

## NOVELETTE

***Having mastered the Sea of Time and a king's daughter, he faced an even greater challenge!***

# GIRL SATURDAY ROBERT F. YOUNG

**H**IS first name was Robinson his last should have been Crusoe. It wasn't though—it was Feeney. His friends called him Robin for short.

When the chronocane came barreling out of the pea-soup mists of the sea of time he was hanging from the fantail of the *Long Long Ago* in a magnetic bo's'n's seat, overhauling the excursion ship's auxiliary drive. The minute he saw what he was in for he jammed the fountain pen-sized energizer he had just removed into his jacket pocket—an instant later he was lifted from his perch and borne away on a tumultuous tide of bluenesses and blurs and cinnamon-colored convolutions.

Meanwhile, the *Long Long Ago*, by that strange quirk of fate for which time-storms are noted, sailed on unscathed.

Confronted with what appeared to be imminent death, Robin sought to soften it by thinking of how dirt-poor he was, how dirt-poor he had always been and how dirt-poor he probably always would have been. But the countermeasure proved to be unnecessary, for the chronocane turned out to have a heart as well as an eye and, after whisking him this when and that, deposited him unharmed upon the shore of an ISLE.

Or, to break down the acronym, an Integrated Superficial Lenticular Ephemeron.

Robin deduced the nature of his new surroundings even before he glanced up at the sky and saw that the sun occupied a dozen different positions at once, each only slightly removed from the others but combining with them to give an overall effect of a much larger body. The phenomenon resulted, as Robin well knew, from the orbital variations of Earth since its formation and from the presence of more than one latitude.

Getting to his feet, he surveyed the scene in greater detail. Strictly speaking, the shore on which the storm had deposited him was nothing of the sort. It was merely the outer edge of the place-time he happened to be inhabiting. Beyond it the sea stretched endlessly away somewhat in the manner of the upper surface of a vast cloud bank. In a way, being on an ISLE was like being in heaven and, as a matter of fact, all Robin had to do to get back to Earth was to jump. But the trouble was he didn't know where he would land—or when. Possibly in Mycenae, circa 1500 B.C.—possibly in Times Square, circa 1950. Most likely in the middle of the Pacific Ocean, circa it-didn't-make-any-difference.

But perhaps things weren't as bad as they seemed. In his jacket pocket reposed a time-drive energizer that needed nothing more in the way of repairs than a good cleaning, and there was an excellent chance that one or more of the place-times constituting the ISLE might contain the materials for a time raft. True, the ISLE might begin deteriorating any moment but then again it might hang on for ages.

**H**E TURNED his back on the sea and took a good look at the place-time he was occupying. It consisted of an unbroken plain about a mile wide and a mile and a half long. Spears and shields were scattered over the immediate foreground. Examining them, he tied in the former with the ancient Greek poleis and the latter with the ancient Persian Empire. Unquestionably he was standing on the Plain of Marathon, the *mise en scene* of the historic battle in which the Athenians and the Plataeans had put to

rout an invading army that outnumbered them ten to one.

Beyond the plain, in lieu of the historic heights, rose a big green hill that Robin recognized instantly. It was Hill 29, the site of Captain "Idaho" Murphy's famous stand during World War III.

To Robin's left the plain was bordered by the sea; to his right it gave way to two other place-times. One of them—a narrow strip of forest—formed a continuation of the littoral, while the other—a wide expanse of tree-dotted countryside containing a number of grim-looking castles—was conterminous to the plain and Hill 29.

He explored the forest first.

It consisted of first-growth maples, beeches, oaks and elms. They were tall and straight, the aisles between their boles virtually free from sunlight. Robin noticed a slight drop in temperature, but this was due solely to the shielding foliage. Each place-time had its own sun, but owing to their proximity they functioned as one and as a result the ISLE's components received equal amounts of warmth and light.

He came at length to an Amerindian village of twenty Iroquoian long-houses. He decided that the place-time was from stone age North America and constituted the scene of an intertribal battle that, while it may have eluded history, lingered on in the unconscious minds of those whose ancestors had been involved in it.

He entered one of the long-houses and looked around. It was uninhabited of course (an ISLE's endemic life forms were limited to meiofauna), but it contained a sizable cache of Iroquoian corn. However, he was certain the ISLE possessed more appetizing fare than desiccated corn, and didn't take any of it with him.

He spent the remainder of the day (according to his wristwatch-calendar, it was Saturday) and the better part of the next exploring his island home. All told, it comprised twelve place-times. He had already identified three of them the Plain of Marathon, circa 490 B.C.; the Amerindian Forest, circa the sixth-century A.D.; and Hill 29, circa 1998 A.D.. He mentally catalogued the castle-haunted countryside adjoining the first three as King Arthur's Kingdom, circa 550 A.D., and the rest as follows: Coventry, circa the time of Lady Godiva's ride; Minos, circa 2,000 B.C.; the Rubicon, circa 49 B.C.; Grendel Land (i.e., the scene of Beowulf's encounter with the monster), circa 500 A.D.; *Yasnava Polyana* (Tolstoy's estate), circa 1908 A.D.; the first MacDougall's hamburger stand, circa 1972 A.D.; Generous George's Used-car Lot, circa 1974 A.D. (Robin would have been at a loss concerning these two if it hadn't been for the self-explanatory signs over their entrances); and Futureville, circa sometime in the far future (he *was* at a loss concerning this one and only assumed that the figure-nine shaped structures he glimpsed in the distance constituted a community).

He drew a map in his mind for future reference.

In most cases only a representative section of the place-time was present. However, Generous George's Used-car Lot, MacDougall's and *Yasnava Polyana* appeared to be intact.

The Used-car Lot delighted him. Not only did it adjoin MacDougall's, making for convenience in the way of meals, but the cars parked in it would provide him with the materials he needed to build a raft. In addition, many of them contained tools and in one of them—a beat-up Chevy van—he found an acetylene torch and tanks and a small electric arc-welder.

*Yasnava Polyana* afforded the most direct route to the sea, but it was heavily forested in places and he decided that when the time came he would launch the raft from the Plain of Marathon. This would involve passing through part of King Arthur's Kingdom, but the terrain didn't look too bad and was definitely a better bet than that of Minos.

**L**IKE most such lots, Generous George's was strung with overhead wires from which hung little plastic pennants of various colors. In one corner stood a small wooden structure in which were an office and a lavatory. The former contained a desk, two chairs, a collapsible cot and a miscellany of other

items. The wall next to the door held a metal fuse box. It was connected through quinque-dimensional space to the same source of power that supplied the original, and the lot's lights—four overhead self-activating fluorescent units—would go on as soon as darkness fell. For the same reason the taps in the lavatory and those in MacDougall's dispensed running water, while the two fuel pumps just within the lot's entrance dispensed regular and premium gasoline.

Robin rigged up an outdoor shower and connected it to the cold-water tap in the lavatory by means of heater-hose lengths commandeered from several of the cars. After washing up he went to work. To obtain parts he tore down a 1970 Buick Riviera, a 1972 Chevrolet Bel Air and a 1969 Ford Torino. The job took him five days. On the sixth—his eighth day on the ISLE—he went prospecting for quartz.

It was almost dark before, high on the seaward side of Hill 29, he found the kind he was looking for. After mining the small amount he needed for the time-drive he pocketed it and turned to leave. As he did so he happened to glance out to sea. He gasped. A ship was approaching the ISLE.

As time-ships go it was not a large one and its time vanes—or sails—seemed disproportionately wide. Obviously it had just surfaced or he would have noticed it before. As he watched, it touched the edge of the Plain of Marathon and came to a halt.

ISLEs, owing to their ephemeral nature and to the navigational problems they gave rise to, were generally avoided like the plague. Consequently Robin found it hard to believe his eyes. Nevertheless, they were giving it to him straight. As he stared, the forward nacelle opened and seven passengers and/or time sailors disembarked. One of them appeared to be a prisoner.

## II

**N**O ONE living in Robinson Feeney's day really knew what an ISLE was, but there were plenty of theories making the rounds and one of them—the one Robin himself subscribed to—has turned out to be substantially correct.

It proposed that the collective unconscious is tied in with the space-time continuum and that when any given race memory becomes firmly enough established it materializes in the form of a "place-time" on the so-called surface of the so-called temporal sea. -By the same token, when the race memory behind any given place-time lapses for any reason, that place-time deteriorates and disappears and, because of the physical factors involved, the placer times that have combined with it to form an ISLE deteriorate and disappear also. Hence, the longevity of an ISLE is arbitrarily determined by the longevity of the weakest of its components.

The creative process that results in a place-time can be likened to a projector throwing an image on a screen, the projector being the mass memory of the human race at any given time and the screen being the surface of the temporal sea. Granted, the analogy is an oversimplification, but it is only by oversimplifying complex phenomena such as the one here involved that we can conceive of them at all. Therefore, although we are dealing here with five dimensions and the make-believe room in which we have placed our make-believe projector and screen comprises only four (the fourth being time as it is generally understood), the analogy still enables us to obtain some idea of what a placetime—and by extension, an ISLE is all about. But it must be remembered that what we are visualizing in four dimensions actually involves five and that our screen encompasses yesterday, today and tomorrow and is not subject to the same laws that govern our earthly existence. And it must also be remembered that our projector represents only one of a long line of similar projectors that stretches from the remote past through the present and on into the far future.

These qualifications make a number of things clear: (1) how a place-time can seemingly have only one surface and yet be dimensionally identical to the original; (2) why chronology proper plays no part in the grouping together of place-times into ISLEs; (3) why many of the historic locales that men still remember do not exist on the so-called surface of the so-called temporal sea:

Finally, the incongruities that confront us when we view an ISLE are the product not of the ISLE but of our preconditioning. Were we to view such phenomena solely with respect to the similarity of their

components' seasons, all the while keeping in mind that geography is a three-dimensional concept, these incongruities would not exist. Suffice to say, whatever it is that causes place-times to unite into ISLEs, once the union is consummated the resultant montage is cemented by a twenty-four-hour cycle of day and night that repeats itself over and over until the ISLE's demise. And time, while it passes in one sense, does not, in another, pass at all.

**UNDERSTANDABLY** Robin was filled with joy at the sight of the ship. However, his joy didn't overwhelm his natural caution and, instead of running down the side of Hill 29 and across the plain to welcome the new arrivals, he blended himself against the trunk of a nearby tree and sat down to watch.

The landing party had set out single file in the direction of the Amerindian Forest. Some members carried boxes, others sacks. The one Robin had taken for a prisoner carried nothing—even so, he seemed to be having trouble keeping up with the others. Possibly because he was little more than half their size.

When the party was halfway to the forest someone on the ship closed the forward nacelle—and a moment later the ship backed away from the ISLE, extended its sails and sank out of sight.

Crestfallen, Robin stared at where it had been. The good old Feeney luck was working overtime.

But he was certain that the ship would be back in the near future to pick up those it had left here. Perhaps in the meantime he could make their acquaintance and assure a berth for himself on the trip back to the present. First, however, he would do a little spy work and find out what they were doing on the ISLE.

He watched the landing party make its way single-file across the plain. By the time it reached the forest and disappeared among the trees the sun was low in the west—however, he decided to wait a while longer before leaving the hill. Dusk came. He saw smoke rising above the distant treetops and knew that the newcomers had made camp. Descending the hillside diagonally into King Arthur's Kingdom, he made his way across the ancient English countryside to his destination. By now night had fallen and the sky was crammed with stars. Literally crammed with them, because it contained not only the visible stars of more than one latitude, but the visible stars as they appeared from the various place-times. Like the sun, the gibbous moon that presently rose in the east occupied a dozen different places at once.

Entering the forest, Robin saw firelight flickering among the trees up ahead and he made his way cautiously toward its source. At length he found himself on the outskirts of the Amerindian village. Creeping closer and peering around the corner of one of the long-houses, he saw that the fire had been built in front of the largest dwelling. It was not the one he had entered earlier and he wished now that it had been, for he had a hunch that it was the new arrivals' headquarters and that this was far from the first time they had visited the ISLE.

Suspended over the fire on a makeshift tripod was a big black kettle and from it rose steam. Within the circle of firelight six men were grouped around a glittering pile of finger rings, bracelets, amulets, necklaces, brooches, earrings and various other items, arguing in loud voices.

Tied to a tree on the other side of the fire was a girl.

She had copper-colored hair and amber eyes. Her features were at once delicate and strong. Her eyebrows made Robin think of swallows flying south.

Her dress appeared to be silk and was either ultra modern or ultra ancient. Golden in color, it fell all the way to her golden-slipped feet. In a number of places it had been torn, as though ornaments had been ripped from it. Returning his gaze to the pile of jewelry, Robin saw several iridescent sequins.

Slowly the truth dawned on him. At the time of her capture she had been wearing all those jewels and all those ornaments!

He studied her captors. Their speech seemed to consist of grunts and squeals. He was unable to make out what they were saying. The men averaged about seven and a half feet in height, were swarthy of skin and wore bloomerlike trousers that hung in tatters around their knees. Their black hair was long, unkempt, and kept falling over their eyes. Their faces were either clean-shaven or naturally

hairless—probably the latter. They wore plastic rings in their noses and their teeth, either naturally discolored or artificially blackened, were filed to points. Each had a long cutlass stuck through his belt.

Buccaneers? Cannibals? Hillbillies? Robin found himself thinking of them as "Buccannibillies."

Identifying their civilization was something else again. One thing was for certain—they were not from his. Nor were they from any of the past ones he had come into contact with. Perhaps they came from the future. Impossible. Contact had never been made with the future.

The men had apparently decided to postpone dividing their captive's jewelry till later in the evening. They were now clustered around the fire and, as Robin watched, first one and then another reached into the steaming kettle, fished out a large chunk of meat and devoured it in two or three bites. The procedure was repeated again and again, to the accompaniment of loud lip-smacking and deep grunts.

The captive looked on from contemptuous eyes. Presently one of the men—an eight-foot giant with tangled hair hanging over his face—fished out a piece of meat and took it to the tree where she was tied. After pinching her cheek he held the meat against her mouth. She almost bit his finger off.

Yelling, he raised his hand as though to strike her. But the hand never descended. The scathing look she gave him was so intense and so utterly devoid of fear that he turned and slunk away.

But her reprieve was temporary at best and Robin knew it.

He sighed. The last thing in the world he wanted was a Girl Friday. Nevertheless, he was shortly going to have one.

### III

**L**EAVING the village behind him, he hurried to the edge of the forest. He hauled all the dead wood he could find out onto the plain and piled it into a large pyre. He applied a match, waited till the flames got going good, then began stomping around it, giving vent to series of what he thought were pretty good Indian war whoops. He kept up his howling for about five minutes, then reentered the forest.

He took a circuitous course back to the village, careful to make as little noise as possible. The little he did make was presently drowned out by the girl's captors as they crashed through the underbrush on a direct route to the plain.

He had gambled on their leaving only one of their number behind and this was exactly what they had done. The man turned out to be none other than the Good Samaritan who had offered the girl part of his supper. He was holstering his courage with the contents of a large jug and eyeing the girl covetously through his hair.

Robin found a good-sized rock and clobbered him on the back of the head. He dropped the jug and toppled like a felled tree.

Robin borrowed his cutlass long enough to cut the girl's plastic bonds. Disbelief had come into her eyes when he had felled her captor. Now hope replaced it. But she didn't collapse into Robin's arms with a profound sigh of thanksgiving as he half expected her to—instead she ran over to the pile of loot and began slipping amulets onto her arms, bracelets onto her wrists and rings onto her fingers.

Robin seized her arm and tried to pull her to her feet. She pushed him away.

"Begone!" she said in Anatolian.

Anatolian was the language of ancient Asia Minor. Foremost among the countries where it had been spoken was Lydia.

A bell began ringing in Robin's mind, but as yet it wasn't loud enough for him to get its import.

Again he seized the girl's arm, and this time he succeeded in pulling her to her feet.

"Do you want to be here when they get back and have them tie you to that tree again?" he demanded.

Her amber eyes widened in surprise at his easy familiarity with her language. They also snapped.

"I will not leave without my jewels! Release me this instant!"

He did so. "We'll take them with us, but there's no time for you to put them on."

He removed his jacket, spread it on the ground and piled the rest of the jewels and ornaments on it.

Then he brought the ends together, stood up and slung the makeshift sack over his shoulder. "Come on," he said, and set out in the direction of King Arthur's Kingdom.

**T**HIS time the girl obeyed him—for the very good reason, no doubt, that he was carrying her ornaments and her jewels—and together they hurried through the forest. From the plain came the shouts of her captors, but there was no indication as yet that they had discovered they had been faked out of position.

"What's your name?" Robin asked the girl presently, as they left the forest behind them.

He told her his.

Almost a full minute passed. Then, just as he was beginning to think she wasn't going to tell him, she said, "Manijeh."

"That's a pretty name. Where are you from?"

Silence.

"All right—don't tell me."

"I am from Sardis."

Sardis. Again the bell began to ring, but still not loudly enough.

"Why did those men capture you?"

"They did not tell me, so I do not know. Not only do they act like pigs, they talk like swine. Except one, who spoke as I do—but him they left behind.

Robin helped her across a little brook, careful not to hold her arm a single second longer than was absolutely necessary.

"Why do you *think* they captured you?"

"To extort riches from my father, of course."

"Your father must be very—" Robin began—and stopped. While he and Manijeh had been talking the shouts of her captors had faded away. Now the voices had started up again, much closer at hand, and he knew her escape had been discovered. "Hurry," he told Manijeh. "They'll start looking for us now."

He led the way at a brisk dogtrot to Generous George's Used-car Lot. The fluorescent units had come on, creating an oasis of brightness in the night. The paleness of Manijeh's face as she followed him into the lot attested to her wonderment and fear, but she said nothing.

He took her to the office, told her to stay inside, then ran over to the parts bank he had accumulated and began assembling a field-fence adapter. He worked swiftly, aware that he and Manijeh might have left a trail that their pursuers could follow by starlight. When he finished he carried the adapter into the office and connected it to an unused circuit of the fuse box. Two spare fuse cartridges and a fuse-puller were lying at the base of the box, a fact that he had noted earlier. He stood one of the cartridges on end and placed the fuse-puller next to it so he could insert the former in a hurry when the time came.

Meanwhile, Manijeh had been putting on her jewelry. Robin stared at her. She looked like a Christmas tree. Disgusted, he returned to the parts bank and built five post pacs. He installed one on the lot's northwest corner, one on the northeast corner, one on the southwest corner and the remaining two on the southwest and southeast corners of MacDougall's parking lot. As he was installing the last one he glimpsed a furtive movement in the darkness beyond the radiance shed by MacDougall's outdoor fluorescents, which had also come on with the departure of daylight.

**H**E FINISHED the job fast and rose to his feet. As he did so he caught the gleam of a cutlass out of the corner of his eye. Another. The office was visible around the edge of the hamburger stand. It was a million miles away—perhaps two. Whichever, he knew he'd never be able to reach it in time.

"Manijeh!" he shouted. "In the box on the wall there's a little pair of tongs. Pick up the upright cylinder with them and shove it into the empty slot—do it now! But whatever you do, don't touch it!"

He repeated the instructions twice. Hell, she'd never understand! How could she? She had never

seen a fuse box before in her life, to say nothing of a fuse cartridge or a fuse-puller. Even if she did by some miracle succeed in gripping the cartridge she'd never succeed in inserting it properly.

He could see the pirates, kidnapers or whatever they were now. There were six of them (apparently the Good Samaritan had recovered) and they were pounding out of the darkness of *Yasnaya Polyana* toward MacDougall's for all they were worth. Robin began to run for the office. Halfway there he shouted the instructions again.

Abruptly Manijeh appeared in the doorway. She stomped her foot. "I *did* pick it up!" she said. "I *did* shove it in! I *didn't* touch it! Do you think I am deaf?"

Robin slowed to a halt, turned around. She had indeed activated the fence. The foremost pirate bounced back six feet when he collided with it and sparks shot from his hair. An identical fate overtook the second and their howls of pain were faintly audible from beyond the invisible barrier. The remaining four braked just in time and, as Robin watched, helped their fallen comrades to their feet. Then the six of them slunk back into the shadows of *Yasnaya Polyana*, there no doubt to reconnoiter and to try to devise a means to breach the fence.

Robin wasn't worried. From what he had seen of them so far, it would tax their know-how to breach chicken-wire.

Whistling, he covered the rest of the distance to the office. Manijeh was still standing in the doorway, her jewels having an iridescent glow in the blazing fluorescence, her eyes fixed on the darkness of *Yasnaya Polyana* into which the Buccannibillies had disappeared.

"I knew they were arrant cowards," she said. "I knew it all along."

All the jewelry that had been in the makeshift sack was now on her—diamond- and ruby-studded golden disks and brooches, silver bracelets, golden amulets, lapis lazuli necklaces, emerald earrings, diamond fingerrings, golden shoe buckles . . . Robin began to have some idea of the true extent of the fortune that her kidnapers had let slip through their fingers.

Could there possibly be more where it came from? The mere thought staggered his imagination.

But that was because he was looking at the situation through the eyes of a poor man. For all he knew, her father might own all of Asia Minor. He might even have gone down in history. History was full of rich men—rich men and despots. Maybe her father was both.

"Who is your father, Manijeh?" he asked.

"King Croesus," she answered.

## IV

**R**OBIN'S father was as poor as a church mouse. Once he had said to Robin, *Steer clear of rich bitches, son. They like nothing better than to spit on people like us ...*

Another time he had said, *Son if you can find a way to do it marry a rich bitch some day. It just might beat being on welfare—you never know. ..*

From which it can be seen that Robin's father was nothing if he was not inconsistent.

This was because he was afflicted with an ambivalent attitude toward the rich. As a lifetime welfarer and a charter member of the International Brotherhood of United Welfare Recipients he instinctively regarded the wealthy as the natural enemy—and as a lifetime member of a society devoted to meretricious materialism he couldn't help but admire them for having accumulated so many possessions.

Robin himself was also afflicted with an ambivalent attitude toward the rich, but his ambivalence was more extreme than his father's. He, too, instinctively regarded them as a natural enemy, but he did not simultaneously admire them—he worshiped them. There was a teaspoonful of Honore de Balzac in him, a tablespoonful of F. Scott Fitzgerald and a cupful of Horatio Alger.

To aggravate his present position still further, his attitude toward the fair sex had been molded by the complete works of Zane Grey, James Oliver Curwood, Harold Bell Wright and Charles Alden Seltzer, hooks which his Great Grandfather Feeney had picked up at a rummage sale and which had been with the Feeney family ever since.

Consequently, while his reaction to his Girl Friday's momentous disclosure involved two separate emotions, the romantic haze through which he was accustomed to regard womankind made it impossible for either to manifest itself.

Otherwise, however, his mind was quite clear and the ungodly crew's motive in being on the ISLE was a mystery no longer. They were using it as a hideout while their confederates negotiated a ransom settlement with Croesus.

A thought occurred to him. "Manijeh, did they make you write a letter to your father?"

"They tried to make me. When I would not they pulled all the combs from my hair and said they would show them to him as proof I was their prisoner. The pigs!"

Robin wondered if they would have returned her unharmed. He doubted it. In any case, they no longer had the option. It was up to him to return her—to take her back to Sardis—preferably before the ransom was paid.

He informed her of his intentions.

She put her hands on her hips and looked at him scornfully. "Take me hack to Sardis—ha! How can you take me back to Sardis when you cannot possibly know which way to go?" She tossed her head in the direction taken by the retreating kidnapers. "After those stupid goats stole me from my father's garden they became lost in a fog—and I do not think even they know which direction to take to get back down from this bewitched mountaintop! How then can *you* know?"

Robin was justifiably piqued. "It just so happens that I do know," he said. "And what's even more important, I know how." He pointed to the time raft, which at this stage of its construction even he had to admit didn't inspire much confidence. "We're going to Sardis in that—after I finish building it. Now that I've got you to help me it'll be done in no time."

She drew herself up in the doorway and looked down at him disdainfully. "I do not know from what wretched land you come," she said, "but from your apparel I would judge you to be a goatherd from the hills of Mysia and from your manners a swineherd from the outlands of Phrygia. The daughter of King Croesus would not so much as lift her little finger to help either—and were either to address her in so presumptuous a fashion in her father's kingdom a hole would be drilled through his tongue and a redhot skewer thrust through it!"

Poor Robin didn't know what to say. He should have been indignant, but he wasn't. Instead of instinctively wanting to tell her off for what she had said he instinctively wanted to apologize for what he had said.

**IT WAS** what he got for not listening to his father. *Stay on dole and you'll keep your dignity*, the elder Feeney had told him and he had been right. You'd never catch a professional welfarer letting some rich bitch walk all over him—he had *pride*. True, a welfarer never had very much money, but the difference between him and someone like Robin, who placed independence above common sense, was that the former never had to worry about where his money was coming from while the latter had to worry all the time. Unless—unlike Robin he had an aptitude for one of the more lucrative trades or professions. Otherwise he had to scrounge and pay for his independence with his pride. If he were Robin he studied languages day and night so he could go to sea—only to discover that a ship's linguist, even when his natural mechanical ability automatically qualified him for a first-class mechanic's rating, enjoyed a status similar to cabin boy and didn't draw a great deal more in the way of wages.

Robin sighed. Maybe his ten sisters and his eight brothers had been right when they unanimously voted him the black sheep of the family. However you looked at it, the time for him to assert himself was on hand. So maybe he was as poor as a church mouse and his Girl Friday as rich as a five- and dime-store heiress—she was still his Girl Friday. He'd show her who was the boss right now.

"I'm hungry," Manijeh declared. "Fetch me something to eat."

Robin didn't remember his resolve till he was halfway to MacDougall's. By then, of course, it was too late. It had been too late in the first place. In MacDougall's he made coffee, french fries and hamburgers (there was enough food in the refrigerators and the freezers and the cupboards to last him and Manijeh a



whole year), prepared a tray for her and one for himself and carried both back to the office. It was strange fare for a sixth-century B.C. maiden and for a moment he thought she was going to turn up her nose at it. She didn't, though, and after the first bite devoured everything on her tray.

It was clear, however, from the frigid glances she repeatedly cast in his direction that having to sit at the same table with a common goatherd outraged her sensibilities. But she made no comment.

It had been his intention to inform her in the best James Oliver Curwood tradition that the cot in the office was hers and that he would bed down either in MacDougall's or in the back seat of one of the used cars. However, this proved to be unnecessary.

"Begone," she said when he picked up the trays. "I would sleep."

Sadly he carried the trays and the plastic cups and containers back to MacDougall's and dumped them into one of the disposal bins. Then he returned to the used-car lot and after finding a back seat that was almost wide enough for him to stretch out on, settled down for the night.

**T**HE kidnapers showed up early the next morning, arrayed themselves a respectful distance beyond the fence and brandished their cutlasses. Robin ignored them, rigged a tarpaulin around the outdoor shower and washed himself vigorously, wishing mournfully for a razor (he had by this time grown a frizzly brown beard). He was about to step outside when Manijeh appeared in the office doorway, yawning. Fortunately his clothes were within reach and he put them on.

"Why have you been pouring water on your head?" Manijeh asked when he stepped into the morning sunshine.

He glared at her. "It's an old Mysian custom."

She parted the tarp and peered inside.

"To turn it on," Robin explained, "you twist that little round disk. To turn it off, you twist it the other way. You stand under that bucket with the holes in its bottom. The water's cold and there isn't any—any—" (he discovered there was no Anatolian word for soap). "Well anyway," he concluded, "you'll find it an invigorating experience."

"Ha!" Manijeh said. "You would never catch the daughter of King Croesus pouring water on her head."

And she had called *him* a Mysian goatherd!

"Fetch me something to eat," the daughter of King Croesus continued. "I am hungry."

He made fresh coffee and fried hamburgers and they breakfasted at Generous George's desk.

"Why didn't you cook some more of those delicious little biscuits?" Manijeh asked.

Biscuits? "Oh, you mean french fries. I'll fix some for dinner. Meanwhile," Robin added meaningfully, "I've got work to do."

After disposing of the breakfast dishes he got busy on the raft. The pirates watched for a while, brandishing their cutlasses whenever he happened to glance in their direction—then, evidently becoming bored, they withdrew into the rocky wilderness of Minos.

Noon came. "I am hungry," Manijeh called from the office doorway. "Fetch me something to eat."

Robin gritted his teeth. Some Girl Friday he had! Come to think of it, though, he'd rescued her on a Saturday, which made her his Girl Saturday, not Friday.

The good old Feeney luck had been working overtime, as usual.

While he was peeling the potatoes for the french fries in MacDougall's kitchen he sensed someone standing just behind him and out of the corner of his eye he saw Manijeh peering around his shoulder.

"Is that the way the little biscuits are made'?" she asked.

"That's only the first step. Here, let me show you."

Craftily he slipped the paring knife into her right hand and placed a potato in her left. "You turn it like this, see? And while you're turning it, you peel."

After she finished with the peeling he showed her how to put the potatoes in the slicer and then how to put them in the wire basket and immerse them in the deep fat, which he had heated beforehand. Then he showed her how to fry hamburgers and make coffee. She was so thrilled that several times she

clapped her hands out of sheer delight and when the boiling water rose magically from the lower to the upper globe of the coffee-maker, she uttered an awed: "Ahhhhhh!"

They ate at one of MacDougall's indoor tables. Afterward, Robin showed Manijeh where to throw away the disposable cups and plates. Then he went back to work. The day grew hot. Along about three o'clock he heard water running, and looking in the direction of the outdoor shower he saw a golden dress hanging over the ring to which the tarp was attached. That evening at supper her copper-colored hair, still not quite dry but neatly combed (apparently she had secreted one of her combs from her kidnapers), fell in straight moist tresses to her shoulders and shone softly in the subdued fluorescence of MacDougall's dining room.

**L**IKE most such establishments, Generous George's Used-car Lot was a heat trap. The mornings weren't bad, but every afternoon the temperature climbed into the high nineties and—as the sea of time was incapable of providing so much as a zephyr and as the fence would have kept it out in any case—there was no relief till the sun went down. And even then there wasn't very much to speak of. The only shade available (discounting the ephemeral shadows cast by the office and the hamburger stand) was that thrown by a great oak that stood in the wedge of *Yasnaya Polyana* the field-fence had made part of the car lot/MacDougall complex. And this was not available to Robin because he was building the raft in the center of the car lot and couldn't afford to take time off except to eat and sleep.

But while the shade was not available to Robin, it was available to his Girl Saturday. She set the more comfortable of the two office chairs under the tree and sat there by the hour, polishing her jewelry with an old chamois cloth she had found in one of the cars. Occasionally she grew bored and took a walk around the lot, looking at this used car and that, a baffled expression on her face. When the pirates came around, as was their custom once or twice a day, she would interrupt her perambulations or her polishing long enough to stick out her tongue at them. After several futile attempts to breach the invisible harrier by rolling boulders from Minos up Hill 29 and letting them come tumbling down the slope and into the fence, they had apparently given up and now confined their activities to sitting on the ground in the shade of a rock or tree and watching Robin work, a pastime that seemed to be enjoying greater and greater popularity on the ISLE.

At first Manijeh paid the raft not the slightest attention, but as it began to acquire form she evinced an increasing interest in it. At length—one afternoon when the temperature was nudging a hundred—she came over to where he was working and asked what he was making.

He was lying on a creeper under the deck plating, installing a Revlin relay-instigator that he had built the night before. He propelled himself out into the sunlight, stared up at her in disbelief.

"I thought I told you. It's what I'm going to take you back to Sardis in."

"You did tell me. But you didn't tell me what you call it."

"It's a raft."

"She looked around. "I do not see any water."

"Of course you don't—it's not that kind of a raft."

"And we are going to Sardis on it?"

"That's right."

"Ha!"

"You didn't say 'ha' the other night when I put up the fence," Robin said.

"What fence?"

He pointed to the pirates, who were lolling in the shade of a big Minoan boulder. "The fence that keeps them from coming in here, chopping me into mincemeat and carrying you off."

She looked in the direction he had indicated. "I do not see any fence."

"Naturally you don't. It's invisible."

She put her hands on her hips and gazed down at him. "Your face is dirty," she observed.

The abrupt change of subject disconcerted him and for a moment he forgot how dirt-poor he was, had always been and always would be and that she was the daughter of one of the richest men in all

creation.

"Of course it's dirty," he said. "And I'm tired and I'm thirsty, too. And do you know why? It's because I've been working myself half to death to get you off this 'mountaintop' and safely back to your father's kingdom—"

She looked at him for a long time. Then, without another word, she turned and walked away.

Awed by his outburst, he propelled himself back under the raft and began plying an end wrench. Some time later, out of the corner of his eye, he saw Manijeh coming out of the office carrying a paper cup. He gaped. Presently the raft cut her from view till all he could see were her feet.

"Well, are you going to come out and quench your thirst or not?" she said. "Or do you perhaps think I am going to crawl under there with this container of water and hold it while you drink?"

Slowly he propelled himself back into the sunlight. He accepted the paper cup, drained it and handed it back. "Th-thanks."

He was about to shove himself back under the raft. "Wait," she said. "You forgot your instrument."

She handed him the end wrench.

"Th-thanks," he said again.

It took him five more minutes to finish installing the instigator and when he reemerged into the sunlight he expected Manijeh to be gone. Instead he saw her standing at the other end of the raft, studying an electric booster motor he'd set in place and drilled holes for but hadn't gotten around to bolting down.

"I believe," she said, "that I could secure this funny-looking object if I were to be supplied with the necessary instrument."

He handed her a socket wrench. She worked beside him the rest of the day. When evening came her face was as dirty as his was, all her knuckles were skinned and her million-dollar dress was a mess.

"Tomorrow," she said, "I will get up before you do and prepare breakfast. That way, we will be able to get back on the job sooner."

## V

**F**OR a while things went swimmingly, although as the days passed it became increasingly clear to Robin that long before the raft was finished, King Croesus would have come across with the ransom. Something of the sort must have been on Manijeh's mind, for one night while they were sitting in Generous George's office, she said, "How soon will it be before we leave for Sardis, Ro-bin?"

He looked up from the time-drive ganglion he was assembling on the opposite side of the desk. "I thought you didn't believe I could find my way to Sardis."

"Would I be helping you to build the raft if I still did not believe it?"

He returned his attention to the ganglion. "No, I guess you wouldn't. We should be able to leave in two more days."

There was a silence. Then: "Why is it that you wish to take me back to my father?"

"Because that's where you belong."

There was another silence—a much longer one. At length: "My father will probably reward you handsomely," she said.

The possibility hadn't even entered Robin's mind. "I'm not doing it for a reward."

"I did not say you were."

He looked at her across the desk. That evening, as had been her custom since she had begun to help him with the raft, she had removed all her jewels and ornaments, polished them and then, after taking a shower, had put them all back on. But from some strange reason she didn't seem to glitter quite as much as usual.

"I guess my not thinking of a reward makes me seem kind of foolish," he said.

Her amber eyes snapped. "I did not say that either! You are putting words into my mouth again. Moreover, I think that I shall go to bed!"

She did not point to the door and say "Begone!" but she might just as well have. He pocketed his

tools, rose to his feet and picked up the ganglion. Eventually, he supposed, if he were to remain in her company long enough, he would get used to her outbursts. They no longer bugged him as much as they used to. But "eventually" did not apply—in a few more days they would part and he would never see her again.

He stepped over to the doorway. "Good night, Manijeh," he said.

"Good night —Ro-bin."

**T**HE next morning they had a visitor.

Rather, they had nine visitors—the six who had been left with Manijeh on the ISLE, their confederates—two in number who had departed in the time ship, plus a third party.

But it was the third party who was the actual visitor—the others were merely spectators.

He stepped forward and attached a small, two-way magnetic microphone to the field-fence, where it hung magically suspended in the morning air some six inches from his mouth.

"My name is—" (Robin couldn't quite catch the words, but they sounded like "Coal Bin"), he said in late twentieth-century English, a language that must have predated his own by centuries. "My presence on the periphery of your fastness arises from an urgent necessity to negotiate a satisfactory settlement of our dispute. I think you will find the terms I have to offer eminently equitable and, under the circumstances, more than generous."

He was somewhat smaller than his uncouth friends, although unquestionably of the same species. His long black hair was thickly pomaded with what looked like axle grease and was parted precisely in the middle of his scalp and combed straight down on either side of his face to his shoulders, where it curled upward into a sort of semicircular eavetrough. He wore a canary-yellow vest. Lime-green jodhpurs, black imitation-leather leggings and narrow black oxfords with pointed toes. There was no ring in his nose and presumably there were none in his ears. Nor were his teeth filed to a point or blackened—instead they were perfectly formed and dazzlingly white. As he talked he displayed them by means of a wide smile that went on and off at regular intervals as though activated by an automatic switch hidden somewhere in his head.

"What sort of terms?" Robin asked.

"Terms pertaining to the disposition of your companion and her paraphernalia and to your departure from this ISLE." The smile went on and off like an electric lightbulb. "As president of our small but powerful labor union, the Brotherhood of Quinque-dimensional Engineers," Coal Bin continued, "I am authorized (smile) to offer you—in exchange for your turning over to us the daughter of King Croesus together with the aforementioned paraphernalia free (smile) transportation on board our time vessel to whenever and wherever you are from."

Robin stared at him.

"I have just returned from sixth-century Sardis," Coal Bin went on, "where (smile) for many days I have been sitting at the bargaining table with the king himself. I regret (smile) to report that we were unable to reach a mutually satisfactory agreement."

**B**ARGAINING table? Agreement? Suddenly Robin understood why Coal Bin had chosen late twentieth-century English in which to conduct the conversation. Aside from the probability of Robin's being familiar with it, it abounded with generalities and provided the speaker with an ideal means of dignifying the lowliest of professions, of talking around the truth and of calling a spade a spade when it was really a shovel.

Coal Bin was far from the first to have elevated extortion to the level of the bargaining table. None of which explained why King Croesus has refused to come across with the ransom.

"Surely he must have offered you something for Manijeh's safe return," Robin said.

"He refused absolutely to recompense us in any way whatsoever for our labor."

Robin was stunned. "Did he say why?"

"He said (smile) that the piece of merchandise on which our bargaining power was based was of no use to him—that he already had in his possession a number of such commodities, that the commodity in question (smile) had negated through stubbornness and conceit several tentative conglomerate mergers with neighboring corporations and that chattel such as she, being non-negotiable, was of no further value to him. Thus (smile) our little labor union has been deprived of wages its members have honestly earned, necessitating our taking action to obtain whatever other income may be accruing (smile) to us."

"I can understand why you want Manijeh's jewelry," Robin said. "But why do you want her?"

"She will bring (smile) a handsome price on the Babylonian slave market. Meanwhile, you will have been suitably recompensed for your (smile) labors by means of a free voyage home. I might even offer you as an added inducement that small ring that twinkles (smile) so charmingly on her left little finger."

Robin took a deep breath. He managed to keep his temper, but it wasn't easy.

"No deal," he said.

Coal Bin blinked. "But I am unable (smile) to offer you more. Our union funds are virtually exhausted and must be replenished. Moreover (smile) you cannot but agree that both the girl and her paraphernalia are rightfully ours and that as the thief who stole them (smile) you are scarcely deserving of the recompense I proffered."

Again Robin managed to keep his temper. "Neither Manijeh nor her jewels belong to anyone but herself," he said.

Throughout the one-sided conversation Coal Bin had kept glancing at the time raft. Now he pointed to it.

"Surely you are not so naive as to think you can escape from the ISLE in that."

It was the last straw. "If you were working for me," Robin said icily, "I'd fire you in two seconds flat. You know why? I don't like the way you part your hair."

The freedom to part his hair any way he chose had long been the workingman's most cherished right, more important to him even than time-and-a-half. To question it was tantamount to heresy. Apparently matters hadn't changed in Coal Bin's day and age. His face went white, his equanimity vanished and he shook his fist.

"Dirty (smile) capitalist pig!" he shouted. "Robber of the Poor! Stealer (smile) from the mouths of babes! Picker of the hard-working man's (smile) pockets! Dirty—"

At this point his "fellow workers," realizing that something had gone drastically wrong at the bargaining table and fearful, perhaps, lest their president forget the presence of the fence, stepped forward, seized his arms and, leaving the two-way mike behind, carried him bodily off into Minos. There they disappeared among the rocks, where gradually Coal Bin's imprecations faded away.

**R**OBIN looked at Manijeh. Manijeh looked at him. "What did he say to you, Ro-bin? What did you say to him?"

"He said they wanted your jewels. I said they couldn't have them."

"How can they be such pigs? They have already collected a huge ransom from my father, have they not?"

Robin didn't have the heart to tell her the truth. Besides, Coal Bin might have been lying. Suppose, though, he hadn't been? In that case would it be fair to Manijeh to take her back to Sardis and dump her off like so much unwanted baggage?

But if he didn't take her back to Sardis, what was he going to do with her? He couldn't leave her on the ISLE. He couldn't take her home. True, his father might like her, but it was a cinch his eight brothers and his ten sisters, all of whom lived in the Feeney homestead with their wives, husbands and children and all of whom were on welfare, wouldn't. All they'd have to do was take one look at her jewelry and that would be it.

He sighed. He couldn't remember a time when he had had so many troubles.

"I don't know whether they collected the ransom or not, Manijeh," he said. "Well just have to wait and see. Meanwhile, we're going to have to work on the raft all day today and all night tonight so we can

launch it early tomorrow morning. The sooner we leave this 'mountaintop,' the better."

She made no objection and after a quick breakfast they got busy. Manijeh had no mechanical aptitude whatsoever: nevertheless she always seemed to know which tool to hand him next and always managed to be where she should be when he needed her. Equally important, she now prepared all the meals, enabling him to make up for time he had previously lost.

Throughout the day he expected her kidnapers to show up again, but they did not. Coal Bin worried him.

So did the time ship. The former had brains and the latter indubitably carried weapons of a far more sophisticated nature than cutlasses. He was certain that it was anchored just off Minos.

Clearly, however, Coal Bin knew nothing about magnetic fields—or he would have shorted out the fence at once. Thus, even if the ship carried gas grenades, lobbing one over the upper edge of the field—which was sixty feet high—and incapacitating Robin and his Girl Saturday, hardly would accomplish anything.

Tentatively Robin concluded that Coal Bin planned to make his move after Robin deactivated the fence himself and he and his Girl Saturday were on board the time raft and on their way to the sea. When the night passed without incident he knew this to be the case.

## VI

**BY DAWN'S** early light the time raft was a phenomenon to behold.

Its launching wheels sported white sidewall belted tires and its main deck was completely enclosed. There were two port and two starboard windows, a wide forewindow just above the hooded prow and an even wider aftwindow just above the rear deck. All were equipped with safety glass and could be raised and lowered by means of little cranks. The cockpit was roomy and just behind it was a commodious compartment furnished with an upholstered divan on which Manijeh could sleep if she got tired during the voyage.

The time-drive ganglion was located in front of the pilot's seat, underneath the control panel, and the heavily insulated wires connecting it to the fore- and aft-equilator-bars and the port and starboard interometer-strips had been routed underneath the main deck. It was preset for sixth-century B.C. Sardis. All Robin would have to do when he and Manijeh reached the sea was turn off the launching motor and throw a switch.

The launching motor had been lifted intact from the Ford Torino. However, Robin had completely rebuilt it, increasing its HP and eliminating its noxious emissions—a true feat of legerdemain by twentieth-century standards, but child's play for a mechanic of his own day and age.

The prow was equipped with four prowlights—two on either side—and the stern with six sternlights—three on either side. There were two chronocane repellors—one centered on the forward equilator bar and the other on the aft equilator bar—that Robin had fashioned from a set of 1974 license plates he had found in the trunk of one of the used cars.

He and Manijeh took turns in the shower. Then they had a farewell breakfast at MacDougall's, packed a lunch and filled a gallon thermos with coffee. Manijeh insisted on preparing an extra batch of the "little biscuits" to take home to her sisters and day was breaking when they at last left the stand, walked over to the raft and got on board. There was still no sign of the uncouth ones but Robin suspected they had the Lot under observation, probably from the brow of Hill 29.

Presently the Lot resounded with the smooth rumble of the raft's 420 HP 8 cylinder emission-free internal-combustion launching motor. After driving over to the fuel pumps Robin filled the tank with regular, then drove over to the office and parked as close to the door as he could get. He went inside, pulled the fence cartridge fuse, ran outside and quickly reboarded the raft. After locking the port and starboard doors he surveyed the scene on all sides. Still no sign of the kidnapers.

**H**E DROVE off the Lot into King Arthur's Kingdom and began circling the base of Hill 29. The special fore and aft suspension system he had designed paid off and the raft rode the uneven terrain smoothly. But he had to be careful of hangups because of its low undercarriage—an unavoidable carry-over from the cars he had used for parts.

Presently he came to a lane and since it led in the direction he wanted to take, he turned into it.

He was able to up the raft's speed. Beside him he heard Manijeh gasp.

"My father would give half his kingdom for a chariot such as this!" she exclaimed.

Robin concentrated on the road ahead, momentarily expecting the kidnapers to appear. He didn't think they would try to destroy the raft for the simple reason that Manijeh might be injured and her value on the Babylonian slave market impaired. But he did think they would try to disable it.

However, he saw no sign of them and presently he and Manijeh reached the Plain of Marathon and the marsh.

The marsh extended from the eastern fringe of the Amerindian Forest to the base of Hill 29. He had been unaware of its existence because he hadn't passed that way before and because from a distance it looked no different from the rest of the terrain.

He drove the length of it just to make sure there was no way of crossing it. There wasn't.

The good old Feeney luck again. "Why are we turning around?" Manijeh asked.

"We've got to find another way to get to Sardis. This one's out."

He expected a sardonic comment. Oddly none was forthcoming.

Coventry would be his best bet, even though it involved passing through the whole of Arthur's Kingdom. Fortunately he found a lane that roughly paralleled the Amerindian Forest and skirted the higher ground where most of the grim-looking castles stood. But the lane didn't go all the way and the last leg of the journey was a nightmare of hills and dales that provided not even so much as a cow-path. At length, however, he glimpsed buildings in the distance and knew they were going to make it.

He approached the town slowly. Its streets afforded the kidnapers an excellent chance to waylay them. But he needn't have worried—the streets proved to be so narrow that the raft couldn't pass through them, couldn't, in fact, even enter them.

Next, he tried *Yasnaya Polyana*. Getting there turned out to be another nightmare. Arriving, he found that wherever a route to the sea existed, trees had been felled to block it.

The kidnapers' handiwork, of course. They, too, had worked all night and the field-fence had shut out the sound of their labors.

Somehow Robin managed to get back to the used-car lot. He knew he could never make the sea through Minos, so after fueling up again he drove the raft through the northwestern section of the place-time to Grendel Land. He found more nightmares awaiting him—roads barely wide enough to accommodate an oxcart, sodden fields, sullen hills, foreboding forests. In exploring the ISLE during his first two days as a castaway he had touched upon all the place-times, but he had seen them from the perspective of a man on foot and a man on foot sees the world far differently from a man on wheels.

After straddling a pair of deep ruts through a brooding woods, Robin came abreast of a large hall with antlerlike ornaments projecting from its gables. He had come across it on his previous visit and had identified it as Heorot, the *mice en scene* of Beowulf's legendary battle with the troll Grendel. It was mid-afternoon by this time, and if Manijeh had glanced once into the rear compartment where their lunch lay, she had done so a dozen times. At last he braked the raft in the shadow of the hall and, after a careful look around, got out.

"Would you like to have something to eat, Manijeh?"

She needed no second invitation. They ate standing up, utilizing the raft's hood as a picnic table. What little sunlight managed to penetrate the perpetual overcast that characterized Grendel Land's sky glittered harshly on her jewelry, all of which she had on, of course, and all of which she had polished to high heaven. As, always, this annoyed him. Not that he begrudged her the wealth the jewels represented—he just didn't want it so frequently and flamboyantly thrown in his face.

**S**HE was standing with her back toward one of the hall's apertures—a window, presumably. Abruptly a huge hand attached to a brawny arm shot out from the window and made a grab for her. Robin dove across the hood and pulled her out of reach just in time. He had a very bad moment during which he almost believed the hand and arm belonged to none other than Grendel himself—then, as the owner emerged from the window, he saw they were part and property of his old friend, the Good Samaritan.

Two more of the kidnapers emerged from two more windows and approached the raft.

Robin threw the rest of their coffee into the Good Samaritan's eyes, shoved Manijeh into the raft and locked her door. Then he shot around the raft, slid behind the wheel and closed and locked his door. Meanwhile the Good Samaritan was rubbing his eyes and dancing a jig in the middle of the rutted road. Robin was about to send the raft either over or around him and continue in the same direction he had been traveling when he saw that several trees had been felled ahead and deduced the presence of a roadblock.

Wearily he turned the raft around and headed back the way he had come.

The road might have taken him and Manijeh all the way to the shore and had constituted their last remaining hope. The strip of Grendel Land conterminous to Futureville and Minos was much too heavily forested for passage—and he wouldn't have tried to go through Futureville in any case. Even on an ISLE, travel could not postdate the energy-source of the time ship—in this instance, raft—and were he to have entered Futureville the raft would have come to a screeching halt and he and his Girl Saturday would have been worse off than before.

So it was back to the used-car lot again.

He sighed. He was reminded of a story he had heard once about a man who had built a boat in his attic and when it was finished could find no way of getting it downstairs and out of the house.

Throughout the return trip he had the uncomfortable feeling that he had eluded the Good Samaritan and his friends far too easily—that they hadn't really cared whether they captured him and Manijeh or not. They had behaved like three cats playing with two mice.

Where were the other six cats?

**I**N MINOS the raft became hung up on an outcropping and it took him better than two hours to work it free. Night had fallen when at last, tired, discouraged and disgusted, he drove into the lot. He pulled up in front of the office, turned off the launching motor, entered and, finding the field-fence adapter unharmed, reactivated the fence. Then he climbed back into the raft and settled down to think.

Manijeh had dozed off. Awakening, she said, "Why have we come back here again, Ro-bin?"

"To give me a chance to figure a way out of the fix we're in."

"Then you do not know how to get to Sardis after all?"

"I'm afraid not."

She was silent for a while. Then: "I am glad. I didn't really want to go home to my father from the very beginning."

Robin looked at her. "You didn't? Why?"

"Because he does not seem to know I am alive. All he cares about are his wives and concubines. In addition to them, he has a farm where he raises girls the way the peasants raise sheep. When he isn't thinking about his wives and concubines he is thinking about them."

"I'm afraid I'm going to have to take you back to him just the same," Robin said. "Provided I can find a way."

She nodded. "I know. Like all Mysian goatherds, you will do anything for riches. I hope he doesn't give you so much as a fig for bringing me back."

"Now see here—" Robin began.

"Your only interest in me from the beginning was my jewels," Manijeh went on. "And then, after you found out who my father was, your only interest in me was the reward. I know all about such things."



Every time a prince looks at me I see either my jewels or my father's wealth shining in his eyes. That is why every time my fathers tries to arrange a marriage for me I hide in my room and barricade the door." She shuddered and a tear rolled down her cheek. "And you are just like they are, even though you are only a Mysian goatherd."

Robin was staring at the tear. It certainly seemed real enough. But he had no chance to find out for sure. All over the lot, which in his naivete he had assumed to be deserted, Buccannibillies, kidnapers, pirates were boiling out of used cars. Counting the Good Samaritan and his tow buddies—who had apparently outdistanced the raft—and Coal Bin, there were nine of them. Eight were brandishing cutlasses. The ninth, Coal Bin, was brandishing Robin's acetylene torch.

## VII

*Think, Robinson Feeney said to himself. Think...*

*—What is an ISLE?*

*—An ISLE is an Integrated Superficial Lenticular Ephemeron.*

*—Yes, yes. But what is its relationship to conventional reality?*

*—It is a montage of place-times that have been lifted out of conventional reality and projected upon the surface of quinque-dimensional space.*

*—Then an ISLE is connected to conventional reality through each of its place-times, is it not? And there is, is there not, a sort of quinque-dimensional umbilical cord connecting each of the segments to its original?*

*—Yes. But the metaphor is misleading because it conjures up a three-dimensional image. Quinque-dimensionally the distance separating the two realities is both infinite and nonexistent. Thus the umbilical cord would have to be both visible and invisible, without end and without beginning.*

*—Nevertheless it would be possible, would it not, to proceed directly from a projected to an original reality?*

*—It might be possible—if the time-traveler overloaded his time-drive energizer and risked ruining it. But time-drive energizers cost a fortune and—*

**ROBIN** drew himself up short. What was he arguing about? What difference did it make how much they cost? If burning his out would keep Manijeh out of the hands of Coal Bin and himself out of reach of cutlasses he couldn't ask for a better bargain. And he would never have to worry about replacing it—because where they were going he would not be able to replace it.

Rousing himself from his brown study, he saw that Manijeh had picked up a heavy-duty socket wrench from the deck and was shaking it in the face of Coal Bin, who was standing several feet from the raft's starboard hull trying to ignite the acetylene torch with what looked like a cigar lighter. But for some reason the lighter itself wouldn't ignite.

Robin started up the launching motor.

Excursion ships such as the *Long Long Age* steered clear of the late twentieth century, hence all his knowledge of the year 1974 A.D. was limited to what little he had read of the history of the period. But he had read enough to know that when he and his Girl Saturday got there—assuming they got there—the new problems that would confront them would be nearly as bad as the ones confronting them now.

Well, at least they would be different.

Coal Bin at last got the torch going, adjusted the flame and began applying it to the starboard door handle.

"Ro-bin, the wall is getting hot," Manijeh said. "I think we had better leave."

"We're going to, Manijeh—but by a different door."

He began backing the raft toward the nearest section of the field-fence. Coal Bin and his friends confident their quarry couldn't escape, walked easily along on either side of it. Coal Bin continued to

apply the torch to the starboard door-handle, smiling at every other step.

Several feet from the fence Robin braked, then inched the raft backward till the aft equilateral-bar came into contact with the magnetic field.

There was a loud *pfft...* as the energy transfer began. .

The "Buccannibillies" were visibly startled, but none of them—not even Coal Bin—caught on.

Not that it would have done them any good if they had.

Robin kept his eyes focused on the time-drive energizer indicator. It climbed rapidly. When it completed the circuit of the dial he turned off the launching motor.

"Here we go!" he said to his Girl Saturday and threw the ganglion switch.

**A**T FIRST nothing happened. Then, subtly, the figures outside the raft began to lose substance. So did Hill 29. So did Minos. So did MacDougall's. So did *Yasnaya Polvana*. So did King Arthur's Kingdom. Everyone and everything, in short—except Robin, Manijeh, the raft, the cars and the car lot—began to fade away.

Suddenly the cars that Robin had torn down for parts reappeared. He kept his fingers crossed. Now, if ever, the raft would dematerialize and he and Manijeh would be left sitting on thin air. When it did not he knew that time was more lenient than he had thought—it could and did permit the coexistence of two or more versions of the same object.

Buildings patterned with tiers of lighted windows had begun to take shape. Now people began to appear. Muffled traffic noises reached his and Manijeh's ears.

At length the Buccannibillies vanished altogether. So did the ISLE.

"Something is burning, Ro-bin," Manijeh said. "Do you not smell it also?"

It was the time-drive energizer, of course—or what was left of it. He rolled down the port window.

"It's nothing to be alarmed about, Manijeh."

He looked at the people standing in the lot, at the people passing in the street, on foot and in cars.

*Well, here we are, he thought. Babes in the late twentieth-century woods...*

He removed his jacket and told Manijeh to put it on before someone saw her jewels and tried to steal them.

"Where are we, Ro-bin?" she asked. "Certainly this is not Sardis—or even Lydia."

"We're in a strange country, Manijeh—a country filled with fierce savages. But don't worry. Most of them won't attack us—at least not openly—because they like to pretend they're civilized."

"I'm not worried. I am with you."

Him? A fat lot of good he could do her. No job. No money in his pocket. She had sure picked a good one to pin her hopes on when she picked him!

Most of the people in the lot were looking at the used cars. Presently one of the ones who wasn't—a big beefy man with salt-and-pepper sideburns—noticed the raft for the first time. His eyes got as big as beer coasters. He came over and rested his elbow on the port window sill

"Hi, folks—didn't happen to see you drive in. Thinking of trading her in?"

"Trading who in? Robin asked.

"I'll make you a generous allowance. After all, that's how I got my name."

It got through to Robin finally that the man was referring to the time raft.

"You drive out of here in one of my later models and I'll go as high as two thousand bucks,"

Generous George continued. "And believe me, that's tops for an old crate that needs a paint job as bad as this one. What make is it, by the way?"

Robin stared at him. *Two thousand dollars for a burned-out time raft?*

"I asked you—what make is it?" Generous George repeated.

"I made it myself," Robin said.

"G' wan—"

During the conversation, another twentieth-centuryite character—a tall middle-aged man wearing a sleek blue business suit—had been walking around the raft, looking at it from this angle and that. Now,

apparently having overheard Robin's last words, he came over to the port window and asked, "You built this yourself?"

Obviously awed, Generous George retired hastily into the background.

"Well not exactly," Robin amended. "I had a helper."

"How many horse?"

"Four-twenty."

The tall man blinked. Then: "You must be polluting the environment like crazy. How the devil do you get away with it?"

"I don't get away with it. I installed a simple afterburner that eliminates pollution entirely."

"I suppose you built that too."

"Naturally. Like to take a look at it?"

"I haven't time right now," the tall man said. He handed Robin a card. "I'm staying at the Wenceslaus Arms across the street—that's how I happened to get my eye on this job. Drop in tomorrow morning and we'll have a chat. Maybe you're pulling my leg and maybe you're not—we'll see. If you're not and you can design a car for us like this one and simultaneously free us from the Curse of the Wankel—our engineering department is shortly going to grow a new head."

The tall man turned and left the lot.

**R**OBIN felt a little better, but not much. He had a good prospect of getting a job, but he still didn't have any money. Down the street from the hotel he could see the lighted show-window of what undoubtedly was a pawnshop. If only...

Scandalized, he threw the nascent thought out of his mind. What in the world was the matter with him? Had he no pride left at all? Besides, Manijeh would never go along with the idea—never in a million years.

He became aware that she was looking at him intently. "Have you ever visited this strange land before, Ro-bin?" she asked.

"No. But I know a little bit about it."

"One time when I was a little girl I became lost in a strange part of Sardis. No one would give me anything to eat nor would anyone offer me a place to sleep. A long time later I found out why."

He felt her hand touch his, felt something cold drop into his palm. Looking down, he saw the gleam of an emerald earring.

"When I said all you wanted was my jewels," Manijeh went on, "I said it because I thought you were still going to take me to Sardis and I was angry. I know that you do not want them—that you never did. I know also that you are not really a Mysian goatherd, but I think that you may be as poor as one. It is imperative therefore that you exchange this bauble for whatever is needed to obtain for us food and shelter and clothing."

"Now see here—" Robin began.

"But even though you may not be a Mysian goat herd,— Manijeh continued, "your apparel makes you look like one and it would never do for the daughter of King Croesus to be seen in the company of so uncouth a creature, especially when the means for him to alter his appearance are available."

"All right, I *will* exchange it," Robin said and jammed the earring into his pocket.

Then he saw that she was still looking at him, that there was a twinkle in her amber eyes.

Was it possible that this Girl Saturday knew him even better than he knew her?

"Suppose I really were a Mysian goatherd," he said. "Suppose I couldn't alter my appearance. What would the daughter of King Croesus' reaction be to that?"

"Way down in her heart she wouldn't care a fig."

His Girl Saturday moved closer to him on the seat—so close that her hair touched his cheek. He put his arm around her and drove out into the twentieth-century night. It was spring and the streetlights shone softly on the sidewalks and the stores. A breeze born of fields and flowers was blowing up from the south.

The good old Feeney luck, it would seem, had taken a turn for the better.