Ellice Islands. But all of the sightings were unofficial, and by the time the various search forces arrived on the scene she was no longer in the vicinity.

Knowing how hopeless it would be to try to find her with nothing but a yacht at his disposal, David remained on the island with Barbara and followed the search on radio. At first there was no discernible pattern in the sightings, but at length one became apparent. Even after he spotted it, however, he didn't realize its implications until, several weeks after she had been sighted south of Tuamotu, she was seen in Drake Passage; and the real truth didn't dawn on him until he heard that she had been seen in the Strait of Magellan.

Hating *Bijou-de-mer* and all it stood for, she was heading for the only other home that was still accessible to her—the cottage on the Connecticut coast. And she was letting herself be sighted so that

he would know. So that he would be there waiting for her when she swam in from the sea.

He would not disappoint her.

In September, he and Barbara left *Bijou-de-mer* and set their course for Santa Cruz. Arriving there, they hired a crew, and then they began the voyage home. Again, David decided to go by way of Tacoma. There was no hurry, for it would take Helen till December at least to reach the cottage. Probably she wouldn't get there much before Christmas. The whole truth dawned on him then, and left him stricken. She wasn't making the fantastic journey just to meet him at the cottage—she was making it meet him there on their fourth wedding anniversary.

He began to hate the ground he walked on.

The *Nereid* reached Tacoma early in October. On the same day it docked, a news story that climaxed all previous accounts of the "sightings" appeared on the front page of every newspaper in the country. An American whaling ship had sighted Helen in the South Atlantic and dispatched a catcher to intercept her. She had attacked the catcher and overturned it—entirely without provocation according to the report—and when the factory ship had come to the rescue she had surface-dived and disappeared from sight. But that wasn't the worst of it. Two of the catcher's crew were missing, and as yet no trace of them had been found.

What had happened was quite clear—if you believed what everyone was saying. "Goliatha" had carried the two men into the deep with her and devoured them.

Yes, she had a giant's name now as well as a giant's reputation. And a thrilled and delighted audience. Never had a nation's morale been so high; never had neighbor felt kinder toward neighbor. For now there was a common enemy whom all could hate to their hearts' content—a monster whose eventual "defeat and death" all could "attend to with the greatest satisfaction."

As for David, he was horrified. He was doubly horrified when he learned that Congress, anticipating Goliatha's capture, was appropriating funds to build a special prison where she would be held for trial and a special court house where justice would be meted out to her. Once again society had been affronted, and once again society was out to exact an eye for an eye. And in this instance, revenge would be obtained whether the accused was convicted or not. The court house would take on the overtones of a zoo and the trial would destroy her as utterly as an atomic bomb would have. Society was a far more fearsome giant than the giant whose blood is thirsted for.

There was only one thing to do. Like all men, David had to kill the thing he loved.

He had not worn his scarlet cloak when he and Barbara traveled incognito from Washington to Connecticut. He had not worn it when he secretly arranged for the purchase and the emplacement of the howitzer.

He did not wear it now.

Had the wind spoken his name? He listened. "Da . . . vid! Da . . . vid!"

He stepped over to the window and looked out. Barbara beckoned to him frantically, then turned and pointed out to sea.

The moment had come.

Numbly, he got into his shoes and his galoshes. Then he donned his mackinaw and plunged hatless into the wind-slanted snow. At the cliff's edge, he stopped and looked out to sea.

He saw the gulls first—great clouds of them circling in the lowering sky. Then he saw the dolphins leaping from the leaden waves. Finally, he saw the golden kelp-beds of her hair.

He dropped to his knees beside the howitzer. *This day hath the Lord delivered thee into mine hand . . .*

The leitmotiv sounded once again, grew in volume as she waded in from the sea. She seemed made of shining gold, and golden garments that matched her golden skin adorned her breasts and loins. A golden tiara crowned her golden head, and her golden hair fell down around her shoulders in glistening golden strands. She grew out of the water till she stood lighthouse-tall in the morning—fair as the moon, clear as the sun . . . terrible as an army with banners.

She halted a dozen yards from the cliff. A trident gleamed in one of her golden hands. Behind her,

dolphins leaped. Above her circled the gulls. David looked upon her face. It was different now. It was frightening in a way. But her eyes still held the blueness of a September sky and her mouth still knew the softness of a summer night.

Her voice, too, was as gentle as he remembered it. "You needn't worry about me any more, David—I've found my own kind."

His sling and stones forgotten, he straightened to his feet. "Then the Titans *did* return to the sea!"

"It may have been the Titans. It all happened so long ago that we aren't sure who our ancestors were ourselves. But we know that originally they lived on land. When the waters began to rise—probably during one of the glacial retreats—they must have thought that everything would be submerged. Anyway, they adapted themselves to live beneath the sea, and once they'd done so, they couldn't re-adapt themselves to live above it."

"Then how were you able to live on land?"

"I'm an atavism—a throwback to the days when my ancestors were still in the process of adjusting themselves to their new way of life. It took them centuries, and at first heredity didn't function. Children had to be brought up on land and allowed to adapt themselves gradually. Only when they reached adulthood were they ready to live beneath the sea. Just as I'm ready now. I would have died the same day I was born if my parents hadn't put me on land. They wrapped me in seaweed and held me above the surface of the sea, and as soon as they could do so without being seen they swam into shore and left me where someone would be sure to find me. After that, all they could do was hope that I'd survive till I reached maturity. I was less than a day old when my foster father found me. Just a baby. We're different from land people. We reach puberty two years after we're born, adolescence four years later, and adulthood eight years later. And the older we become, the faster we grow. I'm the first atavism to crop up in thousands of years, but there used to be lots of them. That's why your folklore is so full of giants."

David looked out over the gray -snow-pocked wastes that spread beyond her golden shoulders. He shivered. "But the cold," he said. "The darkness and the terrible pressure. How can you possibly live at the bottom of the sea?"

"We don't live at the bottom. We live on the tops of guyots and on continental shelves, and in caverns in the walls of the submarine canyons that cut back in from the continental slopes. And it's not so different from living on land as you might think. We have underwater farms where we raise some kinds of algae for food, and underwater factories where we process other kinds and make clothes out of it. Most of us live in small communities, but on some of the larger guyots there are regular cities. It's a good life, and a safe one. We have two hereditary enemies—the white shark and the tiger whale—but they're no match for us when we're armed, especially today. Our ancestors used to make their tridents out of wooden masts or ribs, and sometimes they broke; but we have much better materials to choose from, and ours never break."

David looked deep into the giant blue eyes. "Did you attack the whaling crew?" he asked.

"Only because I had to, David. They were trying to harpoon me, and they would have killed me if I hadn't upset their boat. When I dived afterwards, two of them were caught in the suction and pulled down. I've felt terrible about it ever since."

She reached into a golden pouch that hung at her side, withdrew a tiny object, and laid it at Barbara's feet. Barbara picked it up. It was Helen's wedding ring. "I was hurt at first," Helen said, "and I wanted to get as far away from *Bijou-de-mer* as I could. But after a while I got over it, and I saw that it was only natural that the two of you should have fallen in love. So I came here, hoping you'd guess where I was going and come to meet me." She looked at Barbara. "Good by, little sister," she said. The enormous azure eyes came softly to rest on David's face. "Good by, sweet gentle David."

She turned, and the gulls circled higher. The dolphins leaped above the waves. The waters rose around her as she waded into the sea.

"Don't go yet," David called. "Don't go yet—please!"

She did not pause. The waters rose higher, swirled around her waist. He no longer loved her—he knew that now. Not in the way he had loved her before. But he loved her in a different—perhaps a nobler—way, and seeing her walk all alone into the vast and lonely wastes of the sea was more than he

could bear. So he called again: "Don't go yet! Don't go yet —*please!*"

She turned then, and looked back at him. She smiled, and shook her head. There was sadness in the smile, but there was happiness, too. A strange, secret happiness . . . As he watched, the waters near her swirled and eddied; then they parted, and a great golden head appeared. Golden shoals of shoulders, cyclopean arms . . . In a great surge of foam, her new mate rose out of the sea beside her, and she turned and looked up into his great blue eyes. His love for her and her love for him shone through the slanting snow. Together, they began swimming out to sea.

The dolphins leaped, the gulls wheeled. The wind doubled its strength and the snow came down in wild and furious whiteness. Just before they dived they rose high out of the waves, and a single ray of sunlight stabbed down through a sudden chasm in the clouds and burnished their gleaming bodies into blinding brightness; and then the ray was gone and the brightness was no more, and nothing broke the surface of the sea except the leaping dolphins and the pock-marks of the falling snow.

Tears were running down Barbara's cheeks. David put his arm around her shoulders. "It's all right now," he said. "Finally she's free."

He looked out over the vastness, over the sweep of wave and trough. He remembered the canvas she had painted in the heyday of their love—the eerie palace and the slender towers, the strange rays and the filmy phosphorescences and the piscine birds. It was like a line of Shelley's almost. "In what cavern of the *deep*," he whispered, "will thy pinions close now?"