

The Inevitable Conflict

by Paul H. Lovering

Published in *Amazing Stories*, December 1930, p. 776-797, and January 1931, p. 928-949.

Introduction

To say now that women may be commandeered into active fighting service at any time in the future, would seem to be the height of ridiculousness. The universal male cry would probably be, "And what earthly good could women be as soldiers!" Yet Joan of Arc led her soldiers to phenomenal victory and women in Russia today are doing work still exclusively man's everywhere else in the world. And in the field of politics, woman's voice is heard more and more. Even if it is not imminent, it is more than interesting to speculate about the possibility. Mr. Lovering, who is well known to our readers, has more than idle speculations on the subject and has worked his ideas into an engrossing story of the future.

Chapter I

"Your words are treasonable."

Matriarch Victoria Arston's cold, gray eyes compressed to pin-points of icy emphasis.

"If any subject of Matriarchy of the United Companies had given utterance to such statements, I would condemn him to the lowest levels of our deepest mines."

General K'ung Fu, Mongolia's famous soldier-statesman, ambassador to the court of the great American Matriarchy, spread his hands in a gesture of courteous regret.

"I must disavow intention to offend. When I spoke the military impotence of America under the government of the United Companies, I only inferred a comparison between conditions here and in my own country."

He smiled gently.

"Ours, Eminent Matriarch, is a masculine civilization. Men are our leaders, from our glorious Emperor - exemplar of all masculine virtues - to the humblest subject in his home."

Smiling still, he spread his hands again in courteous disavowal of intentional offense.

"Different countries - different customs. What Mongolia deems desirable is not what America esteems."

The Matriarch had heard him in cold silence.

"We do not welcome sentiments such as you have expressed, or ideas such as you have voiced - "

She halted protestations with imperious hand.

"You will understand, general, my remarks are in no sense personal. They are dictated solely by

circumstances of state, more evident to our eyes than to yours after so brief a residence as you have had in America. You must not take too seriously the expressions of such immature and inexperienced youths as Stephen Mowbray with whom, I know, you have conversed."

She smiled as his eyes narrowed slightly in surprise.

"Even your own masculine government," she continued, icily, "has its reckless young rebels."

Mongolia's ambassador winced under her biting reference to the brief, vain revolt of his emperor's eldest son, which that able ruler recently had crushed with ruthless hand. He also recalled that his predecessor had departed hastily from the American court following a sharp interview with this masterful woman, in which she had hotly resented a charge of secret support for the youthful insurgent. His own orders had been to pacify her, in order that there might be no open break or interruption of the enormous American tribute to Mongolia, until the Asiatic war genius had perfected plans upon which he long had been meditating.

"From the time the Matriarchy assumed control of America," she continued, leaning forward and emphasizing her words with a stern forefinger, "we have perceived the folly of permitting discussion of the absurd doctrine of 'men's rights.' Long before the republic collapsed, a victim to the incapacity of masculine rule."

General K'ung winced slightly. She noted it and a half-smile wreathed her firm lips.

"Long prior to its collapse," she pressed on ruthlessly, "women had been conducting its affairs. So-called 'Captains of Industry' had become mere figureheads. I am reciting history, general, but it is necessary to recall it to your mind in order that you may understand America."

Coldly furious, she did not spare him.

"Actual management of the great companies had been in the hands of their secretaries - women, who had broken away from the absurd taboo of the past that their place was in the kitchen and the nursery - and who had devoted their lives to the conduct of giant business enterprises. They were the super-women of a masculine decade, the motors that drove industry, directed politics, molded the press and controlled legislation. Even then - "

She transfixed the unsmiling diplomat with a compelling finger.

"Even then, they possessed a dim understanding of the great destiny of the sex. They perceived the incapacity, the futility of man. They resented masculine lust for sports involving physical danger - "

Chief among these, I presume," interjected K'ung Fu suavely, "was war?"

Her heavy hand fell, palm downward, on the table in among you, vigorous assent.

"Absolutely! For untold centuries, patient, submissive women had been venturing within the Valley of the Shadow to bring men children into being - and for what purpose? That they might be accoutered in the gaudy trappings of militarism and sent against the children other mothers had borne. Millions of lives wasted - industry turned from its sane channels - passions inflamed - hatred engendered - false ideals of heroism created - and what did it all avail? When, in all time, was there a war which, in itself, was good, or which brought results comparable with the sorrow, suffering and destruction it entailed?"

"If I am questioned," he replied, smiling easily for the first time, "I fear I must answer as a soldier - there are many wars which bring compensations in the cultivation of a revived martial spirit among the people, in the subordination of sordidly material well-being to the concept of the common weal. Even Nature, Eminent Matriarch, wars in her storms and the air is sweeter after a thunder shower."

Her heavy' brows contracted ominously. After a pause, a wintry smile broke through her stormily compressed lips.

"We cannot meet on common ground," she declared, "You see life from a viewpoint we know to be absurd and unreasonable. However, to continue with my recital. After women had obtained complete control of American affairs, had thrown aside republicanism and substituted our efficient matriarchy under my distinguished ancestor, the first Victoria Arston, lingerings of discontent persisted among the men."

"Is it possible?" ejaculated the general, suavely ironic.

"Theirs was the old, ignorant, masculine dissatisfaction with a settled state of affairs," she continued curtly. "Theirs was the urge for the so-called 'progress' that had been observable since the dawn of history."

"I understand," he declared. "I understand - perfectly."

"For their own good and also for the peace of the state, we were forced to drastic action. Agitators were sent to the mines, timber camps and mountain quarries, forbidden to marry and kept isolated until their breed had expired. This occurred generations ago. There after, we had peace. Now, when we have occasion, at rare intervals, to warn sporadic mouthers, the memory of that earlier lesson always is sufficient to check pernicious preachers of the doctrine of 'men's rights.'"

"If I were an American and harbored the wholly heretical masculine opinions I do," the general laughed, "I certainly should think long and frequently about those mines and quarries."

"With good reason," she assured him, biting, "for all your sons and grandsons would bear you company, while your daughters and granddaughters would be forbidden to marry. We extirpate treason root and branch."

"We, in China, in what we had considered - mistakenly, I now see - as our new age of liberalism, have adopted the principle that justice is satisfied with visiting the penalty solely on the individual guilty of the crime."

"You refuse to understand the difference in our viewpoints," she replied, head imperially high. "Nothing in Mongolia compares with conditions here. Treason, is directed against an individual - your Emperor or his representative. As in all masculine governments, you have only a succession of steps in power, culminating with your ruler. Each is filled by a man who represents that step during his period in office. Here, there is only the Matriarchy. There are no individuals. From myself to the most modest director of ten of men workers, all women are a part of a great machine. Treason is not against an individual, but against the matriarchy as a whole."

* * * * *

"Undoubtedly there is a difference I cannot perceive," he said, smiling broadly. "Needless to say, I shall be most circumspect in word and deed. I would not have presumed to say outside this chamber what I have remarked to your eminence, and you will recall I spoke as I did in answer to your questions."

She nodded agreement, her grim face relaxing.

"After all, we cannot be too careful, with Mongolia before our men as a survival of the theory of masculine always dominance."

Declining to reopen the argument, K'ung Fu pressed on to another subject.

"May I assure my gracious master, Eminent Matriarch, that there will be an end to agitation by those falsely assuming to represent the Matriarchy in seeking to excite our women to rise and take over the reins of government?"

If his hooded eyes observed a slight, startled raising of her heavy brows, he gave no sign. She replied haughtily.

"Am I accused of inciting Mongolia's women to rebel?"

"Not at all, Eminent Matriarch - only that those guilty of this offense claim to be in your pay and to be following your instructions."

She had a vivid picture of secret agents sobbing out, under torture, certain statements that had best not been said to the fiery Asiatic ruler.

"Would my disavowal of these people and their purposes suffice to reassure the Emperor?" she asked, after a thoughtful pause.

"Absolutely."

She leaned across the table, her heavy face stern.

"Then, so assure him, general."

She rose with royal dignity. He bowed, in a foreign fashion unknown to the men of America, and she did not withdraw her hand as he bent low over it.

"A masterful person," she murmured, watching his strong, heavy figure until it disappeared through hangings held apart by graceful, beautiful boy pages. "If the republic had been filled with such as he - "

She smiled whimsically.

"Who knows whether we should have found it so easy to upset the old government?"

She surveyed her own strong figure, rounded and pleasing despite the years evidenced by her graying hair, and her smile deepened.

"With such men at the helm of American affairs," she continued, laughing, "there might not have been opportunity or the need for change."

A discreet hum sounded from a button on her shoulder. She inclined her head slightly.

"Yes?" she asked, haughtily.

"Eminent Matriarch! General Semiramis Bullvers, commander of the Amazons, reporting," said a stern feminine voice.

"Yes," impatiently.

"The lowest-caste workers are marching on the Food Depots. May I ask that you effect contact by Electrono for a more complete report."

Lips compressed, the Matriarch seated herself at a table and pressed a button. A red spot of light leaped from a metallic stanchion and was centered on her forehead, completing thought connection with General Bullvers, hereditary commander of the women's corps. There was no magic for her in the familiar communication system, by which thought impulses had been linked with radionic power transmission for the interchange of information without waste of time or energy in speaking.

"Throw a cordon around the ways leading to the Depots," she directed, voicelessly.

"It has been done, Eminent Matriarch."

"Use gentle means, if possible. Men's lives are valuable in industry and must not be sacrificed. If necessary, shower the rabble with sleep rays."

"The rays have been tried and have failed. They have found means for counteracting their effect."

"This is unbelievable! We know nothing of such a counter-agent. How did they devise one?"

"I do not know," the Amazonian leader replied. "Our communal Telemnons also have been malfunctioning for days and we have been unable to read the mob mind of the city accurately."

"Your failure to report these extraordinary events is culpable, general. However, there still remains the Death Ray. Use it, as a last resort, but remember, I shall hold you accountable for needless slaughter of even these low-caste males. Act at once, as I have commanded."

"I salute you, Eminent Matriarch."

The red spot dimmed and disappeared. The matriarch turned to a large cabinet. Under her ministrations, it sprang into life and as she slowly revolved the massive metal cylinder on noiseless bearings, a panorama of gigantically extended city life unrolled before her eyes.

"At least, they have not found means of fogging the Televis," she murmured, studying the changing pictures with keen eye.

Gigantic factories of the Clothing Company, constructed solely of a glass with tensile strength greater than steel, yet more ductile than soft iron, swept across the face of the Televis. Into them was admitted the precise degree of light and exterior heat for the most productive labor.

Followed a panorama of the metal-working centers, titanically powerful buildings, constructed especially to resist the rending, explosive force of released atomic energy, with which ores were broken down and their stores of precious materials released for industry. A moment later, she caught a glimpse of the area where the workers in earth fashioned wares for a world denuded of nearly all other industrial productivity following Mongolia's conquest of Asia, Europe, Africa and Australia. However, her thought was not on

the industrial miracles of the Matriarchy. She spun the Televis to a view of the great central Depot of the Transportation Company, where gigantic radiomotors, each carrying hundreds of passengers, were landing or departing with methodical regularity.

* * * * *

Over these commercial craft, gigantic helicoptic radiomotors floated, each carrying the sinister black flag of the Penal Company, hereditary police of the new government. High above all flashed, for a moment, a graceful frigate of the Amazonian Corps, distinguished from all other craft by its arrogantly royal purple and gold flag of the Matriarchy. She followed the aircraft in its flight across the city, past the Community Houses for unmarried workers of both sexes, the gigantic Domiciliary Establishments for the married and the Juvenile Training Homes, in which all children were placed at an early age to be reared and educated.

Arston saw none of these commonplace wonders of the gigantic industrialized city. Her attention was riveted on the racing radiomotor, which she recognized as that of General Semiramis Bullvers. The machine swept to a landing on a huge warehouse of the Food Company. The commander of the Amazons stepped out and trained a gigantic Telemnon on the canyon-like street on which the building faced.

The Matriarch saw her laboring with the thought-reading instrument for several moments before she thrust it aside impatiently. Her gesture clearly indicated that the delicate Telemnon was not bringing to her a record of the mass mind of the mob. Arston manipulated the Televis cylinder until she was able to see the leaderless marching throng, aimlessly pressing through the streets.

"Preposterous!" she exclaimed. "Mob rebellion for the first time in generations!"

She studied the crowd more closely.

"Men again on the march! What can this mean?"

Her haughty face hardened.

"Can this be more of the mad work-of that insane young visionary, Stephen Mowbray? If he has been responsible for this assault on the authority and dignity of the Matriarchy, not even his position as hereditary heir of the Power Company shall save him."

Eyes flashing angrily, she strode the length of the immense apartment.

"Treason among the lower classes we can curb," she mused, aloud. Her firm lips parted in a grim smile.

"We have learned how to handle them. The Telemnon advises us of their plans before these have been seriously developed. The Penal Company seeks out their leaders. Next day, there are men missing from the ranks of the misguided workers and new faces in our mines or quarries."

She nodded approvingly,

"We can care for them, but treason in the highest caste, fostered by the head of the most powerful of all our companies, is a different matter."

She had forgotten the rabble. The Amazons would deal with them swiftly and efficiently, but Mowbray presented a more difficult problem.

"There is only one way in which he can be handled," she concluded, after a pause. "He must be married immediately. Under the law, he will cease to direct the Power Company and his wife will force him to assume his duties in the home."

Her brow cleared.

"That is the solution. I shall have the Council exert pressure on him at once. We shall marry him to a strong-willed woman and she will put an end to his daydreaming treason."

Dismissing the subject as settled satisfactorily, she signaled for her radiomotor and raced above the gigantic city toward the Food Depot, from which General Bullvers had elected to direct the Amazons in their resistance to the mob.

Chapter II

The brutish rabble spat its helpless rage at the Amazons, as it milled before the silent, menacing ranks of the hereditary women national police. Not for them the mean, degrading work of catching criminals and punishing them. For this despised labor the Penal Company existed, a company comprising a strange male caste, esteemed little above the mob which now menaced the Food Company depots. Theirs the duty of regulating the operation of the human material in the vast industrial enterprises, dealing with unrest by swift extra-legal tribunals, crushing rebellion when it raised its head at widespread intervals. In the old republic, their nobler counterpart might have been the Regular Army, long since swept aside, with all other trappings of militarism, by the sternly pacific Matriarchy. Recruited from the lowest caste in the great industrial state, the mob lacked leaders, a purpose, and weapons. Conspicuous in their magnificent uniforms of purple and gold, the women police maintained a watchful double line in front of batteries of Death Ray artillery. Behind these were massed the Sleep Ray tubes, sent to the rear when their effect, for the first time in all history, had failed to overwhelm the crowd.

"Disperse!" commanded General Bullvers, her command carried far and wide by tone-magnifying instruments.

The mass voice of the half-brutes in the streets was borne to Matriarch Victoria Arston, standing beside the Amazonian commander on the towering Food Company depot. On either side of them were grouped distinguished women of the Matriarchy, each hereditary master of a huge corporation embraced in the United Companies, successor to the United States of America. Slightly more removed were several young men, maintaining a modest distance from the arrogant mistresses of the new state. Reared in an atmosphere of seclusion from life's practical affairs, the high-caste youths were horrified, yet fascinated, by the unusual spectacle of brute violence in the street.

"Teach the dogs a lesson!" screamed Rupert Hare, head of the minor Animal Industries. Company, one of the few unmarried men permitted a seat in the Supreme Council of the Matriarchy.

The group of young men drew away from him, terrified by his violence.

"Give them weapons and they would teach us one," declared one of them, facing Hare resolutely.

"More treason!" the latter sneered. "We would permit it from no other except Stephen Mowbray, head of the gigantic Power Company."

"Is it treason to bemoan the emasculation of a nation?" Mowbray demanded, coldly.

"Bah! You have read history. The women of America became its masters because men grew so soft they were incapable of maintaining themselves or the government."

Stephen did not answer. Hare spoke bitter truth.

"Women have conducted our affairs with greater success," the latter continued, with pompous insistence. "Never was a nation so prosperous, its people so sure of creature comforts, the country so free from the desolation of war."

"Nor so dead in spirit and in soul," replied Mowbray, his eyes kindling. "America, once the great experimenter, the daring pioneer in human progress, has produced not one new idea in generations."

Others among the young, unmarried aristocrats shrank away from him, startled by his bold words and fearing stern rebuke from the Matriarch.

"What more need we discover?" jibed Hare. "What we have is sufficient for the grandest industrial civilization the world ever has known. Only a fool would tempt fate by prying deeper into mysteries that might lead to destruction."

"A coward doctrine!" ejaculated Stephen.

"It satisfies the women who control America," the other laughed, shrilly.

"What of it? Need men accept it? The sacred duty of America's women is to take the seed of masculine achievement, cradle it and nurture it until it becomes the master of tomorrow's destiny. Ours is the duty to create and, if necessary, to die in order that the race may live and progress."

The mob had rolled slowly, uncertainly up to the waiting line of Amazons. General Bullvers' voice, magnified into a menacing note, again swept over it.

"Disperse!"

The growl of the sullen throng was her only answer. Again she called a warning. The van of the mob shambled forward, rude weapons leaping forth from the welter of bodies. One of the purple and gold forms staggered and fell.

"Fire!" she thundered.

The Amazonian front was outlined with hissing flame. Howls of rage and fear swept up from the crowded street to the ears of the nervous observers. Almost in an instant, the street was strewn with still forms and the mob was fleeing in panic.

"It is always thus," Matriarch Arston explained to General K'ung Fu, who had appeared unheralded on the depot roof. "They are helpless, yet they riot. Oh, you men - "

She shrugged her shoulders haughtily.

"In your brute rage, you never forget - and you never learn."

* * * * *

The soldier-diplomat, whose victorious legions, had swept in the van of his Emperor's armies over three continents, gazed down upon the panic with incredulous eyes.

"Are those really men?" he asked. "Driven like sheep by a handful of women policewomen?"

"You are in error," she replied, coldly. "Our Amazons are not policewomen. They comprise a special caste of women executives, dedicated to the task of ruling and controlling the male workers of the Matriarchy."

He turned his eyes slowly from her to the street, rapidly being vacated by all save the still forms on the pavement.

"Have your men utterly forgotten how to fight?" he asked, after a pregnant pause.

She shook her head regretfully.

"We have not yet succeeded in breeding that primitive, lustful impulse out of them, any more than we have abolished it among the males in animals, but we allow them no weapons and this renders them impotent."

"They knew, then, they would be helpless before your Amazons when they marched here?"

"Of course. The Amazons always dominate them."

"Your men are not wholly past redemption," he commented, coolly, "if they dare revolt under such circumstances."

Flaming anger shone in the Matriarch's eyes, but her attention momentarily was directed elsewhere as Stephen Mowbray pressed her little group of executives and fawners upon the mighty. She laid a commanding hand on the young man's arm.

"You have seen!" she exclaimed menacingly, nodding downward toward the street, where squads of the low-caste Penal Company workers already were at work removing the dead and wounded. Stephen bowed, his troubled eyes searching her stern countenance.

"Let it be a lesson!" she continued, grimly. "The Matriarchy may forgive childish day-dreaming in an immature young man, unversed in the practical affairs of life. It will not forgive more than that!"

"It is damnable!" he replied, hotly.

"Such intemperate language is improper in a gently reared young man," she reproved. "What do you mean?"

"This wholesale emasculation of an entire nation. What will you do for soldiers when a crisis arises, demanding the summoning of troops for the defense of America?"

"In the Amazons, we have all the force America ever will need."

"Policewomen!" he answered, contemptuously. "When have nations ever relied on police officers to defend their shores and independence?"

"Neither they nor any others ever shall have need to answer a call to arms," she replied, furiously. "War! Struggle! Battle! Men think of nothing else! It has needed this Matriarchy to prove that a great nation can grow greater without these things."

"It was struggle, battle, and war that gave to our caste the nation with which to make this experiment," he replied, pointedly.

Anger overswept her haughty face.

"Be warned, Stephen! The Council knows of your treasonable thoughts. You can hide nothing from the Telemnon. We have been patient, because you are of the highest caste, but you have presumed too much on its patience."

She paused, her cold eyes fixed on his stern face and continued menacingly.

"If I hear more of such utterance's, I shall see that you are disciplined, just as that mob of men has been taught obedience. Despite your high rank, it will go as hard with you as with the misguided leaders of those rebels."

He met threats with chill defiance.

"By what right do you menace the master of the Power Company?" he demanded haughtily. "I am as noble as the Matriarch and answerable to none except the Supreme Council."

She gazed amazed into his fearless eyes.

"I have been patient with the plodding incapacity of this government," he continued, "but now, in my turn, I warn that patience has ceased to be a virtue."

He turned to the Mongolian ambassador, who had been a silent but interested spectator of their duel of wills.

"Tell your Emperor," he said, sternly, "that you have seen the men of America still have the will to fight. He may find that fact - interesting."

"Remember, Eminent Matriarch," he continued, swinging around to Arston, "this time they were helpless because they were unarmed. The next time your Amazons face them, they may have both the will and the means to fight."

With a proud inclination of his head that included the diplomat, he strode to his radiomotor.

"There goes a man!" thought K'ung Fu, stroking his heavy chin thoughtfully. "The first and only one I have met in America."

He checked his step as he half started to follow the daring young rebel, then turned diplomatically in another direction. The Matriarch, accompanied by a large and haughty suite, was entering her airmotor. Others of the aristocratic throng, which had witnessed the rout of the mob, also were departing. The Mongolian diplomat paced thoughtfully to his own machine and was whirled away.

* * * * *

The Matriarch, accompanied by Meering, hereditary mistress of the gigantic steel company, proceeded to the latter's palace. She paused a moment to talk with the powerful autocrat before entering into the dwelling. When she entered the gigantic reception room, her hard eyes scornfully swept the gathering crowd - younger sons of the ruling caste, not yet commanded to marry, daughters of the all-powerful rulers of the companies, women of secondary estate seeking recognition or power, and their husbands craving social triumphs. Her face was cloudy as she continued into an inner chamber. The gay babble of the crowd, stilled under her bitter gaze, again rose like a whispering gale.

"Where is Fordyce?" she demanded.

"She is sitting at one of my cities, judging a group of insolent workers," Meering replied. "Learning how to discipline these low-castes is part of her training. I advised having them thrashed and sent to the quarries for a sufficient time to teach them good behavior."

"Men, of course?"

The steel mistress nodded.

"I don't know what's coming over the country," the ruler of the United Companies declared irritably. "After generations of peace and orderly management of American affairs, we seem to have a plague of dissatisfaction and unrest among our men workers."

"We must make an example of their leaders," Meering replied sternly.

"Granted, but every loss of labor is deplorable. These muscle-bulking, slow-thinking half-brutes could be dangerous, if they knew their power."

"We need not worry. The Amazons have the situation well in hand."

"These troubled times impose a heavy responsibility upon me," the Matriarch complained. "Our younger generation of women lack iron."

"Fordyce does not."

"She is an exception. The air is poisoned by platitudes and absurdities. 'Men's rights.' What did they ever do with rights, except prostitute them to destructive ends? War! Conquest! Plunder! Politics! Destructive business competition! Those were the net results. Whatever else may be said in criticism of our rule, it must be admitted we have abolished these economic crimes."

"Why permit criticism? Our foremothers knew how to curb it," said Meering.

"It is not that which troubles me. Quarries, forests, sewers and mines remain to swallow up mouths. The graver problem is the seeming inability of women in our own caste to cope with other issues and also the gradual intrusion of men into the Supreme Council, weakening it to an extent that is potentially calamitous."

"You refer to Mowbray, Hare and Harmon?"

"Yes. Mowbray, a day-dreaming visionary, Hare half-mad, but devoted to the Matriarchy, Harmon an iron-jawed reversion to masculine type, hiding contempt for us under a thin veneer of insufferable

politeness."

"We need only endure them as long as we will," Meering replied, with an oblique glance.

"Assassination will not cure our disease. There is more need of a surgeon's knife. Sooner or later, we shall have to operate on the body politic, not even sparing our own caste, or this cancer will spread until it menaces the life of the State."

Fordyce Meering brushed aside the hangings with imperious hand.

"Did you conclude your work in the Steel Company court?" her mother asked.

"Yes. I sent three thousand to the quarries and the others to the mines."

"Will the lesson suffice?"

Her reply was arrogantly laconic.

"Quarries and mines both are reeking with rebellion."

"Just as I said," the Matriarch declared, her eyes approving the stern young autocrat. "What is to be done?"

"Deport them."

Her voice was coldly incisive.

"Europe is half-desolate, following the Mongolian conquest. With the Emperor's consent, we can colonize it with the discontented, sending such of their women as wish to follow. I know a number I would like to see summarily deported. Not only will we get rid of these elements but we also may build up a defense against the Oriental menace."

"A brilliant proposal," Arston agreed. "I shall have it considered at the next meeting of the Council. I came here, however, to discuss another matter. When are you to marry Stephen Mowbray?"

"I don't know that I care to marry him at all," the younger autocrat replied, indifferently. "He is handsome enough and it would be a good stroke to unite the Steel and Power Companies but, to be candid, I'm not certain I want a man like him in my house."

"What's the matter?" her mother demanded, in alarm. "Has he been involved in anything scandalous?"

"If he had, I do not think I should be troubled particularly," Fordyce replied, yawning. "I am not a prude. However, he entertains ideas it might be annoying for me to educate out of him."

She crossed one masterful leg above the other.

"There are many things more interesting to me than driving stupid ideas out of a husband's head. He has his full share of silly masculine stubbornness and while I have a certain affection for him as an old playmate, I don't believe I should care to spend my life converting him to sanity."

The Matriarch laughed boisterously.

"If I had a hundred women like you in our caste, Fordyce, I would ride rough-shod over all the Mowbrays of this mad age."

"Give me the Amazons for a year and I will guarantee to stamp out rebellion."

"And some hundreds of thousands of workers at the same time."

"Well, what of it?"

She rose to her slim height and faced the ruler arrogantly.

"What are a million lives, as compared with the preservation of the State?" she asked, haughtily. "I'm weary of dilly-dallying and truckling to treason, this refusal to face facts and deal with them vigorously." She towered over the Matriarch. "Will you give me the Amazons for a year?"

The older woman shook her head.

"You know I can't take them from General Bullvers. She is hereditary ruler of the corps. I question whether they would obey any one else."

With a gesture of impatience, the young patrician turned to go.

"One moment, Fordyce. You have not said when you intended marrying Mowbray."

"Never, if I consult my own inclination," she replied, brusquely. "However, you and mother suit yourselves. I'll marry him, if you insist, but -"

A sinister note crept into her cold voice.

"You both must agree, in advance, to support me if he appeals against my - discipline."

Chapter III

Prone on the withered grass of an isolated mountain plateau, Mowbray rapidly operated the dials of a small machine. After a few moments, he smiled with satisfaction.

"Progress, which died with the old republic, is coming back to America again," he mused aloud. "How Bullvers was amazed when her Sleep Rays failed to overwhelm the mob, forcing her to employ the Death Rays."

He wrinkled his brows in thought.

"She will be more surprised when she finds the Death Rays useless against my militia. This little machine was sufficient to nullify her less deadly weapon. I might have immunized the mob against her stronger arm, but it would not have been wise. The salvation of America is not to be found in the mob. Change must proceed by orderly processes or we will find ourselves in social chaos."

He smiled affectionately as his fingers pressed a button on the little machine, which set up a thin, subdued hum.

"In you," he said, apostrophizing the mechanism, "we have found means to fog the lighter radionic impulses, creating a zone of counter-influence to the ether-borne waves which not only renders the Sleep Ray inoperative, but also produces a condition of disturbance which makes the Televis and Telemnon useless. But for you, I could not meet my captains here in secrecy and with assurance of privacy."

He patted the machine whimsically.

"Thanks to you, I also can talk aloud to myself when it seems I cannot longer keep my thoughts to myself.

"You are our first contribution to the new America that is to be. The next will be the great war machines now under construction in our secret arsenals which you protect from the Matriarchy's spies. Mongolia may believe America is asleep and defenseless, but we shall have another story to tell the great Emperor when he arrives.

He trained a portable Etherscope on a group of quarry workers in the distance. In this instrument, the ancient glass lenses were replaced by a refracting medium of concentrically-whirling colorless gas, activated by radioI active units fixed in the metal shell which set up a gravitational field around which the gas molecules revolved. The refracting power could be determined by the volume of energy directed to the control units. The Etherscope had a vision range much greater than that of the ancient telescope and the image also was far more clear. It now revealed to his eye thousands of men, all political suspects, condemned to the exhausting and degrading task of hewing out stones with rude hand tools under the watchful direction of guards clad in the somber black of the Penal Company.

"Poor victims of tyranny," he mused. "Their only crime is an unuttered, perhaps even a half-formed mental protest against the soul-deadening materialism of an age that has made both men and women mere slaves to the machine. All betrayed to harsh overlords by the treacherous Telemnon."

He shifted the Etherscope to a broad field, on which gigantic machines were reaping an early harvest.

"Here is one of our greatest hopes for the future. Agriculture is so essentially individualistic and the labor so heavy and exacting, that men have had to be retained for all but the highest executive positions in the Farm Company. They still fight Nature to win food, even in America."

He shook his head doubtfully.

"At times, I wonder whether we can depend upon them. The farmers are a special caste, upon which the Matriarchy has showered more favors than upon any other of the lower elements in the country. These men might be reluctant to risk the loss of their special Privileges."

A small radiomotor dropped lightly on the sere grass and from it sprang a girl, her beautiful face alight with the charm of high intelligence. He leaped to his feet. "Ardis Moore! I had not expected you so soon."

"I hoped you would be here early and came as soon as I was given release by the Mistress of my Community House."

He drew her to him.

"I hear gossip," she continued, "that the Matriarch had decreed your immediate marriage."

"She had no authority for such statements," he replied, his eyes flashing. "She is spreading these reports to render me ridiculous among my followers, but even she will not dare attempt coercion."

"I am not so certain. It would not be the first time a young man of your caste, who entertained ideas inconvenient for the Matriarchy, had been summarily removed from public affairs by marriage to a strong-willed woman of his own estate."

"It is damnable! Eager, ambitious young men parceled out in such high-handed manner - married to this woman or that woman as the Matriarchy deems expedient."

"It is the custom," she replied, smiling sadly.

"Custom or no custom," he answered, hotly, "I shall have no wife but you, Ardis."

A spasm of pain contorted her beautiful face.

"That can never be. The matron of my Community House informed me today I have been placed in the proscribed caste. I never can become either wife or mother."

"Proscribed!" he ejaculated, in amazement.

She nodded, her face suddenly grown haggard.

"The Telemnon must have revealed our secret. I was instructed that as soon as discharged from the surgery of my own caste, I am to enter the School for Junior Executives."

He drew her, to him in a fierce embrace.

"I shall not permit it!"

"What can you do?" she replied, sadly. "You - a man?"

"I shall appeal to the Matriarch. She shall know I love you - "

"That would make her the more determined to see the decree carried out. She has arranged a marriage for you with Fordyce Meering - "

"The daughter of the Mistress of the Steel Company?"

"Yes," she answered, with pitiful composure. "Your ruling caste will not permit you to marry outside its own sacred bounds."

Abruptly, she thrust him away, her strong hands pressed against his chest.

"This must be our last meeting."

"Never!"

"Marriage is forbidden for me," she replied, firmly. "Where I may not wed, it is unjust to you to play at love-making. You must think of your future and of the woman who is to make you her husband."

* * * * *

He strove to interrupt, but she would not heed his protests.

"For me, there is only the dreadful prospect of a loveless, hopeless life as a cog in the government's gigantic executive machine. For you, there opens up a great social career as help-mate of the woman who, through marriage with you, will dominate two of the mightiest of the Companies. Dearest, do not add to the burden of my grief. Blind my eyes as I might with love, I always have known: I could not hope to claim a man of the highest caste. Now comes the end of our pitiful little dream of happiness. I followed you here today to say a last, sad farewell."

He grasped her wrists determinedly.

"Neither the Matriarch nor the Council can force me to marry Fordyce Meering or any one else except you."

She shook her head gently.

"You know less than I of the terrible power of the government. You were not reared in a Community House from the hour of birth, never knowing your father, bearing your mother's name and drawing in, with her milk, the stern doctrines of the Matriarchy. You did not go to the women's schools, where we were taught the lessons of our sex, prepared for our masterful part in the world, trained to take our places, when ordered, in whatever branch of directive energy to which we might be assigned."

She brushed her hand across her brow, as though to steady her thoughts.

"Stephen, you have no conception of the ordered ruthlessness of the Matriarchy, or you would not speak of defying it."

He crushed her to him with arms stronger than her own.

"My defiance will not be the protest of one helpless man," he declared, exultantly. "Have you heard of the militia I am organizing?"

"Who has not?" she smiled, lovingly tolerant. "They laugh at you in the Women's Community' Houses for your 'toy soldiers' and your 'playboy campaigns.'"

"My soldiers are not toys," he replied.

The grim purpose in his voice brought her face up from his breast. She searched his face apprehensively.

"Down there, where those quarrymen are toiling, I have friends," he continued. "Yonder, among those farmers, I have emissaries. You cannot enter a mine, a factory, a machinery depot that you will not find my agents. In the Men's Community Houses, I have representatives, who wink at the departure of the Companions for stealthy drill grounds, deep down in the city catacombs, in the silence of mountain forests and in isolated highland valleys, where every man is committed to my cause."

"You play with fire," she cried, in alarm. "What if the Council were to learn what you are doing?"

"Who do you think it was that fogged the Telemnon so no one, not even General Bullvers, now can read the public mind with certainty?"

"Was that really your work?" she exclaimed, amazed.

"Who else could it be?" he laughed. "This is the first of several surprises I have for the government."

"It is all fearfully dangerous," she replied, shaking her head. "If they learn of this, they will sweep you with the Death Ray."

He laughed derisively.

"I have stood an hour in its full force and never even felt a tingle of the skin. Inventive genius all but died under the Matriarchy but we have revived it. I have weapons of which even the martial Mongolian does not dream. This revolt of mine is no sudden thing. It is the culmination of masculine plots reaching back for generations. When the Companions answer my call, the world will be amazed by their tools of war."

He gazed down tenderly into her beautiful face.

"Can you love a rebel, dearest? Can you give yourself to one who would smash this horrible travesty on government, which brutalizes even its masters and which at this hour awaits, without attempt at defense, invasion by Mongolia?"

"Is that certain, Stephen, or only hearsay?"

"It is a certainty," he replied, soberly. "I have spies at the court of the Emperor in Thither Mongolia and I know he is at this moment assembling a tremendous fleet of gigantic warmotors to raid our country."

"But the Council must know! Why is it not preparing for defense?"

"To whom would they turn?" he demanded.

"The Amazons."

"Policewomen! What does their commander, Bullvers, know of fighting. For generations, they have done nothing but maintain law and order and punish the enemies of government."

"Women can fight," she replied, spiritedly. "Provided, of course, that fighting really is necessary."

"When have they had to war?" he demanded, laughing. "The republic was established by men, who battled with Washington, Grant, Pershing and a thousand other commanders. When the Matriarchy was established, this nation so completely dominated the world none dared challenge it. That was the state of affairs until this Mongolian conqueror burst from Asia to sweep three continents. It needs only the defeat of America to make him the first unchallenged master of earth."

"He may be a great soldier," she argued, "but he will not risk the collapse of highly industrialized America. That would mean economic ruin and would give him a barren victory."

"Are you so sure of that, my little philosopher?" he teased.

His bantering tone brought surprise to her eyes. Never before had she heard any man speak in this wise to a woman. He grew serious.

"Ardis, men esteem some things higher than peace, security, and comfort. One is fame - the red fame of conquest, of domination, of power. For power and also, perhaps, an imperishable page in history, an Alexander conquered the known world, a Caesar crossed the Rubicon, a Napoleon set up and crashed down an empire. Another of these primal urges is the lust for the continued progress of the race which inspired Washington to establish this republic and Lincoln to make it free."

"What are these things, as compared with safety, comfort, even life itself, sacrificed in accomplishing the achievements you mention?" she protested, in horror.

"Everything. That is where your sex and mine differ. I do not mean the poor masculine weaklings this Matriarchy has developed by inbreeding among its own kind, or the stern women it has elevated to power in the Companies, but the men and women of the early republic, who sacrificed greatly that it might come into being and continued sacrificing that it might live and progress."

She listened in silence, inspired by his enthusiasm but amazed by the strange, new doctrines he enunciated.

"Men must adventure and die that the race may go forward," he continued. "Women must safeguard all that courage and sacrifice have won. Theirs it is to have, to hold and to transmit to the next generation, cradled in their arms and learning from their lips the lessons of patriotism and noble thinking."

"It is a wonderful picture, but an impossible one."

"Ardis," he said, solemnly, "we have come to the end of unchanging days for America. Change has been slow, but now it has arrived!"

"Change!" she exclaimed, with a frightened intaking of breath. "Change is a frightful monster, always demanding a toll of life, wealth and happiness. What do you mean?"

"We face the inevitable conflict. The Matriarchy is doomed. If Mongolia wins, the Emperor will degrade its rulers and seize their enormous wealth. If he is to be defeated, my 'toy soldiers' must do it. They will not stop short of a restoration of the republic."

"The Emperor will not invade. He will accept tribute, as he has before."

"Why accept part when we can have all? Ardis, you little know the heart of man. He would rather be first Master of the World than possess all its wealth. To him, the glory infinitely outweighs the gold."

She stared with affrighted eyes into his eager face.

"These things of which you speak are mad," she declared. "Yet, I believe. I see you as the herald of a new day for America. What is my part to be?"

"When the crisis comes - and it will be delayed only a few days - hasten to Malcolm McArthur, custodian of furnishings in the Alpha Community House for Men. He is a trusted friend and will show you a secret hiding place I have prepared for this emergency. Remain there until I come to you."

"And if you do not come?"

"Be guided by Malcolm's advice."

"I shall not need his advice. I shall join you."

"That," he replied, slowly, "will be impossible. I shall have gone on a long, long journey."

Realizing fully the savage fury with which the Matriarchy would pursue him as a defeated rebel, she read the secret meaning in his cryptic statement.

"It will not be impossible for me, sweetheart," she declared. "You will not travel that long road alone."

Chapter IV

Dusk was falling as Stephen, his lips still warm from Ardis' kisses, made his way through the business section of the metropolis toward the quarter of the no-caste foreign contract slaves of the United Companies. A heavy cloak drooped from his shoulders and a long-drawn hat concealed his features.

The precarious, narrow balcony he followed was a strangely inefficient survival of a distant era in the life of the great industrial autocracy. It hung along the cliff-like sides of massive factories and consisted of loosely-joined links of communication between adjacent buildings. Other and more rapid means of communication had rendered pedestrian traffic unnecessary, but tradition and customs had preserved the walkway, which had a sinister reputation of nights when, in its convenient shadows, lurked successors of lawless elements that, in earlier days, had preyed on the public under the names of "burglar," "thug," "thief" and "footpad."

By day, these malefactors plied the lowest and vilest trades in the great city, plowing through the polluted waters of mastodonic sewers, performing menial labors in the mammoth Community Houses, executing tasks from which even the foreign contract slaves shrank. Chalk-faced, stoop-shouldered, taciturn, they spoke a patois of their own, turning sullen, debased faces to their harsh task-masters. At night, they sallied forth, veritable vampires of evil, levying forcible tribute on wayfarers and even occasionally looting a rich warehouse.

This caste - for although not officially so designated, it was as distinct and separate from others as those recognized by law - was always at war with the Companies. In it, men were dominant and these snarling enemies of society alone cherished a feeble flame of revolt against the rule of the Matriarchy. From their ranks had arisen fierce leaders who led wild hordes against the Amazons, deluging sections of the city with blood and holding mad revelry over the glazing wreck of vast properties.

In their odd language, a treasure of ancient tradition was preserved. The spirit of the old republic found strange, distorted response in their untamed, individualistic natures. When they rose, a rude banner, fashioned from memory of the starry flag that had been the emblem of the ancient nation, floated defiance to the purple and gold ensign of the Matriarchy.

Mowbray paused at the approach to a gentle slope and peered into the darkened street. Far below ran the escalators, which provided passenger transportation within the city. Outside it, all permitted to travel used antigravitational belts for short distances but because these had not been perfected to the point where they could be relied upon for long trips, the radiomotor was employed for this purpose. This limitation on transportation also served the useful purpose of preventing departure of workers from their fixed districts without permission of constituted authorities.

Under the escalators were the moving freight platforms. Huge-muscled men darted in and out among the trains shifting the commodities into warehouses or adding bulky parcels to the never-ending procession. Over the street, from the roof of one building to its fellow on the opposite side, sprang a translucent

covering, which excluded cold, rain and snow, but permitted passage of light, heat and the health-promoting ultra-violet rays. At right, its surface was a vast mirror, which flung back mellow radiance into the canyoned thoroughfares from lights concealed in supporting beams.

Sinister forms crept from the gloom and a heavy hand was laid on Stephen's arm. The vampires were abroad. He spoke a password in the patois of the caste and it brought instant respect.

"We did not recognize the Commander," a hoarse voice apologized.

Another man, evilly odorous of the sewers, thrust his way forward. Imperatively motioning his companions to draw back, he whispered in Mowbray's ear.

"Simeon of the Thieves asks orders, Commander. Shall we strike?"

"No. The time has not yet come."

"Will it be soon?"

"It cannot be long delayed. The Mongolian is preparing to invade."

"We are ready."

The thief out-thrust a brawny arm in a gesture of rude eloquence.

"My hand is open. The Commander's will controls it. If he speaks - see, it closes!"

"Many will die if the Emperor comes, for he will bring an army of veterans."

"Better to die fighting than rot in the sewers."

He bent closer.

"Simeon was approached today by a servant of Mally, Master of the Penal Company."

"Yes?"

Stephen instantly was alert.

"A bribe was offered."

"For what service?" the young man demanded.

"Your assassination as an enemy of the state. Others were to be removed also, without scandal."

Stephen laughed curtly.

"Simeon is certain the man was Mally's agent?"

"Is there one of his cat-footed devils Simeon does not know?"

"Did the man say who ordered Mally to strike?"

"Yes. He mentioned the name of Arston."

"The Matriarch! This is grave news. Is it possible she would risk internal revolution on the eve of Mongolian invasion?"

* * * * *

He soliloquized more to himself than to the ear of the thief, who hung eagerly on his words. When he spoke again, his voice was hard.

"This is one more subject to be discussed at tonight's meeting of the Leaders."

Fury shook his reserve.

"Fools and murderers! Their doom is on their own heads!"

Nodding a preoccupied farewell to the thief leader and his followers, Stephen pressed on with hurried steps deeper into the heart of the quarter reserved for the contract slaves. Factory buildings became less numerous and were interspersed with loathsome no-caste Community Houses. He plunged into a chasm-like court and knocked at a gloomy door. It was opened guardedly and he slipped in, coughing as a medicinal reek filled his lungs.

A Mongolian, upon whom tuberculosis, the scourge of the outcasts, had set its seal, carefully fastened the door and joined him at a table. His face showed wan and pinched in the light - deep hollows in his cheeks and stern lines of pain graven about his mouth testifying to an agony of suffering restrained by indomitable will.

"You sent for me, Drusus?" Mowbray said, inquiringly.

A spasm of coughing shook the other's frame. An exile from his own country, with a price on his head, he had fled across the Pacific for refuge. Speaking the language of the Americas freely, he had adopted the name of "Drusus" and had taken his place among the Mongolian contract slaves. Unfitted for rough and noisome tasks, he had contracted the disease that now wrote the lines of doom on his countenance. Hard-driven by a merciless taskmaster, he had been picked up by Mowbray's order and, under the young patrician's shelter, treated by skilled practitioners, who had halted the hand of death but could not cure the wounds disease had inflicted.

Stephen had surrounded the proud sufferer with simple comforts he could be persuaded to accept and had been repaid by information concerning conditions among the outcastes such as no others, not even the leaders of the thieves, could furnish. "Drusus" was a hidden power among the Mongolian contract slaves and, through them, was in intimate touch with all elements in that vast, appallingly unknown underworld which crawled about the substructure of society in the Matriarchy. Curbing his coughing by an effort, the man began to talk, speaking rapidly lest further attacks interrupt his words.

"The Emperor is prepared at last. He will command the invasion in person. This is to be his last and greatest campaign of conquest."

"Are you certain? This is grave-news, if true."

"Drusus" laid a bony hand affectionately on the young man's arm.

"My friend, why waste a noble life in a doomed cause? You cannot stem the tide of destiny. Mongolia will obliterate this government."

"I fear you are a true prophet," Mowbray assented, gravely.

"What is there in it worth fighting for?" the Mongolian proceeded, eagerly. "Even if, by some miracle, you should defeat the Emperor, the Matriarchy would hound you to death as a rebel."

"True again, 'Drusus.' Still, you know the die is cast. I could not draw back if I would and I would not if I could."

"Is it too late to cast aside your own plan for a better one?"

"What do you propose?"

He seemed at loss for an answer.

"As you know," he said, after a pause, "I fled Mongolia because my life was in danger and the Emperor had declared my estates forfeit. The reason I never have told you. In open council, I accused him of cowardice because he refused to throw an army of conquest into America."

He raised a hand to check Stephen's protestations of surprise.

"I did not realize the slow certainty of his mind. I saw only that your nation could not resist a single spirited attack. An empire without an emperor, a despotism of merchant princesses, I knew it would crash under the first assault of veteran troops. I did not realize that Mongolia had taxed its resources so vitally in the European and African campaigns. It could not strike again without imperiling all that had been built up by war."

He rose and replenished the urn, in which pungent drugs burned slowly.

"The Emperor has recalled me," he continued, seating himself. "He offers a place in his council and the return of my estates."

"That is good news for you, 'Drusus.'"

"'Drusus' no longer," replied the Mongolian proudly. "Field Marshal Lee Chang."

Mowbray's brows rose in astonishment. The conquest of Europe had been a chronicle of this man's spectacular victories.

"I see you recognize the name. It is my last pride. However, though I have accepted the estates, I have refused office and return to my own country only to die. One mission I have accepted, at the Emperor's request. He seeks the rich prize of America for a double purpose - to recoup his treasury and to forge the concluding link in a chain of conquests that will carry Mongolia's rule around the world. This forceless Matriarchy is the sole remaining government of the white race. It must fall, that Mongolia's triumph may be complete."

"If he succeeds, Mongolian world rule is certain," Mowbray admitted. "The white race will cease to exist as a dominant people."

"It has ceased to exist," declared Lee, in sonorous tones. "If unmenaced from without, it soon would crash of its own incapacity. The white race has had its day. I speak not of individuals. If men of your lofty spirit dominated America, it still would be the torch-bearer of civilization. The Matriarchy, buying peace at the price of dishonor, stamping out initiative, imprisoning all who dare oppose its unprogressing rule, has made men slaves and women their soulless taskmasters."

The stern pride of the soldier shone for a moment in his deep eyes.

"We, of Mongolia, poor but militant, would not sacrifice our manhood on the altar of commercialism. Few in number after the Great Plague of China, wandering for generations on the desolate plains of Asia, we held true to the high principle to which your forefathers subscribed. Upon us, my friend, has descended the mantle of your Washington and your Lincoln."

His emaciated form was shaken with a spasm of coughing. When he resumed, it was in a calmer tone.

"I spoke of a mission I had accepted. It intimately concerns you. Do not be surprised. The Emperor's mind is omniscient. The Companies will fall and the bloodstained treasure wrung from your decadent manhood and a world's necessities will enrich Mongolia. He seeks a vice-regent to govern this people, in whose fealty he can place trust. He has selected that man."

Lee leaned forward, his keen eyes searching Mowbray's face.

"Who is he?" Stephen demanded.

"Yourself!"

The exile's hand closed commandingly on the other's arm.

"Do not answer hastily. The future welfare of millions may depend upon your decision."

* * * * *

The young man sat for moments revolving the amazing proposal. Mongolia's victory might not be so foreordained as Lee Chang assumed, but treachery in America, coupled with military incapacity, readily might make the Emperor's triumph both sure and complete. As America's vice-regent, he might launch far-reaching reforms, the operation of which eventually would rescue America from the dire abyss into which the Matriarchy had plunged it. However, when he replied, his voice was stern with resolve.

"I cannot accept. The conflict is inevitable. Upon the issue hangs the mastery of your people or mine. America, substituting servile peace for warlike accomplishment, and gold for steel, had procrastinated for generations. Now, it must face the issue with as much resolution as still remains in its fighting men. A vice-regency, under a shadow monarch of our own race, merely would smother whatever flame of ancient courage yet survives. The fight must be to the finish - your race against mine and I must stand or fall with my own people."

Lee Chang bowed gravely.

"Your answer was as I had feared and expected. This is our last interview. I envy your youth, strength, even your perils, and they are many. However, I have accepted the Emperor's grace and will return to die in the land of my birth. One last warning. Be prepared. The Emperor moves slowly in preparation but

swiftly to battle. You will be at death's grips with him soon."

Stephen was met at the entrance to his palace, on his return from his interview with "Drusus," by a nervous servant, who whispered a message. He paused thoughtfully, weighing the news carefully and then went to a retired chamber where he conversed briefly over the Electrono with several of his lieutenants. Brow now serene, he returned to the reception chamber, where a purple and gold clad Amazon awaited.

"I was instructed to request your immediate attendance upon the Matriarch," the officer said, bowing haughtily."

"Her word is law," he replied, according to traditional formula.

He paused as they reached his radiomotor, in which he had chosen to make the journey.

"Am I under arrest?" he demanded.

"I was not so instructed," the woman replied, coldly. "General Bullvers, who is in conference with the Matriarch, directed that you be summoned."

Stephen breathed more easily. While he had relied upon the known hesitation of the Council in the face of an emergency, none knew better its instant readiness to sacrifice any individual, however nobly placed, when its members suspected their own security was endangered. The machine rose from the roof and the city fled away like a dream panorama. He could discern the outlines of factory roofs only dimly, because the covering conserved all except a modicum of illumination. The radiomotor alighted on the roof of the Matriarchal Palace, in the Administrative Center of the city. Stephen found her closeted with Bullvers, Councilor Alexander Harmon, one of the few unmarried men in active control of one of the great Companies, and Mallay, Master of the Penal Company. With a haughty gesture, she indicated a chair and studied him coldly for several moments before speaking.

"What are you doing among the lower-caste workers?" she demanded, abruptly.

"Do you ask in the name of the Council?" he replied, boldly.

"Yes."

"Am I on trial?"

She stirred uneasily. Mowbray was another of the dangerous anomalies of the national politico-economic administrations - master of the greatest of all the Companies in a government otherwise dominated by women. In a critical stage of public affairs, it was no simple matter to discipline so powerful an autocrat. While she weighed her answer, Mallay, a rat-faced, nervous little man, shrilled a challenging answer.

"When the Council decides, it will speak in no uncertain tones."

"I am a member of the Council and I need no information on that score," Mowbray replied, scornfully.

The Penal Company head recoiled under his haughty contempt. Stephen shot a stern question at Arston.

"As a man of highest estate, I demand to know why I am questioned."

"The law accords you that right," she admitted, unwillingly.

His boldness daunted her. She also was handicapped by traditional feminine respect for his sex. After all, once he was safely married to Fordyce Meering, there would be an end to his weak, wild adventuring. She continued in a milder tone.

"Is it not sufficient that I ask an explanation? Do you require nobler auditors?"

A slight smile played upon his lips.

"No, Eminent Matriarch, but I demur to one of the Company," with a glance of contempt toward Mallay, "and I also question the reason for this inquisition. However, I am at your service. What would you know?"

His adroit reversing of their positions as accused and accuser had not escaped the notice of Councilor Harmon, the square-jawed satirist, whom failure of the female line had made Master of the mighty Food Company. A smile of amusement swept his heavy face, and brought a flush of annoyance to that of the Matriarch.

"Why are you organizing the workers and educating them in arms?" she demanded, brusquely.

"To defend the state."

"Is there no other motive?" Her half-closed eyes glittered ominously.

"Not now."

"And later?"

"I am no prophet," he replied, composedly. "I cannot probe the future."

General Bullvers, who had been listening intently, thrust forward a ruddy visage, purpled with anger and the hard effort to control strong emotion.

"Who are these enemies you fear?" she demanded, ironically.

"Mongolia, immediately."

"Ah!" She heaved a portentous sigh.

"And ultimately?"

Stephen's face paled, but his voice was firm.

"All who endanger the future of our race by debauching its people and squeezing out the last remnant of their manhood."

"Treason!" shrilled Mallay.

"If it is treason to save a people from subjection, I am guilty," Mowbray replied, fearlessly. "What is the Council doing to meet the Mongolian threat? Nothing! Go down, as I have, into the Community Houses

of the lower-caste workers and see hordes of men without courage and women without hope. There, find the answer if you can to the problem of resisting the great Emperor when he pours his veterans out upon the soil of America."

Arston, her eyes sparkling with rage, replied:

"We shall meet him, if he comes, as we have in the past. He is no fool. He will not risk the loss of tribute to gratify a mad lust for conquest."

* * * * *

A harder note crept into her warning voice.

"Be careful, Stephen Mowbray. The Council can deal harshly even with traitors of the highest caste and your sex will not make it too merciful."

He brushed aside the personal threat contemptuously.

"The Emperor will not be content with part when he can take all. You measure his ambition with your own golden yardstick. Think you, if he intended accepting tribute he would, at this very moment, be gathering the greatest fleet of warmotors the world ever has known in Thibet with such secrecy that your secret agents have heard no word of his plans?"

Arston shrank back, as though from a physical blow. Her face paled, but Harmon, his heavy face alight with interest, leaned forward in his chair.

"How do you know this?" he demanded.

"Because I have not been blinded by insane belief in the impossibility of war and have men in Mongolia looking for the thing you refuse to recognize. Tomorrow's sun may be darkened by the Emperor's war fleet. Where will you find soldiers to meet his trained veterans? Will you find them in the Amazons?"

The angry corps commander was silent under the lash of his scorn.

"Your sole salvation is in the despised workers, to whom I have tried to teach a little of the almost forgotten art of war. It may be they are a broken reed but it is the only one upon which we all can lean in an emergency."

He turned his back upon the silent group and strode from the apartment.

"Stop him!" shrilled Mallay, starting from his chair.

"No!" thundered Harmon. "Would you see warehouses and factories in flames? He speaks with the air of one backed by no uncertain force."

"Harmon is right," the Matriarch declared, uncertainly. "We must take this matter before the Council."

"Dare we try him?" Harmon asked, contemptuously. "Be patient. We may find use for these Workers he has trained if the Emperor actually has gone mad and decided to invade America."

"You attach too much importance to his bluster," Bullvers protested.

The Councilor's tone was bitterly ironic as he replied. "If you fight no better than you reason, general, you will need more than Mowbray's levies."

As Stephen's radiomotor rose from the Matriarchal Palace roof, he perceived many small machines and larger passenger carriers swinging, bat-like, over the building. The air was thick with them and they moved in perfect order. He flashed a signal, recognizing them as part of his secret aerial militia and a tiny flyer cut in under his own. Simeon Shackelford, leader of the Thieves, swarmed up a ladder into the cabin of the Commander's car.

"We were marking time an hour, as you directed," he declared. "Had you not appeared, we should have invaded the palace. Men have assembled at all the concentration points and are awaiting orders."

Stephen briefly detailed the session through which he had passed.

"Disperse at once," he commanded. "The Council will summon me for trial tomorrow. Let the commands gather quietly and, if no order comes from me at once, order them to move on its chamber."

"Why delay?" urged Simeon. "We are ready now. Let us seize the Matriarch and defy the Council."

"We must give them one last opportunity to prove their ability to cope with the situation. If they will strike hands with us in repelling Mongolia and consent to national reforms following victory, we can afford to be magnanimous. If they refuse, our plans are made."

"You waste time," Simeon protested. "Assassination has not been unknown, even in the Chamber. Strike now!"

"Not tonight. Our soldiers will be filled with renewed determination if they know peaceful advances by their leaders have been rejected."

"Your advice is best," the leader of the Thieves conceded.

He cried a voiceless order into the Electrono and radiomotors swung off in every direction, carrying the militiamen to their respective quarters. In the early morning hours, while Stephen still was in conference with his Captains, an imperative message came, commanding him to appear before the Council.

"Fate is moving with hasty strides," cried a worker of distant Italian parentage, his mobile face lighting with stern enthusiasm.

Stephen moved to a window opening out upon the east. His palace stood on a hill outside the city and the chill breath of dawn was borne on slanting lances of light to his tired face. Eyes upon the distant horizon, growing bright with the first hint of sunlight, he studied the problem before him. Would this day be the herald of a new era for America, or would it witness destruction of another futile rebellion against these giants of commercialism, against whom he had unsheathed his sword?

With a sigh, he turned to issue final orders to his lieutenants, who hastened to their radiomotors, bearing commands that might turn the city into a shambles before nightfall.

Chapter V

Stephen paused at the door of the Council Chamber and listened with amazement to the tumult within.

This magnificent edifice, in which the Mistresses of the Companies long had met to decide the policies of the nation, always had been a place of dread, in secret, even to the patricians who foregathered there, but never had it been a house of brawling. Its sign had been the sign of fear. So haughtily confident, in fact, was the ruling caste that lesser estates never would dare invade its sinister precincts, that no sentinels ever had guarded its single entrance. Now, for the first time, clamorous voices battled for recognition and verbal riot held sway within its magnificent confines.

"Treason!" shrilled a voice he recognized as that of Hare, the unwedded Master of the Animal Industries Company.

In the hush that followed, he heard the Matriarch's stern voice.

"Treason, undoubtedly. We are agreed. The question now is how we shall meet it."

Again the din burst forth, drowning her voice. Mowbray strode into the chamber. Women Councilors, magnificently clad in the hereditary robes of their high office, had clambered on seats and desks and were gesticulating into the reddened faces of companions, who shouted in a vain effort to make themselves heard; Obviously, the debate had been long sustained and had brought no decision to the divided and uncertain Council. Arston recognized Stephen and beat heavily with her gavel. The noise rose above babble of voices and the disputants, following the direction of her gaze, saw the young Commander. Silence fell upon the assembly.

"There's the arch-criminal!" screamed Hare, pointing a trembling finger. "Arrest him!"

Unsupported by a single attendant, Stephen strode to the foot of the Matriarchal throne, the gorgeously robed Councilors parting before him, and bowed gravely.

"You sent for me. I have come."

Harmon forced Hare into a seat as Mallay raced into the Chamber.

"The masses are marching," the Prison Master screamed. "An army of the low dogs is massed at the outer gates of the Chamber grounds."

Arston hurled a bitter question at the silent young Commander.

"You ordered these men to mass here?"

"I did."

His laconic reply brought a dozen Councilors to their feet, shouting questions and denunciation. She silenced them with her gavel.

"By whose authority did you issue these orders?" she demanded.

"My own."

"Traitor!" again screamed Hare.

Meering thrust herself to the forefront of the throng.

"Do you place your authority above that of the Council?" she demanded.

"It remains to be seen whether they were not in accord with its best judgment."

"This is no time for quibbling," the Matriarch declared, sternly. "The Council speaks its own will in its own way and in its own time. Order these low-castes to disperse."

Stephen smiled into her flushed face.

"Is that all you desire of me?"

"That is all I require now."

"I will go then."

The richly garbed throng parted less readily before him, uncertain whether to detain him or permit him to depart. Harmon laid a heavy hand on his arm.

"Why did you come here?" the man demanded.

"I was summoned in the name of the Council."

"This is child's play," the burly Food Company Master declared, turning to his colleagues. "Who summoned Councilor Mowbray?"

"I did," Arston declared.

"Why?"

"That he might give an accounting of his subversive activities among the lower classes."

"Let him speak then," Harmon urged, grimly. "I do not believe his rabble will attack this Chamber without his orders."

"What would you know?" the Commander asked, addressing the burly Councilor.

"I know all I consider necessary about you and your plans," he replied, shrugging his shoulders. "The Matriarch is curious."

Her face flushed with anger; the latter again interrogated the intrepid young patrician.

"What have you to say in your own defense?"

"Of what do I stand charged?"

"Treason to the state."

"Treason is a broad accusation. I do not recognize that I need to defend myself from such a charge."

"And I," she replied, with fierce malevolence, "refuse longer to bandy words with one who has betrayed his own caste. It is my judgment that you die as a traitor, under torture."

Mallay, his vulpine face alight with eager malice, laid a clutching hand on Mowbray's wrist. With a contemptuous gesture, the latter knocked the Prison Master sprawling, then sprang through the richly robed Councilors and paused at the head of the magnificent stairway leading from the Chamber to the splendid park in which the dread building was situated. A solid body of purple and gold clad Amazons was advancing on the doublequick toward Phillip's militiamen, who had broken through the gates of the Chamber ground and were marching upon the building. Harmon had followed Mowbray from the structure and the latter now turned to the heavy-faced Councilor.

"Must this slaughter be precipitated?" he entreated indicating the nearing columns.

"Yes! A thousand times yes!" screamed Mallay, cowering behind Harmon's sturdy form.

General Bullvers broke through the door and smiled with satisfaction as she noted the orderly advance of the Amazons.

"Thus, young sir," she declared triumphantly, "will end another abortive rebellion."

Stephen had been recognized by a keen-eyed leader in his own forces and at the officer's command, the militia broke into a quick-step, rapidly narrowing the distance between it and the Amazons, who also converged on the Chamber entrance. Harmon suddenly flung up his hand and knocked a weapon from the hand of Hare, who had slunk through the gathering crowd of gorgeously robed autocrats until he had gained a position behind the preoccupied young leader. As the half-mad young aristocrat recoiled, the Food Company Master studied Phillip with evidence of lively amazement.

"Are you immune to the Death Ray?" he demanded.

"Yes," Mowbray replied, grimly. "So are those militiamen. The Amazons are doomed, if they clash with my soldiers."

He heard a strangled cry of incredulous surprise from the hereditary commander of the corps.

"There still is time to avert a massacre of your troops, general," he continued, sternly.

* * * * *

He paused for a reply. From both advancing columns abruptly broke a startled rout. He glanced westward, in which direction all eyes were bent. A squadron of crimson radiomotors was swiftly approaching. Over the foremost floated a banner readily identifiable, even before the design upon it was visible. Behind the first squadron came two others and then an endless fleet of racing warships, heading purposefully toward the east. Grim, relentless, they all too evidently typified a power arrogantly confident of itself and as arrogantly contemptuous of opposition. As the leading machine swept past, the flaunting flap was revealed. It bore a gleaming dragon on a blood-red ground.

"Mongolia!" screamed Hare, hysterically. He turned to the silent mob of patricians, eyes rolling, mouth pendulous in panic dismay.

"Mongolia, certainly," Harmon assented, heavily. "What will you do now, Councilors?"

None answered. Stephen turned quietly to Arston.

"What now, Eminent Matriarch. [sic]

"Invasion from Mongolia!" she exclaimed. "Impossible! There must be some mistake!"

Harmon, his harsh face stern with foreboding, answered contemptuously.

"The mistake is ours. We sent incompetents to the court of the most dangerous enemy America ever has faced."

With characteristic directness, he turned to Mowbray.

"Can we rely on you and your militia?"

"I will make common cause with any one against the Emperor?"

"Can you control your men?"

"Better, perhaps, than you can control the Amazons. They knew this emergency was inevitable and have been trained for it."

Unwilling admiration erased the habitual ironic smile from Harmon's lips.

"You're bigger than I had thought, Mowbray - bigger, perhaps, than all the Council combined."

He turned commandingly to Bullvers. "Disperse your troops. Mowbray will order his soldiers to retire. We are facing the gravest crisis in the history of the United Companies."

Ignoring the panic-stricken Councilors, he led the general, Stephen and Hare to the offices of the Food Company.

"Whatever our individual opinions on internal affairs," he declared, sternly eyeing his silent auditors, "it is our common duty to join for the defense of the country against a foreign foe. We will pour out treasure unstintedly [sic] to procure peace but must prepare immediately for war. Our military force is embraced in the Amazons Corps. Mowbray, what force can you put in the field?"

"I will place a soldier in the field for every one the Amazons can produce and a reserve of as many more."

Harmon's grim face lighted with surprise and admiration. With an ironic smile, he glanced toward Bullvers, whose florid countenance was set in an expression of amaze and gloom.

"This nut would have been harder to crack than you had anticipated, general," he said, with grim humor. "Are your troops adequately armed?"

"So adequately that they could wipe out the entire Amazon Corps without the loss of a man," Mowbray replied, grimly.

"You have devised a new war weapon?" Bullvers declared, incredulously.

The young Commander nodded, a half-smile on his lips.

"What is it?" the general demanded.

"Perhaps, even though time is pressing, it will be well to advise you of its general purposes, so you will know how readily it can be introduced to the Amazons. If they are to join with us in resisting Mongolia, I have no secrets from them or from you, general."

The half-incredulous, half-admiring smile again swept Harmon's heavy face and he leaned forward eagerly as Mowbray continued.

"It will be necessary to briefly sketch the present most efficient arm to make our improvement apparent. The death ray, as you well know, is a relatively simple application of the principle of atomic disintegration, which finds expression on a much more gigantic scale in the powerhouse of the company of which I am hereditary Master. The lesser always has been most readily understandable if the greater is explained in some detail.

"Early-day scientists discovered the entity of the atom and established the theory of electrons rotating around a more or less fixed proton. They made this theory intelligible to the relatively inexperienced masses of their day by comparing this atomic system with the solar system of a central sun and a congregation of attendant planets. With the object lesson of the sun as the fixed point in the solar system, these early observers erred in assuming that it was the electrons that constituted the vital factor in the atomic constitution.

"It remained for a daring originator to cast aside their theory and proclaim the fact which constitutes the underlying basis for the success of our present power system and the Death Ray. This was, as you are well aware, that the proton is the primal element. Through the practical application of his idea, the way was paved for the utilization of atomic energy, the existence of which long had been recognized but the employment of which seemingly had appeared as a vain dream of science.

"By utilizing protonic power to break down atoms by changing their electronic structure, a vast new power has been obtained. It was my august ancestor, Christopher Mowbray, who carried a correct theory into effect, made possible the development and control of this gigantic power supply and paved the way for the formation of the Power Company."

Hare moved impatiently. All this was history and the foppish autocrat interjected an ironic comment.

"You preach windily, Mowbray: Tell us of this new weapon. That is all we wish to hear from you."

"Pay no attention to him, Stephen," Harmon broke in, harshly. "Tell the story in your own way. We are not scientists and if you think we will understand you better by reviewing the past, our time is yours."

He turned sharply to his slender companion.

"If you have read history, Hare, you know that every great conqueror has gained his victories by discovering new methods of warfare. If Mowbray has found something that the Emperor does not know, I commence to have a faint hope we will succeed in defeating this invasion."

* * * * *

As you know, although long experimentation made it possible for us to employ atomic power," Mowbray continued, "practical use of it has developed unexpected problems that have baffled the most skilful engineers of the Power Company. Periodically, the atomic generators have burst all bounds,

destroying all our safety devices in cataclysmic outbursts of uncontrollable energy and irretrievably wrecking everything with the scope of their titanic forces.

"For this reason, our power houses always have been situated in remote mountainous and desert areas, where servants of my Company, trained from birth for the dangerous duties of their caste, have kept vigilant watch and ward over the gigantic generators that furnish radionic power for the entire nation."

"Granted all this is true, what has it to do with Mongolia?" Hare again interrupted, smirking impertinently.

"For one thing," the Commander flashed back, "these power houses are practically opened to capture by the Emperor any time he elects to move against them. By this time tomorrow, he may have them in his power and to render this entire nation helpless by diverting their sources of energy to his own martial uses."

Harmon exclaimed in amazement and Bullvers drew back, as though from a physical blow. Hare smiled satirically.

"As long as the generators operate, we can find means to attract their power for our own use," he said. "If necessary, we can wreck them and leave the Emperor helpless. Even the Master of the Power Company should know that."

"He knows something the Master of the Animal Products Company does not know," Stephen smiled. "The Emperor is both a great conqueror and a resourceful administrator. He anticipated the ~possibility his plans might become known in advance and that America, rendered desperate by invasion, might wreck its great power houses before he could seize them. His air fleet carries improved generators, models of compactness and ingenuity, which will amply supply his radiomotors and war-engines with energy for the conquest of America."

"The man's foresight is devilish," Harmon replied, his face serious.

"He is not the only one who perceived this possibility," Stephen continued. "My agents saw his plans and our engineers have been at work on similar ventures for months. We are as well prepared as he. Any time we had desired, we could have stilled the power houses and still have had sufficient supplies of atomic power for our military purposes."

Bullvers ran a trembling hand through her graying hair.

"You could have robbed my Amazons of for their Death Ray weapons and still have had sufficient power for the new instruments of war you mention?" she demanded, in amazement.

"Yes. As you know, the Death Ray is an adaptation of protonic power, the ray-thrower drawing force from the invisible stream of radionic power and directing it upon the intended victim. Resulting atomic explosions in the vital organs are instantaneously fatal. Checking production and emission of power from the giant central stations would have disarmed your forces, general. However, we had another defense, absurdly simple but ample to absolutely nullify its effectiveness."

"I cannot conceive of any defense for the Death Ray as absurdly simple," Bullvers declared, positively.

"The action of the rays is similar to that of the X-rays of earlier days. The problem was to find a means to prevent their entrance into the body of the victim. By administering subcutaneous injections of a secret non-poisonous metallic reagent, it has been found possible to start the protective reagent circulating

through the tissues, ultimately finding lodgment in the false skin of the body.

"As the rays cannot penetrate the bodies of my soldiers and reach the deeper tissues, they are immune to injury. By prolonged experiment, we have found that protracted subjection to the rays causes only a scaling of the false skin, in extreme cases resembling a mild case of sunburn and readily yielding to the application of simple remedies."

"Time flies," Hare interjected, in a bored tone. "If we cannot deal with your rabble with the Death Rays, we can hang them. Have you anything more to say?"

Harmon's heavy hand descended upon the foppish aristocrat's shoulder and his stern face was thrust within an inch of the other's frightened countenance.

"Idiot!" stormed the Food Master. "Do you realize Stephen is more likely to hang you than you are to swing his soldiers?"

His eyes wide with amazed horror, the other drew back.

"What of this new weapon?" Harmon demanded, after a pause.

"It is an entirely new principle. It sets up a magnetic field outside the body, which reacts on its compounds.

The food master nodded.

"You mean the sulphur, calcium, sodium, iron and other constituents of the body?"

"Yes. Each atom of these elements or compounds becomes involved. The victim momentarily is convulsed with furious energy, as though an enormous amount of oxygen suddenly had been injected into his tissues. As a matter of fact, while we are not altogether sure about all details of the new weapon because it still is strange even to us, it seems probable that the oxygen in the body really is consumed almost instantly, causing this extraordinary excitation. Collapse immediately follows the disintegration of the haemoglobin in the blood, accompanied by solidification of the serum with immediate suspension of mental and physical activities.

"We have found a very slight period produces syncope, from which recovery is possible after a protracted period of convalescence. A very little longer exposure invariably has been fatal."

"Your troops in the Council Grounds today were armed with that new weapon?" Bullvers asked, with a catch in her voice.

The Commander nodded.

"Then my Amazons would have been doomed if a clash had resulted?" "Absolutely. Furthermore, not a single soldier in my force would have been lost. A peculiarity of our new weapon also is its adaptability to long-range work. It has not been developed to a point where an individual can be singled out and killed at a distance, but its effects dreadful and far-reaching that an entire city could be annihilated almost in an instant."

* * * * *

Does the Mongolian Emperor know of this new weapon?" Bullvers demanded.

"I believe he does. In fact, I think he has developed a defense of some kind against it, but I know positively he has utterly failed so far to duplicate it, although his best scientists have been working for months trying to create a new weapon along the same lines. I also know that it was fear of the new war agency that prevented invasion a year ago."

"Why, then has he come now?" demanded Hare, insolently.

"Who knows?" Stephen replied, shrugging his shoulder. "Possibly, he thinks his defense is ample. It may be he does not believe we have the courage to resist, even though we possess a superior arm. Again, the Emperor is growing old and may feel that he must complete his conquest of the world now or death may intervene to prevent him from winning fame as the first master of earth."

Harmon nodded slowly, understandingly. "You said you would place a soldier in the field for each Amazon and a reserve of equal strength. Why was your statement couched in that form?" he demanded.

"The burden of war must not be borne alone by my troops. They will not be slaughtered while the Companies furnish only gold. We will not waste our trained forces fighting Mongolia, while the Companies maintain their own, possibly hostile, military power intact."

Harmon again nodded slowly and with understanding. "If the first army, composed of Amazons and your soldiers, is beaten or dispersed, what then?"

"The defense of the state will fall where it always should have been, on the shoulders of its people."

Hare's voice shrilled protest.

"This is no time for quarreling," Stephen asserted, decisively. "Our duty is to devise means to defeat an invading enemy. The Council can supply funds, open arsenals and make preparations to maintain the armies in the field. I will furnish what I hope will prove to be the reserves of victory."

"I won't authorize a pound of supplies until I know exactly what your future plans are," the Animal Industry Master declared.

Immaculately clad, his foppishness adding a final accent to his weak chin and pendulous lips, he negligently patted a slender limb with a perfumed hand. "What the devil do you mean?" Harmon demanded. The slender autocrat turned a cold eye on the speaker.

"What I know about this fellow is not favorable. He consorts with lower-class rabble - "

"He has made soldiers of them!"

"Lower-class rabble," continued Hare, placidly shifting his watery gaze to the point of a daintily clad foot, "and thieves. I don't like men who foregather with thieves."

"This is infamous!" exclaimed Bullvers, generous anger in voice and manner.

She turned to Mowbray, real friendliness expressed in her bearing.

"I assure you we did not intend insulting you when you were invited to meet with us."

She continued speaking to him, but flung her words toward Hare.

"If you desire, we will withdraw and consider ways and means to obtain what our troops will need."

Harmon, startled by the thinly veiled threat to join with Stephen in taking by force what a reluctant Council might refuse to grant, half rose to protest but the fop was on his feet in an instant, scourging Bullvers with savage words.

"Join hands, if you will, with this proscribed traitor to his own caste and civilization! He will repay you by hammering us all down to the level of his low-castes. I'm not afraid of the Mongolian. He can be bought off again, as he has been before, but I am afraid of this man. You think he's a patriot. I tell you, he is as ambitious as Caesar and as full of dark secrets as the devil himself."

His face distorted by half-maniacal rage and fear, he stormed on.

"I can read his heart. He has decreed the end of the Companies and has marked our caste for extinction. Cast him out, I say, before it's too late. Cast him out! Cast him out - "

Something in the oppressive silence of the apartment weighed down his tongue. His voice trailed off into indistinct babbling. Slowly, the anger died from his eyes. He shrank back, a pitiful mockery of a man, fantastically garbed in the costliest trappings of a fabulously wealthy caste. Fear mounted to his dull orbs - fear and a light of insanity, that caused them abruptly to burn with almost prophetic fire. He flung his arms aloft, screams of shrill laughter peeling from his lips.

"Mad!" he cackled, his utterances choked by bubbling, fevered cachinnation. "All mad!"

Tearing apart the silken hangings, he ran from the room, still shrieking laughter. Harmon's contemptuous voice broke the silence.

"That removes him. Now, we can plan for defense. Time presses. What have you to suggest?"

Chapter VI

A young woman in the blue and red uniform of the Foreign Legion thrust aside the hangings at the door and saluted. "What is it, Colonel Conquist?" Bullvers demanded.

"A revolution has broken out in the city, general," she replied. "One or more divisions of the Amazons have massed at barracks on the waterfront and declared their intention to raise the banner of Mongolia."

"How far has this disaffection extended?" Mowbray demanded, instantly alert.

"I do not know," Conquist replied. "I did not wait for further details but hurried here to advise the general of the situation."

"What is the cause of the revolt?" Stephen asked, his brow furrowed with amazed thought.

"Cowardice!" laconically replied the Foreign Legion commander.

Words and tone indicated her contempt for the insurgents. Like others in her command, she had a private quarrel with Mongolia which never had been settled. The Foreign Legion was recruited from

selected women exiles, driven from Europe by the invader. Chiefly of high birth, they had chosen the harsh service of the Matriarchy rather than to live in subjection to the alien conqueror.

"They declare the Emperor will slaughter any army sent against him," she continued, bitterly, "and think to propitiate him and save their lives by turning on America in its hour of need."

"Can we be certain of the loyalty of other divisions of the Amazons?" he demanded.

"I can answer for the Foreign Legion," she replied, proudly. "We are Europeans and each of us has a private score to settle with Mongolia."

"What is your advice, general?" he demanded, turning to Bullvers.

"Surround the rebels," she replied, coldly, "give them an opportunity to surrender and, if they refuse, mow them down. We do not dare leave treason behind us in the city when we face the foreign foe."

"I regret that our campaign must open with a battle among ourselves," he said, slowly. "However, I see no other alternative. General, you are better acquainted with the necessities of the moment. Command my troops."

Her bold, courageous face flushed with pride at the honor generously tendered by the Commander.

"Order out your militia at once. Assemble them on the waterfront. I will mobilize the Foreign Legion in the streets on the opposite side of the city. We will not call out other divisions of the Amazons. More of them may be tainted with disloyalty. After we crush this revolt, I will have an understanding with the others."

Her lips closed ominously.

"Before I am through I will know just where every woman in my corps stands, I can assure you."

Mowbray flashed orders to his officers while Conquist hastened away to mobilize the Legion. Moment after moment, reports came to the two commanders from their several units. Finally, Bullvers rose with decision.

"We are ready, Stephen. Let us see just what the situation is that confronts us."

They sped by radiomotor to the waterfront, where his soldiers had massed. She exclaimed with lively satisfaction as she surveyed their silent masses.

"They will give a good account of themselves! You have them under splendid discipline. Are they armed with your new weapons?"

"Yes," said Mowbray.

Bullvers nodded slowly.

"I wonder whether this does not mean the passing of my Amazons," she said, frankly. "Let me say this, Stephen, I, for one, appreciate the forbearance you have displayed in temporizing with the Council when you possessed such military forces and arms before which our forces are helpless. You have the nucleus of a real army. It would be an honor to serve under you - for the defense of our country."

The radiomotor swept to a landing on a tall building overlooking the great square in which the mutineers had congregated. In a few words, she outlined her plans.

"I believe my presence will bring them to their senses. We cannot afford the loss of a single trained soldier in this crisis. It is my intention to descend among them and whip them back to their barracks."

"They would murder you before you could utter word," exclaimed Conquist, her keen face alight with apprehension.

Stephen joined in protesting against the proposal, but Bullvers was firm.

"It is my duty. I should have anticipated this insurrection among my own troops. The least I can do now is to gain control of the situation without loss of life among the soldiers whom one wiser than I has prepared for the nation's defense."

Conquist clutched Stephen's arm.

* * * * *

"Look!" she cried.

From a nearby towering warehouse, flames shot up beacon-like, its ruddy light heralding the destruction that had been commenced by the rebels. It grew larger rapidly spreading greedily until the entire section was bathed in its sinister brilliance. Philip's silent troops also perceived the destruction and a sullen murmur rose from their massed ranks.

"They shall pay for this!" Bullvers declared, shaking an impotent fist in the direction where flames held high revel.

In the crimson glare, disorganized masses of Amazons could be observed in the open park. As Bullvers started toward the exit from the roof of the building on which they had landed, a young officer of the Amazons barred her path.

"Back to your command!" the general ordered, sternly. "What do you mean by skulking here while rebellion riots down there! This is one night when every loyal member of the Corps must do her duty."

"We will not fight them," the officer replied, sullenly, flinging out a hand toward the peopled park. "Why should we? What have we to fight for?"

"Everything! The honor of our hereditary military corps, the Matriarchy - "

"Which has made sexless automatons of us!" the officer interjected scornfully. "Do you think we never dream of those things other women have and which this brutal government has denied us - home, a mate and children?"

"You relinquished those things when you entered the Corps."

"What else could I do? I am of a lower caste. The Mistress of my Community House detested me because she could not break my will. She sent in my name to the Amazon headquarters and I got my orders."

"You had the right of appeal," Bullvers replied curtly.

"To whom? To the Curatress of all the Community Houses! I did appeal. What good did it do? She read the report from the woman who hated me and I was told to accept the work decreed for me or sink to the lowest caste, as a rebel against authority, carrying my entire family with me. I sacrificed my womanhood and my dreams to save them."

"Occasional injustices are inescapable in any government," Bullvers replied, less sharply.

"It is all injustice! Look about you, as many of in the Corps have done. Where is justice to be found? Our men degraded to mere work animals, part of our women dedicated to posterity and another part arbitrarily and autocratically set apart as sexless, pitiless, hopeless cogs in this governmental machine."

She flung her hands outward in a gesture of unrestrained misery.

"Fight! What is there in all this nation for which we should risk death in battle? If there is to be fighting, let the Council and the highest caste do it. The Amazons will not!"

"Consider yourself under arrest," the general replied, hotly. "After you have witnessed the fate of these mutineers, you may change your mind."

Under the menace of her fiery anger, the young officer retreated from the roof. Bullvers indicated the seething park with a gesture.

"I don't know whether I'll come back from there. If I don't, it will be because I have failed - because we all have failed - because our system was wrong and could not endure."

She paused a moment in deep reflection.

"Don't spare them, Stephen! Restore peace to the city, add to your own soldiers the Foreign Legion and those of the Amazons who can be trusted and smash Mongolia - or die!"

With a wave of her hand, the gallant soldier, magnificent in the only great crisis she had ever faced, resolutely hastened away. To Stephen and Conquist, peering downward from the roof on the milling mob, the picture of the end came with appalling swiftness. Her appearance at the building entrance brought a sudden silence. For a few moments of comparative silence, she harangued the rioters. Then a horrible, taunting laugh roared upward to their ears. The sinuous length of the mob swept over the spot where she had stood the moment before and slowly receded, leaving a form, gallant even in death, prone on the stones. While the mutineers still hurled indistinguishable insults at their victim, Stephen sprang toward the roof entrance of the building. Conquist hurled herself upon the young Commander.

"You cannot help her now," she cried, in a choking voice. "She has gone to the last reward of a fearless soldier. It is our duty to avenge her."

A swooping radiomotor flight carried them to the waiting column of citizen soldiers. Stephen flung them out from the waterfront while Conquist, with the Foreign Legion, began a flanking movement. Mowbray's silent advance emerged into the great square and the troops spread out, awaiting orders. Terror-stricken at the menacing array, many of the rebels turned to flee. Others drew together in military order, haughtily contemptuous of the popular force.

A hissing flame spat forth from the weaving mass and one of Stephen's soldiers recoiled, but immediately resumed his place in the front rank. A moment later, the square was horribly lighted with blue rays as the new weapons were brought into action by the militia. The massed rioters melted, like iron in the crucible. Again the blue rays flashed, revealing a scene of carnage and adding to destruction. Writhing forms lay in windows and terror-stricken survivors flung themselves prostrate or sought safety in flight.

Orderly as a giant machine passing over a field of ripe grain, the patriot column advanced, its front alight with the sinister sign of war. Screams and imprecations, ever drawing nearer, attested the success of Conquist's flanking operations, which closed the way of retreat. Occasional knots of Amazons, unwilling to believe that the despised lower class mob actually could resist its long time masters, fought with dogged fury, but their death-rays, formerly potent, were powerless against the protected citizen soldiers, although they took heavy toll among the women of the Foreign Legion. The machine Mowbray had evolved was irresistible. It swept to the opposite side of the square, smashing rebellion as it passed. Conquist appeared, her red and blue uniform ripped by a glancing ray and blood streaming from a searing wound in her head.

* * * * *

"The mutiny is over," she announced, grimly. "I have thousands of prisoners - more, I see, than your troops."

"They would not surrender to my men," he replied, gravely. "Now that resistance has ceased, see that all the wounded, ours and theirs, are given attention."

She saluted and flung swift, curt orders to subordinates.

"I wonder what the Emperor must think of this night of flame and destruction," she said, thoughtfully. "He will not be ignorant of the disaffection in our own ranks."

"It does not matter what he may think," Stephen replied, resolutely. "It is sufficient that we have proved the courage and discipline of our new troops and the terrible power of our new weapons. Let us hope they will be as effective when we face the veterans of the great king."

Leaving Colonel Conquist in command after the fire had been brought under control, Stephen hastened to the secret place of safety, one of his several country places, to which he had asked that Ardis Moore flee at the first sign of disorder in the city. The hour thus stolen from public duties he knew might be the last for many days that he could claim for his own. Not for a moment did he minimize the danger of failure, undoubtedly to be followed immediately by his own death through chance of the battlefield or the subtle scheming of the Matriarchy.

The latter, he knew, would make any sacrifice to effect terms with the Mongolian which would leave it free to deal with revolt at home. He entertained a shrewd suspicion that the autocrats, if assured by the Emperor they would not be disturbed in their immense possessions or their complete control over the working masses, readily would surrender sovereignty to the invader.

Whether the Emperor would be satisfied with a conquest that left even a shadow control with the Matriarchy was the one circumstance about which Mowbray entertained doubts. He knew the Asian ruler to be both daring and ambitious for the fame of having established the first nation with world-wide dominion. Upon this aspiration he counted for a refusal of subjection on any terms other than the complete abolition of the ruling caste, and this alternative, he was satisfied, the autocrats would resist to the last. If the Asiatic warlord should chance to lend a favorable ear to the scheming of the Companies,

Stephen realized he faced a doubly difficult, perhaps an impossible task.

He faced these varied menaces confidently and courageously, but when he considered the perils to which Ardis might be subjected, his emotions were entirely different. He was a distinct reversion to an earlier type of American manhood. His attitude toward her was tender, as solicitous, as protecting as the traditional attitude of men of his race in the days when they were conquering the wilderness, and laying the foundation for the glorious future of the world's greatest republic.

He had made arrangements for her future by providing the secret hiding place and also had stored a quantity of treasure for her use, in the event anything should happen to him. To acquaint her with the location of this store was one purpose of his mission. Leaving his radiomotor at a distance, he pursued his journey secretly to the residence, a private knock bringing Malcolm McArthur, his trusted friend, to the door. A moment later, he was in her presence.

"I feared the worse, dearest," she cried. "I heard you had braved the Council in its own Chamber. Then, I saw the Mongolian fleet and knew another terrible danger menaced you."

"The first armed clash occurred tonight. We suppressed a revolt among the Amazons and the citizen soldiers proved their firmness under fire. A weight has been lifted from my mind."

"You have no time, with these responsibilities on your shoulders, to linger here," she protested.

"It may be my last visit in a long time. If Providence is kind and I return, life holds sweet promise for us both, but at this hour, I see the future only dimly. The one bright spot is our love."

"You do not doubt the outcome?"

"No, but I should be foolish if I did not admit that I am uncertain. My chief hope is our new weapons. They may afford us an advantage that will compensate for the military experience of the Emperor's veterans."

He sketched briefly the new arms with which his troops had been equipped, which had proved so appallingly effective in the clash with the Amazons.

"I'm afraid, however, that the Mongolian knows of them and has perfected at least a partial defense," he continued, soberly. "My agents in Asia heard rumors of great excitement in the Emperor's scientific cabinet some months ago on receipt of disquieting news from America. Later, they heard hints of a surprise for this country whenever invasion was attempted. I know of nothing that could have caused them either surprise or satisfaction except discovery of our new arms and the creation of an agency that would nullify their efficiency."

"If they succeed, will your army be helpless before the enemy?" she demanded, with quick alarm.

"There remains one other defense agency at our command, now nearing completion, which will be a complete surprise to him and his hordes," Stephen replied, grimly.

"What is it?" she asked.

"In principle, it is simple, although its application requires the construction of gigantic machines. Work has been proceeding on them for months, but they were intended originally to bring the Matriarchy to terms, and not as weapons. They are in a state where a few days will assure completion. If Mongolia

attacks before then, they cannot be used. A week, at this time, might determine the fate of the nation."

"It sounds frightfully complicated," she observed.

"In reality, it is the reverse. Briefly, these devices set up countercurrents to the streams of radionic energy sent out from my power houses, completely nullifying them."

"Would you deprive America of power?" she demanded in amazement.

"Yes," he smiled, "if, at the same time, I could rob the Emperor of energy needed for his war engines."

But a nation without power is unthinkable!"

"It would be without precedent in centuries. To accomplish this purpose, we employ the electrical energy of the earth in part, and also create cyclic eddies in the radionic power stream by utilizing its own force and turning it back upon itself."

"I do not understand," she declared, shaking her head. "I was not instructed in science. My caste is not permitted to know about these things."

"I realize the Matriarchy, as a matter of policy, always has closed the door of certain knowledge to your caste. That is at the base of one of the many reforms I hope to see the new state effect. However you know how even in the earliest days of so-called 'wireless', there was provoking disturbance though the little-known 'static'. Our first machines similarly interfered with the power waves, 'fogging' them on a gigantic scale while obtaining energy from the stream itself. It was only a step beyond this to set up cross-currents of energy, which turned the steam upon itself, causing its very force to become its own destruction. Our interrupters are active precisely in proportion to the force transmitted from the powerhouses."

"But the volume of the stream can be increased, can it not, to the point where it is not possible to interrupt it?"

"No. Experiments have proven that to be impossible. Our new machines can be stilled and their operations interrupted only by suspending the transmission of power."

"The Emperor's scientists will know what is wrong the instant his sources of power are broken."

"Undoubtedly, and I do not underestimate their ability to devise corrective measures, if given time. However, I feel sure they will not be able to create hasty agencies. In the meantime, I plan to strike the invading army."

"You will be deprived of power at the same time," she objected. "This will render your own weapons ineffective."

"We will not employ the interrupters unless we find the Emperor has devised a defense for our new arms. If he has, then we will deprive America of all power as a defensive measure."

She thought deeply for a few moments. When she spoke again, her face was solemn and her eyes wide with amazement.

"The Emperor will be weaponless - lacking transport - isolated in a hostile country," she exclaimed.

"Why, Stephen, his conquering army will be helpless - but so will yours!"

"Not entirely, sweetheart. We have anticipated this possibility and he has not. Scientists among us have been working for months re-discovering old methods of creating power through the use of coal. Orders have been issued for the mobilization of miners, who even now are marching into the old fuel pits, long since discarded. We are making machines to employ steam for propulsion and coal for smelting ore."

"Amazing!" she cried. "Why, the nation will go back to the old age of steam!"

"Exactly. That is not all, sweetheart. Stranger still are the weapons we are fabricating - guns employing powder and bullets - canon that must be dragged by steam tractors or even by men in the absence or horses - even swords and knives. If we are forced to use these ancient weapons, our war of defense will be the most extraordinary the world has seen since the so-called World War in Europe in the Twentieth Century."

"I feel strangely confident," she said, slowly. "The contest upon which you have ventured, Stephen, will be crowned with success. Our race is not dead, but is sleeping."

"If I did not believe that, I would have no incentive to go on. Governments are only incidents in the history of a living people. The republic failed because it did not impress upon the mass mind the lesson that successful administration demands the active participation of all honorable men and women in public affairs. This autocracy will fall because it is founded on the false premise that man was created to produce wealth, but not wealth for the spiritual betterment of man."

A chime sounded the hour and he rose. No word of doubt escaped the lips of either. The sorrow of parting, the outcome of which neither could foresee, was locked in their proud, courageous hearts. Claspng her to his bosom, he whispered in her ear directions for finding the treasure he had hidden for her use in the event of accident to himself.

"I have told you dear, I shall not need it," she declared, her gentle lips set firmly. "Wherever you go, I shall follow."

He paused on his way to the door and gave final instructions to Malcolm MacArthur, whose dour, faithful face lighted with humble adoration as he nodded an acquiescent head.

"You can trust me, Commander."

As Stephen emerged from the lonely house, a crone concealed behind a thick-leaved shrub cackled softly.

"So there is where the girl is hidden! The Matriarch will pay handsomely for information about Ardis Moore!"

Chapter VII

The panic that had swept the city and the nation was reflected in the anxious faces the councilors turned to the Matriarch as she strode to her throne. Dawn hardly had reddened the east, yet all members of the august body were in attendance. Groups of white-faced women, only yesterday the haughty and stern rulers of the state, were gathered in the aisles, where the gripping word of fear was bandied from lip to lip. They broke and scattered to their seats before her resolute advance.

Each knew the city was rent with terrors. The kaleidoscopic changes of the previous day and night had shaken the foundations of peace and order. At the doors of factories and workhouses, as the Councilors sped to the Council, had been gathered hordes of vacant-eyed, nervous toilers. Throaty inquiries, incoherent replies, vague questionings, dire prophecies were abroad. Fear incarnate stalked the streets and invaded the homes of upper and lower caste alike.

For the first time in generations, the masses dared question the acts of their rulers. From other American cities came demands for information, along with vague, calamitous rumors. How were the autocrats preparing to meet the double crisis in the nation's affairs? What was being done to protect industry and the people from invasion and rebellion? As yet scarcely formulated, but growing more palpable with each hour rose a new clamor of protest from the sluggish masses, vaguely perceiving, for the first time, that the race's rich heritage of honor and glory had been bartered for a pottage of ignoble peace.

Lacking personal leaders for generations, slaves to the machinery of their industrialized age, men had not yet advanced their questioning to the point of a demand for information, while women, dazed by the sudden change in national affairs, waited in anxious foreboding for the outcome of the appallingly new situation.

Mowbray's soldiers became the popular heroes of America's men. Unbalanced demagogues, drunk with unwonted license as the bonds of Matriarchal control suddenly were released, flung incoherent arguments to excited audiences. To many of these crack-brains, the millennium had dawned, the hour when wealth should be cast down and dumb, brute-like men given license to riot and loot. Mobs that never before had dared miss a day from work-bench or office, refused to enter accustomed places of employment.

Under iron discipline, patrols of Stephen's soldiers were restoring order. Their presence and stern warnings discouraged riots and plundering. Masterful in their new-found authority, they were herding the laborer to his task and the clerk to his desk. The workers obeyed, even the contract slaves, lowest of all orders in the industrial life of the state, submitting without resistance to this stern, strange military authority.

The night's change had wrought no greater miracle, however, than was evidenced by the appearance of the Council. Hollow-eyed, white-faced and nervous, the autocrats sank in their seats awaiting the Matriarch's message. She reported briefly the events of the previous day and night. Her account of General Bullvers' death sent a shudder over her audience, but her recital of Mowbray's prompt suppression of the revolution left it cold. As she paused, Harmon demanded recognition.

"I recommend, Eminent Matriarch," he said, "that this Council express its thanks to Mowbray for his efficient service."

"Service to whom?" she replied, coldly. "The women who were in revolt were for peace, as this Council always has been and is, I believe, at this time."

"What folly is this?" he replied, his heavy brows contracting. "With the Mongolian already in our territory and a thousand matters pressing for action, we have no time for fool's play."

"Nothing is more important than the selection of a successor to General Bullvers," she replied, harshly. "The Council must take over control of military affairs at once."

"What of Mowbray and his men?" he demanded, with an ironic uplift of his eyebrows.

"The Amazons have proved an unreliable defense force," she answered, coolly. "We will hire an army

from Mongolia or recruit one from the veterans of Europe and Africa and smash this insolent upstart."

"The Matriarch has solved a momentous question to her own satisfaction," he derided. "However, I am not sure we can raise an army of mercenaries at once and I also doubt whether the Emperor will hire the army he has landed for the conquest of America."

His face hardened and his voice changed abruptly. "Let us have done with nonsense. The only problem at this time is what shall be done with Mowbray."

"Depose him! Exile him!"

From all parts of the Chamber came vociferous demand for immediate action directed at the Commander. The members, temporarily forgetful of the Mongolian, clamored for the downfall of one they feared as much and hated more.

* * * * *

Who will do these things?" Harmon demanded, contemptuously.

"The Council is the supreme power," interjected Meering, her eyes flaming angrily.

"How will it depose Mowbray?"

"In the same manner as all other measures which its decrees are executed - by formal edict."

Laughter pealed from the heavy-faced autocrat's lips. "Do you think this daring plotter, who has at his back the only efficient army in America other than that of the Emperor, will submit tamely to any decree this Council may adopt?"

Hare sprang to his feet, his weak face working convulsively.

"Where we cannot obtain obedience," he shrilled, "we can kill."

Other members of the august body shrank from him. From Meering's lips hissed a single word.

"Assassination!"

Never, within memory of living women, had this sinister resort of baffled autocracy been championed openly upon the floor of the chamber.

"Yes!" Hare sneered. "Are we children, to shrink from anything that is necessary to assure our own protection and the safety of the Matriarchy? The revolting Amazons killed Bullvers and Mowbray killed them. Now, we will slay him. What is the life of any man in this mad hour?"

He flung a glance of concentrated fury toward Harmon.

"Yesterday this man called me mad. Beware of him! He plans to throw open the Food Company depots to Mowbray."

"This is a time for sane counsel," the Food Company Master replied, disdainfully. "That man insane."

"Mad! Who is not mad?" shrieked Hare. "This Council will be madder than I if it aids Mowbray to braid a lash with which he will scourge the backs of all of us."

He rubbed a trembling hand over his pendulous lower jaw.

"Refuse him the great resources of the Companies. Rob him of his power, or he will lord it as master in this Chamber and we will grovel at his feet."

The effect of his words was magical. He voiced thoughts and apprehensions all others present harbored, flogging into action their irresolute minds. A clamor of approval rose from the autocrats. Harmon alone remained silent, his heavy face set in an ironic smile. Mallay, master of the Prison Company, raced through the open door.

"Mowbray is here!" he warned.

"Heaven appoints the hour!" shrilled Hare. "Mine is the hand of justice!"

A weapon flashed in his grasp as he, raced down an aisle toward the doorway. Over many doubting and uneasy minds in the Chamber flashed a fearsome thought of savage soldiers glutting their revenge for Stephen's death in the blood of a helpless autocracy.

"Halt that madman!" cried Harmon.

Not a hand was raised to check Hare, however. He paused on the threshold, his weapon clattering to the floor. Turning to face the Council, he called a solemn warning.

"The hour has not yet come. Mowbray is protected by soldiers and the Chamber is surrounded."

As he paced moodily to his seat, Colonel Conquist appeared in the open doorway.

"Commander Mowbray awaits a deputation from the Council."

She cast a scornful glance over the irresolute autocrats and retired.

"This woman of the Foreign Legion speaks as the herald of a king!" Mallay exclaimed.

"Why not?" answered the cool, ironic voice of Harmon. "If I had the army he commands, I would be Emperor of America."

The Matriarch splendidly dominated the situation. Calling Harmon to attend her, she went to meet Stephen, who paused at the threshold of the Chamber. Around him were grouped numbers of his officers, some in the olive-drab uniforms of the citizen soldiers and others in the red and blue of the Foreign Legion.

"We commend your courage and thank you for your efforts to restore order," she said, her head proudly high. "We will assist your campaign against Mongolia, but we demand assurances of your loyalty after the invaders have been defeated. Otherwise, we shall refuse money and supplies."

"I give no guarantees except to resist invasion and maintain public order," he replied, gravely.

"Then, the Council will oppose you to the last."

"What of the Emperor?" Conquist demanded.

The Matriarch fixed her with an icy glance.

"We will fight any one - we will buy every one - we will rule or the nation will crash in ruins."

Her face flushed with anger, she re-entered the Chamber.

"She is telling the Council how it can send the country to the devil - or the Mongolian," commented Conquist, eyeing Stephen expectantly.

He nodded agreement.

"The situation is unfortunate," declared Harmon, who had delayed departure. "Still, she is not to be censured too harshly for demanding assurances. The upper caste has most to lose through change."

"My men stake their lives. So do the women of the Foreign Legion," Mowbray answered, sternly. "Who can hazard more?"

"Life is transitory," Harmon replied, enigmatically. "Property is eternal."

Abruptly, his lips curled in an ironic smile. "What are you going to do with them?" he asked, nodding toward the Chamber.

A clamor of discussion had risen within, following the return of the Matriarch.

"I had hoped the issue might not come in this manner or so soon," he replied, "but I am prepared to meet it. Simeon Shackelford!"

An officer leaped out of the press about him and saluted.

"Clear the Chamber!"

"You defy the Matriarchy?" exclaimed Harmon, drawing back.

Part II

Now that the seeming inadequacy of certain political bodies has been proven and disproven so many times, one must necessarily begin to wonder what a regime under women would be like. Numerous times women were known to be the "powers behind the throne," and often that has been true, although it was not generally known. But that is all incidental - only one woman, or a few, quietly dominant in a world ruled by men. What would happen in a world ruled entirely by women? One thing seems certain - conflict would be inevitable. How, where and why is graphically told by this well-known author in the concluding chapters of this story.

What Went Before:

General, K'ung, Mongolia's ambassador to America, visits Victoria Arston, Eminent Matriarch of

America, now a country ruled exclusively for women by women, and the only country in the world left that is not under the rule of the Emperor of Mongolia. The Matriarchy of America has thus far maintained its independence by virtue of enormous tribute in money and commodities paid by them to Mongolia. Ostensibly the Mongolian ambassador comes to America to ask the Matriarch to aid in stopping certain agitation which was supposed to have been started by American women in Mongolia for the overthrow of the Emperor in favor of a female government.

In the meanwhile, Stephen Mowbray, a member of the Council, a scientist and head of the Power Houses, and one of the very few males of the upper caste who has retained an old-time independence, has secretly trained in the art of warfare a vast army of men of the lower classes, particularly to defend their country against a Mongolian invasion, which Mowbray is certain must take place in the very near future. He devises, first, an instrument to nullify the effects of the Death Ray, which the female army of police use as a last resort against any known rebels of the lower caste, and then a machine which makes it impossible for the members of the government to know what the masses are thinking.

On the eve of the entrance into the country of the Mongolian Emperor and his vast army an internal struggle of no mean proportions takes place within the Matriarchal government. Victoria Arston and her immediate Council propose drastic Steps 'to quell Mowbray's insurgence, and even go so far as to attempt a bargain with the Mongolian Emperor to help them fight Mowbray and what they call his band of thieves.

The Women of the Legion, refugees from the various countries that were conquered by Mongolia, are with Mowbray. Harmon, also a member of the Council, and head of the Food Companies, pledges his assistance to Mowbray, only for the duration of the struggle with Mongolia, a danger which has now >become obvious even to the Matriarch. But the Amazons, the barmy of the Matriarchal government, rebel and refuse to fight the Mongolians. Commander Bullvers of the Amazon army valiantly loses her life in an attempt to force them to fight. Only the Women of the Legion and Mowbray's half-trained army of men are left to combat the invasion which seems to take its toll on the morrow.

Chapter VIII

The Mongolian encampment had been pitched on a mountain plateau, overlooking the road to the American capital, a broad thoroughfare which followed the windings of a racing stream that, in countless centuries, had carved a course through high, rocky canyons. At times, the river meandered sedately amid mountain meadows, rich and populous until the coming of the invaders, but now deserted by their inhabitants. Again, it stormed through narrow gorges rising up abruptly by almost unscalable walls. The Emperor's banner floated arrogantly over a huge radiomotor in the center of the array, where he held council with a half-score hawk-visaged officers.

"Victory is in my grasp," he observed, exultantly.

"It is, your serene majesty," assented a hard-bitten commander.

"This government, grown soft by generations of peace, cannot withstand attack. Its Amazons are sufficient to hold the masses in subjection, but will find another problem when they face my veterans of a hundred victorious fields."

"America is doomed," the officer agreed.

"What of the clash in the city last night, observed by our air scouts?" asked a moody youth, the Emperor's heir. "They said it seemed a division of male troops had exterminated a revolting force of

Amazons."

For a moment, the conqueror's brow blackened ominously. Then he smiled and the assembly relaxed with obvious relief.

"My son, division in the enemy's camp always is good news for Mongolia. Let the Amazons and this rabble of Stephen Mowbray, the mad young rebel, weaken each other by attacks upon each other. There will be the fewer troops to face us when we advance."

"Why delay?" the heir apparent asked, with unwonted hardihood. "If they are divided, let us bombard the city tonight and throw the army into it at once. Mongolia's flag will be floating over it by dawn tomorrow."

"Not bad counsel," the ruler conceded, genially. "However, it is the thought of youth and not the seasoned view of one who holds the world in his grasp. Know this, my son, that Mongolia needs the wealth of this land. What would it profit me if I gained America and its rebellious people made it a wilderness?"

His brow clouded irritably.

"Remember, in the European Alps the seeds of revolt still linger. Thibet remains only half-conquered. From the Australian deserts miserable rebels defy my authority. In the Mountains of the Moon, a fragment of hostility persists. We have been campaigning against these centers of discontent for years, but without complete success. Would you add another and greater peril to these in a desperately rebellious America?"

He shook a humorous head in mock reproval.

"Even a decadent nation, such as this, has some devoted souls who prate of liberty and the traditional independence of the white race. This man, Mowbray, is one of them. No one may know how strongly he is supported. Imagine a half-dozen leaders, such as he, scattered through the Alleghenies, the Rockies and the Cascades, perhaps hiding in caves, sneaking through forests and warring upon conquering Mongolia. We would hold the country, it is true, but at the cost of an interminable guerilla war, which would exhaust our troops and sap the resources of both Mongolia and America."

Under his raillery, the fat heir apparent shrank back abashed.

"We will take the city in due time, my son. However, it is my duty to see that when we enter it, America is pacified. Thus, I shall pass on to you the first world empire, not only united but free from dissension that would tax your military capacity and the resources of your treasury."

"These people are dogs," the younger man protested. "They will not fight."

"Chang Yu!" the Emperor thundered.

A tall, keen-faced Mongolian, clad in the habiliments of princely rank, stepped forward.

"Tell my son this, Chang Yu - is this man, Mowbray, a foe to be despised?"

"No, serene majesty. He is a dangerous and resourceful enemy."

"How long did it take your scientific cabinet to devise a defense for his new magnetic arm?"

"Six months, serene majesty."

"Did we dare attack America until it has been devised?"

"Your serene majesty declared not."

"You learn some things you did not know, my son," continued the ruler, in a quieter tone. "Mowbray thought to surprise me with his new weapon. He will fail. This war will be decided by the death ray, which both armies possess, but which we have brought to a greater stage of perfection than that of the one he has developed. It will brush his armies from our path, for discipline and experience will war with us and against him. It is such preparations as these that constitute the duty of kingship. Victories, my son and heir, are won by intelligence, not by arms alone."

* * * * *

An officer entered and whispered a message. Surprise was mirrored on the emperor's face as he rose and made his way to a huge tent near his warmotor. Thrusting aside the heavy hangings, he confronted the Matriarch. With splendid, insolent courtesy he bowed over her hand and motioned her to be seated.

"I am honored," he said, "by the presence of Americas beautiful ruler."

"I did not come to bandy compliments," she replied, crisply, "but to talk of business."

"Business?" he inquired, ironic eyebrows uplifted. "A strange word in a war camp of Mongolia's veterans."

"You need money more than conquest," she answered, sharply. "I offer a tribute ten times that we have been paying, even if it beggars America."

"A noble tribute," he agreed. "What must Mongolia do to deserve it?"

"Crush this insolent rebel, Stephen Mowbray."

"That should not be difficult," he agreed, amiably. "What then?"

"Leave America at once."

He seemed to be weighing the proposal, his eyes half-closed, a smile playing about his lips.

"That might not be so easy," he said, after a pause. "It is difficult to turn Mongolia from the path of conquest - particularly when victory already is assured."

He checked reply with a gesture.

"Let us leave that condition aside for a moment. Possibly, I might be induced even to consider that. Let us talk more of this matter of - business. How am I to be assured this vast ransom, greater wealth than is possessed by all Mongolia, will be forthcoming? From whom shall it be collected?"

"It will come from the Companies," she answered, curtly. "We also are prepared to pay a much larger

annual tribute in consideration of a new treaty guaranteeing peace. We will recognize - privately, of course - the sovereignty of yourself and will perform faithfully whatever Mongolia requires of us."

"You will commit America to all these things to assure peace and tranquillity for trade?"

"Yes," she replied, decisively. "Peace is the great thing - that and tranquillity for trade. Business is business. By making that principle the inspiration of our government, the Companies have brought industry to the highest state of efficiency ever known."

"Pardon a foreigner's curiosity, but in advancing industry, what has been the benefit to men?"

"There are no workers as well housed, as well fed, as moral, as law-abiding as ours. We have no poor. Work is provided for all and all must labor. The sick, halt and infirm are segregated in institutions, where their physical insufficiencies will not impair the productiveness of the well and strong. Even these work and are self-supporting."

"Being so admirably cared for, they undoubtedly are patriotic," he commented, with apparent indifference. "Will any considerable element oppose our negotiations?"

"We have efficient Amazons," she replied, uneasily. "However, I trust there will be no resort to arms."

"But this man, Mowbray, whom you would have me punish - what of him and his rebels?"

"He has trained a number of low-caste workers in arms."

"Efficiently?" he insisted, gently.

"I did not come to speak of him," she replied, with asperity. "Had you not appeared, he and his rabble would be even now in the depths of our deepest mines."

He nodded thoughtfully and arose.

"I shall be pleased to discuss terms with him."

He turned, as if to depart. The Matriarch, amazed, laid a hand on his arm. With a haughty gesture, he drew away.

"Am I to tell the Companies," she cried, in astonishment, "that the world's master declines their proffer of peace and treasure?"

"The King of Mongolia does not sell his honor for gold," he replied, coldly, "nor the destiny of his race for an annual tribute wrung from a mean-spirited people. There can be no peace on such terms between Mongolia and America."

With a royal gesture, he flung aside the hangings and exposed his mighty camp.

"Would those veterans follow a leader who sold their loyalty for gold? There is more nobility in that single sentry, who scans your land with his hawk's eye, than in all your Companies."

He dropped the curtain.

"Send this man, Mowbray, to me. I may discuss with him terms for this nation, which already is at my feet."

A stern smile swept his face.

"If he finds favor in my sight, it will be well for America. If he does not, I shall crush your city flat. There will be an end to this last government of the white race."

Chapter IX

An arsenal of the Foreign Legion had been selected by Stephen as his headquarters. Hands clasped behind his back, he paced meditatively across his office, revolving a thousand plans for meeting Mongolia and wrestling with the problem of assembling and coordinating America's resources to serve the need of the immense army he had called into service. He had been amazed by the numbers who had responded. The work of his lieutenants had been far-reaching beyond his expectations. He did not under-estimate the inexperience of his legions, but was inspired by their numbers.

He stepped to a window and glanced down upon passing regiments. The first was in the uniform of the Foreign Legion, splendid women, who marched proudly and with magnificent discipline. Their colonel saw him at a window and rasped a command, which brought every eye upward to his lonely figure. He saluted proudly and stood at attention until the column passed. Behind them came a column of his citizen soldiers, stolid elders and eager youths, all clad in the olive-drab of the old American army. As he was observed, rhythmic cheers rose from their ranks. A smile of hope lighted up his tired face and remained as he resumed his thoughtful walk. Conquist entered.

"Your work here is concluded, General," he told the brilliant woman commander. "Delachaise and Hardtmuth will command the popular armies. I have placed the Foreign Legion and the loyal Amazons under Simeon."

"Former commander of the Thieves Division?" she urged. "I do not know but what it is a good choice. They will despise him so thoroughly, particularly the Amazons, that they will fight the harder."

"Unfortunately, there are all too few of the Amazons. They and the Legion are our best trained troops. Indications are that the divisions of the Corps in the provinces have seized control of local governments and are preparing for defense.

He paused meditatively.

"It may be as well. If we fail, they may unite and succeed."

"I doubt it, Commander. Bullvers had had trouble with them previous to the revolt here. They long have been discontented and mutinous. I shall be surprised if the outside divisions can be induced to fight Mongolia, particularly if we are defeated."

"After all, that is a matter of indifference at this time. Later, when we drive the Emperor from America, we shall have to deal with them, but I shall not relish the task. I detested the necessity for cutting down the rebels in this city."

"Because they were women?" Conquist asked.

"Yes."

"Have no compunctions on that score," she declared, forcefully. "They are the cruelest product of the Matriarchy - unfortunate, sexless creatures, who are neither women nor men. Pity them if you will," she continued, bitterly, "but deal with them unsparingly."

"We shall cross that bridge when we come to it, General. First, we must draw Mongolia's fangs."

He placed a commanding hand on the other's shoulder.

"Convey to the gallant women of the Foreign Legion my final instructions. I rely on them as I do on the most loyal of my own troops."

"We are not Americans," she replied, proudly, "but we have a debt to settle with the Emperor far more terrible than yours. You have not seen your country overrun, your flag dishonored, your armies slaughtered, your women - God! Your women the prize of a victorious foe!"

Her blazing eyes tear-dimmed, the young officer paused to recover her poise. With a gesture of indescribable pathos and dignity, she turned toward him.

"Have no fear of our steadfastness, Commander. We are fighting the battle of our race against the most powerful foe it ever has known. Place these women - French, German, Spanish, Italian, British - in the forefront of your army and see whether they will not acquit themselves with honor. Theirs is a terrible score, Commander, and my only dread is lest wild rage urge them to useless sacrifice of life."

He nodded gravely. The spirit of these women was not exactly that of his own citizen soldiers, but it bespoke the same determination, the same will to conquer.

"Until I can take active command, General," he said, gently, "you will direct field operations."

"I am honored by the promotion, but is it proper that I, a foreigner and a woman, should be so designated?"

"We have been worshipping peace so long," he replied, gravely, "we have almost forgotten how to fight. You know Mongolia better than we and are most competent to lead our raw levies."

He signaled Hardtmuth and Delachaise, who had entered the room. With them was Simeon, former leader of the Thieves Division and now commander of the loyal Amazons and the Foreign Legion. Over his scowling face a jaunty military cap set oddly. Mowbray acquainted them with Conquist's promotion and their assignments to command. Simeon leered at the young woman.

"We shall fight none the worse together," he said, tongue in cheek, "because we have fought each other so hard in the past."

"Leave at once for the front," Commander Mowbray ordered. "There is no time to be lost, for you must bring order from the chaos resulting from our haste and military inexperience."

* * * * *

He delayed Conquist as the others departed.

"Our new equipment is ready. I have seen it tried in a special apartment, which limited its effectiveness."

"Is it successful?" she demanded, her eyes alight with interest.

"Even more than I had anticipated. It is our last resort, remember. You must send out skirmishers to ascertain whether Mongolia has a defense for the new magnetic arm. If not, we are equipped with a weapon that will give us inestimable superiority over the enemy."

She nodded understandingly.

"Your orders shall be obeyed immediately, Commander. What if Mongolia has a defense?"

"Then, we shall use the new machines to rob all America of power, as a final, desperate measure of defense."

The young general smiled confidently.

"Now, I know the Emperor has been delivered into our hands and also the character of the conflict we must wage to assure victory. Are rifles and cannon being produced in sufficient quantity?"

A cloud obscured his brow.

"That is the greatest of our problems. We cannot improvise these weapons. Even with America's enormous industrial machinery at our command, I cannot obtain all the supplies we need. We should be doomed, if it were not for the stores previously manufactured and our experienced workmen who are teaching others these new, strange operations."

"Even if only partially armed, we shall have an advantage over the enemy," she pointed out.

"True, but he also has the advantage of discipline and a record of unswerving victory. What success are you having with the artillery regiments? How are the troops taking to the rifles?"

Her brow clouded now.

"We should have months of preparation and training," she confessed. "However, there are a few in each company who have had a little experience in your training squads. We are using these to instruct the others."

"At best, it is a makeshift," he replied, shrugging his shoulders hopelessly. "Still, it is all we can do. At least, we shall not be so completely surprised by the cessation of power as will the enemy, and that will count heavily in our favor."

Conquist met Harmon as she left the room, the burly autocrat shouldering his way through a press of military clerks as indifferently, as though they were laborers in the offices of his own Food Company. Brushing aside attendants, who would have barred his way, he addressed Mowbray with characteristic bluntness.

"You sent for me, Stephen - or, should I say 'Commander'?"

His voice was confident, dominating, ironic. Change had not awed him. The Commander replied smilingly.

"We will not quibble over words. I am as proud of the title 'Master of Thieves' as any other. It may be appropriate, for I seem to have stolen America from the Council as our ancestors stole it from the people."

Harmon's grim face relaxed in a smile.

"If I had had you with me on the council," he said "It would have taken more than a mutinous rabble to unseat the Matriarchy."

His tone changed.

"You did not send for me to bandy words. What do you wish?"

"I need some one to organize the industrial machinery of the government for the support of my armies while I am fighting and I ask you to accept the task."

Harmon's eyes opened wide with amazement.

"Are you mad? Or, am I?"

"Answer both questions yourself," the Commander smiled.

"We never can agree. You cherish the delusion that our sensible, efficient government must yield to a republic. Bah! That had its chance and failed. Do you expect me to help you ring up the curtain for another disastrous experiment?"

"Not at all. I ask only co-operation while I am fighting the invader."

"Then what?"

"How can I tell? I may not be here to answer your question."

"I'm not blind to that possibility. Also, I am not blind to the fact that if I do what you suggest, I'll be in honor bound to fight for you against those with whose views I wholly sympathize. It's a difficult decision."

"This thing is too big for me to handle alone. I need help and must have it. We have a common purpose in warring on Mongolia, even if we should be at each other's throats later, to decide the future government of America."

"I agree with both statements."

Stephen confronted the burly autocrat, his eyes stern and commanding.

"Harmon, there is a legend that, during a civil war of the early republic, the section known as the United States was threatened by a European power. Invasion might have assured triumph for the Confederacy. In the crisis, General Lee, commanding the Confederate forces, is said to have notified the foreign power that if invasion were attempted, he would join with General Grant to repulse the common foe, and then would fight out the internecine quarrel."

"I have heard the legend."

"Can't you see its application to the present situation?"

Harmon's answer was characteristically sharp and vigorous.

"I can. I'll enlist with you, Mowbray, but remember - only for the duration of this war."

Chapter X

"The preservation of the Matriarchy and the United Companies is the primary necessity of America."

Arston, her eyes tired and strained, stared dully at Ardis Moore, who seemed on the verge of collapse, although the fires of fanatic purpose flamed in her cheeks. Proudly defiant, the young girl faced the autocrat.

Arston spoke: "Mowbray cannot be controlled. He scorns all constituted authority. His mad hordes are amenable to no discipline. They will give the Emperor the excuse he needs to refuse all proffers of subsidy and peace. This monstrous situation must end."

The cold contempt of the younger woman's manner pierced even the weary self-sufficiency of the Matriarch. She continued in a firmer, colder voice.

"Where we cannot coerce or buy, we may placate. The Companies will triumph. Trade, capital, commerce and the orderly processes of government will not crash before the attacks of an unbalanced dreamer."

"Do I menace these things you mention?" said Ardis.

The autocrat ignored the question, and went on:

"This war must cease. Mowbray's childish emotionalism is a menace to the nation's life. The Emperor will defeat him and, in retaliation, seize our vast wealth-producing agencies. Stephen has no regard for capital. Councilor Meering this morning demanded troops to protect her steel plants. He laughed and told her the steel plants now belonged to the armies of the Commonwealth. Heresy such as this cannot be tolerated."

Oddly, she seemed to appeal to the silent girl for approval and support.

"You are of the executive class - or would have been but for this man's folly. You must realize the monstrous absurdity of his policy. The United Companies always have been the State. If they are ruined, what else matters?"

"Nationality, race, liberty - these things count for something," Ardis declared, her lip curling.

"You parrot his wild talk," the Matriarch replied, with flare of petulant anger. "He annoys me. There is no place in America for a man who annoys me."

She mumbled to herself, regardless of the girl.

"Where was I? Oh, yes! Armed opposition to Mongolia must cease. The King will not be purchased. He is a typical masculine idiot, setting himself above money. He rants of fame, of power, of worldwide dominion. Rank nonsense! But, where we cannot buy, we may seduce. You are the appointed sacrifice."

"I!" exclaimed Ardis, recoiling.

The deposed leader's lips relaxed in a cackling laugh.

"I would have preferred to keep you with me until Mowbray returned victorious. Then, I would have made him grovel and beg for his bride-to-be and I should have spurned him - "

She struck out vigorously with her foot, amused malice mirrored on her face.

"Thought of that moment has been the pleasantest dream of my life, but it may not be."

She turned briskly to Ardis.

"The Emperor knows I am no party to Mowbray's mad schemes, but he has refused my offers of peace and tribute. He awaits more substantial proof of good will."

She leered at Ardis, calculating craft in her eyes.

"Mowbray loves you."

"I do not deny it."

"Tell that to the Emperor."

The Matriarch rubbed her hands gleefully.

"I do not understand."

"Tell him I send you as evidence of my good faith and desire for his success. Tell him," leaning forward confidentially, "that, with you as hostage, he may dictate terms to Mowbray."

She nodded briskly. Then her brow clouded. "On second thought, I will tell your attendants what to say to him. You are too much under control of this man and would lie like a masculine puppet. The Emperor would not trust you."

She thought rapidly into the Electrono and nodded as voiceless answer came to her commands.

"Leave at once. My secretary will accompany you to the Emperor."

Appalled, but helpless, Ardis followed the attendant. Almost in an hour, she had been torn from the place of security devised by Stephen, hurried to the deposed Matriarch's palace and, by her orders, dispatched as a hostage to Mongolia. Under the glooming mass of the radiomotor, poised for flight, she paused meditating resistance, but several Amazons closed about her and forced her into the vehicle. As it drove over a suburb, she caught a glimpse of long lines of marching men and surmised they were Stephen's soldiers. Then, the machine shot toward the mountains at enormous speed and the city sank from view.

* * * * *

As Ardis left the room, Fordyce Meering entered. "Who is that woman?" she demanded.

"A girl of the people I am sending to the Emperor!" The Matriarch answered carelessly. She was interested in Ardis only as a means to an end. Concerning her fate in the Mongolian camp, she was indifferent. She would have sacrificed a thousand like her to win a single improved peace term from the invader.

"Why did you select her?"

"She is beautiful, in a coarse, low-caste way. Moreover, Stephen Mowbray loves her."

"Mowbray!" exclaimed Fordyce. "I did not know he had had an affair."

"Oh, he intends marrying her, I understand," the autocrat replied, carelessly. "With her in his hands, the Emperor can whip the rebel into submission."

"You would betray Mowbray?"

"Betray! Your choice of words is almost insulting. I am protecting my interests, the interests of the Companies, the interests of the great group you will head some day, my child."

"True," Fordyce nodded. "Still, it seems ignoble to decline war, when it is forced upon the country by this insolent, Asiatic upstart."

"I am an industrialist, not a soldier. I do not know how to fight. I have no desire to learn. What does it matter who rules nominally, if I am secure as mistress of the Companies with the continuity of trade assured?"

Fordyce nodded.

"Have you heard about Harmon?" she inquired.

"He is a good man," the deposed autocrat approved. "What of him?"

"He has accepted the office of governor-general, in charge of all civil affairs while Mowbray is in the field."

"Harmon! In control!"

The Matriarch shouted the words in pleased surprise.

"Why, Fordyce, this Mowbray has delivered himself into our hands. Through Harmon, I shall control this nation tomorrow!"

An agitated forefinger stilled questions trembling on the other's lips.

"Recall Ardis Moore! I will not miss one iota of my revenge on this betrayer of his own caste. Hasten! I will make him writhe at my feet before I send both of them to the executioner."

News of Ardis' disappearance was brought to Stephen by Malcolm MacArthur.

"She left in response to a message from you," the man declared.

"I sent no message."

"She said it was in your handwriting."

"A miserable forgery. How did she receive it?"

"An aged woman, an attendant at one of the Community Houses, brought it."

"How did she know where Ardis was hidden?"

"I do not know. I told her Ardis was not there. She leered at me and insisted that I deliver the message. 'It is from him,' she whispered. 'She will know.'"

"Ardis believed her?"

"She told me the message came from you. I accompanied her to a radiomotor station, where she dismissed me and went on with the old woman."

"I commence to see light," Stephen declared, his eyes blazing. "The Companies seek to strike at me through this defenseless girl."

The fire in his eyes had grown coldly intense,

"Leave no stone unturned in your search for her. I will send other aid."

He strode into Harmon's office. The burly autocrat did not lift his eyes from the piled-up masses of papers upon which his attention was concentrated.

"Ardis is gone!" Stephen exclaimed.

"Ardis?"

Harmon raised a puzzled face from his labors.

"Who is she?"

"A girl of the people, whom I intend to marry."

"Where has she gone?"

"I do not know. The Companies discovered the secret hiding place where I had placed her."

"You are sure it was the Companies?"

"She would not have left otherwise."

Harmon smiled broadly.

"You assume too much obedience from our young women, even of the lower castes. They are not as docile as our young men. They are more disposed to give orders than to take them."

Mowbray brushed aside the remark.

"I see the Matriarch's hand in this. What are you going to do about it?"

"I?" asked the burly dictator in amazement.

His heavy face suddenly grew black with anger.

"Do you intimate I had a hand in this?"

"I know you had not."

"It is well you realize that fact. If I had an idea you suspected me of such cowardly treachery, I'd throttle you where you stand. I'll fight you, Stephen, but it will be with a man's weapons and not with a defenseless girl."

He ran a huge hand through his clipped hair until each individual spear stood erect.

"Undoubtedly, they hope to bend you to some purpose. I don't know exactly what that purpose may be, but I'll find out."

Abruptly, his manner changed.

"I'm talking 'strongly, Stephen," he continued ruefully, "but, as a matter of fact, I don't know how to proceed."

"I see you keep Mallay."

"The Prison Master? Yes. He serves as a counter-irritant. When I remember him as a product of the Companies, it serves as a lame justification for assisting you in your plans to destroy them."

Stephen's lips entertained the shadow of a smile.

"He is a good dog on the trail?"

"None better, by nature and training."

"He must know by what means Arston has been accustomed to achieve her ends."

Harmon's eyes lighted as he caught the drift of the questions.

"He's a cowardly sneak, but we could not ask a better agent for such a commission. I'll attend to this matter at once."

Mowbray nodded wearily.

"I am leaving at once for the front."

"Best wishes. I hope you win. Why can't you dismiss your plans for domestic change and thus obtain the backing of the Matriarchy? Surely, you do not really harbor a hope of reviving a republic dominated by

men?"

The Commander did not answer. Harmon drew closer.

"Can't you see the futility of attempting to convert these millions of industrialized human machines to a new theory?"

"With an invader on our soil, must we argue these questions now?"

"Your pernicious theories haunt me. You know, as I do, that the very word 'republic' came to typify masculine incompetence and venality, the rule of ignorance through numbers, the triumph of petty men. Have you considered the unreliable material from which you must mould a man-ruled government after a model which even Washington and Lincoln could not make enduring?"

"Perhaps they have learned a bitter lesson," the Commander replied, gently. "The second experiment may profit from the mistakes of the first."

"A vain, hope! ' The United Companies and the Matriarchy never would have come into existence had it not been for the incapacity of the masculine republic. Why, they could not command even the respect of their own households! That's history. So is their failure to outlaw war and eliminate crime. You know, as I do, that the men of America had abrogated their power long before the efficient women who founded this government seized it."

"At least, they proved dependable soldiers in time of war."

"War! Always war! That was all they dreamed of. Is there no objective for humanity other than slaughter?"

"Why not ask that question of Mongolia?" Mowbray replied, soberly.

Harmon smiled ruefully.

"I am not thinking of today, but of America's tomorrow," he declared. "The republic surrendered to the Companies because it could not rule them and they could control it. People demand and respect a strong government. They want regulated living, moderate toil, sure subsistence. Most of all, they want some one to do their thinking for them. We have furnished all these things. The old republic did not."

"If the wisdom of the nation is insufficient to guide its destinies, it deserves to fall," Mowbray exclaimed.

"Government must emanate from the governed."

"You mean its governed men?" he replied, satirically. "Poor, muscle-bound creatures that have known nothing for generations except obedience to the command of a more intelligent sex?"

"They failed once," Stephen conceded. "They may fail again - but, at least, they may be taught to go down to defeat fighting!"

"Idle, vicious theories," Harmon replied, contemptuously. He turned to the mass of papers on his desk.

"We will continue this conversation later. We are agreed the primary duty is to bring the Emperor to terms."

Burdened by a new, personal sorrow, Stephen made last hasty preparations for departure. His little private world, resolutely separated from the one into which public necessity had thrust him, had tumbled about his ears. He knew well the chill selfishness of the ruling caste. The heart, the happiness, even the life of a girl like Ardis would weigh no more in the balance of their plans, than would a grain of dust in the hand of Infinity. Through an open window, he gazed down upon the glowing street. Was it worth while to strive, through appalling darkness and doubt, toward an end not visible to his own eyes? What was leadership but sorrow, and patriotism but a mocking ideal?

"Ardis!" he murmured.

A regiment, one of the last, marched past. He was seen and a deep-throated cheer beat up from the masses. He bent forward and a hot, unbidden tear coursed down his cheek.

"Poor fellows!" he thought. "Their devotion to duty reproves my doubts."

Duty! The word rang in his ears. What were his private griefs that they must obtrude upon his plans for future of his- country, the destiny of his race? He turned from the window.

A guard of war flyers escorted his machine. As it rose, bearing the new government's splendid banner of Stars and Stripes, a roar of applause surged upward from hordes of massed forms crowded into a suburb. Stephen perceived a half-naked, eerie figure on a towering industrial monolith, its arms outstretched to the sky.

"Woe to the city!" the man cried.

And again:

"Woe to the city!"

Stephen recognized the mad prophet as Hare, deposed Master of the Animal Industries Company, stricken insane by the startling changes that had overthrown the old rule and given birth to a new.

Chapter XI

As the radiomotor bearing her to the Emperor's camp raced toward the mountain eyrie of the Asiatic conqueror, Ardis, schooled in the stern training of her caste and sex, did not weep. Hers was an apprehension too grave for such expression of grief. The reputation of the rough veterans of masterly Mongolia left little doubt in her mind as to her fate. These slashing swashbucklers, who had swept victorious around the world, were of another breed than the docile, easily controlled men of America. She knew that when they had swept like a flame through Asia, Europe, Africa and Australia, they had held no people too great to attack and nothing in any land they dominated too sacred to be ravaged. Rising, she searched the spacious apartment, outside which an Amazonian sentry stood guard. From a decorative panel on the wall, she gleaned a thin, keen-edged dagger, part of a display of ancient arms.

"I shall not be without a final recourse," she thought, pressing the steel to her side until its needle-like point pierced her clothing and pricked the skin beneath.

Strengthened by this thought, she gazed long and thoughtfully toward the mountains, their huge shoulders revealed by the rising moon. With a shock she realized that scattered illuminations dead ahead must be the lights of the enemy's camp. Just below the racing machine was another smaller cluster of lights which,

she surmised, must mark the advanced American positions.

"Stephen is there," she murmured. Despite her desperate peril, she was thrilled by the thought. "If he only knew! How quickly he would come to my rescue!" She did not remove her eyes from the flickering lights of the American encampment until a sudden glare caught the radiomotor in its blinding grasp and held it unwaveringly. The Emperor had seized the major power houses in the vicinity of his camp immediately following disembarkation of his forces, and was employing the energy for the operations of gigantic dark lights, which surrounded his position and safeguarded it from surprise attack.

These rays caused no illumination except when coming in contact with an obstruction along their course. Vibrating at a speed below that of light, they were sent into the night from huge ejectors. To the eye, they were invisible and remained so until an object entered their stream. Instantly and automatically, the intruder was noted by the projecting instrument, the vibrations were speeded up and the subject was flooded with light. Delicate audiodetectors, with which armies had been supplied for generations, long since had picked up the slight hum of the radiomotor's propelling mechanism and the dark rays had been searching the heavens for it. A menacing command sounded in the radio ear of the speeding machine. The Amazon in command replied, explaining her mission. Ardis could not hear the conversation between the Amazon and the distant Mongolian' sentinel, but after the flyer had circled twice over a designated spot, constantly bathed in light and evidently under the stern scrutiny of enemy eyes, it swooped to a landing. Then, for the first time, she perceived dimly the orderly array of military tent-houses, in which the invading horde was accommodated. The Amazon entered her compartment, accompanied by an Asiatic officer.

"Come!" the woman commanded.

She followed submissively, but her right hand convulsively clutched the handle of the slender dagger. They paused at a magnificent tent, the rich tapestry of which shone with dull brilliance in the subdued light of the camp street.

"Enter," the Mongolian commanded. He thrust a haughty hand before the Amazon, who would have followed.

"Your work is done."

"I was instructed by the Matriarch to convey a message to his majesty, the Emperor," the woman protested. "Your instructions are countermanded," he replied, ironically. "Go!"

The woman hesitated. He turned savagely to a silent detail of hard-bitten veterans, who guarded the magnificent tent. "Drive them from this camp! They contaminate it by their presence!"

* * * * *

Without waiting to see the manner in which his order was obeyed, he took Ardis' arm, thrust aside the heavy hangings and proceeded to the center of the tent, which reeked of pungent drugs. As she suppressed a cough, an emaciated figure glided out of the darkness. The newcomer was a hollow-checked Mongolian, his face lined by suffering but his eyes alive with intelligence. He dispatched the young officer with a curt command.

"I live in this atmosphere," he said, turning to her. "Could you become accustomed to it?"

"I?" she asked, recoiling.

"It may not be necessary," he pursued, thoughtfully. "I am stronger today." He indicated a couch.

"You are sent as a hostage to the King?"

The words were more a statement than a question. She bowed silently.

"You were sent by the Matriarch?"

"Yes."

"Why?"

He leaned toward her eagerly.

"You must know," she replied, shrinking away.

"Because Stephen Mowbray loves you?" His voice was harsh, forbidding.

"He loves me," she answered, in a low voice.

"With you as a hostage, the Matriarch declared we could compel Mowbray to lay down his arms."

She did not answer.

"Do you think he will yield?" he pursued, insistently. Gripping the dagger convulsively beneath the folds of her cloak, she flung her answer into his intent face.

"No!"

He smiled inscrutably.

"You shall write him a letter I shall dictate. You shall tell him that if he ever hopes to see you again, he must yield as the Emperor dictates."

She smiled bravely into his eyes.

"He will not yield."

She grasped the dagger tighter and hastened on, lest traitor tongue prove coward to her intrepid soul.

"I shall not write such a letter."

The smile on his face gave way to an expression of admiration and respect.

"You are dallying with peril to cross the King's will - you, a girl of the American lower caste."

She did not reply.

"You fear to tempt your lover," he accused. "You doubt whether his love will prove as great as his devotion to this doomed nation."

She found words at last.

"He loves me, but he will not be swayed from his duty. I should hate him, if he were."

The curtains were flung aside by a heavy-set, powerful Mongolian.

"I lose," he said, coming forward and addressing the ailing man. "I had not expected to find so much courage and honor in this entire nation."

"I did not know the woman, great Emperor," replied the other, his voice grown old and inexpressibly weary, "but I knew the man."

With a contraction of her heart, Ardis realized she was in the presence of the Asiatic conqueror. He turned to her, his face noble and commanding.

"Mongolia does not war on the helpless. You are as safe in my camp as in your own city - safer, I imagine."

A disdainful smile flickered across his strong face.

"What miserable cowards your government develops! I would send you back were it not that a friend of the man you love believes you more secure here than there. Special accommodations and a maid of your own people will be provided." As the curtains dropped behind his regal form, the pallid man addressed her.

"I am Mowbray's friend. Years ago, I warred under the great Emperor, but had to flee to America, where I became a contract slave and fell ill. Mowbray surrounded me with every care and all the skill medicine could command and prolonged a life-thread that had all but snapped. To him, I then was 'Drusus,' a Mongolian, whom a sentiment of common humanity had led him to rescue. I never dreamed an hour would come when I might repay, in part at least, the debt of gratitude I owe him."

He paused and suppressed a cough with difficulty.

"He knows now that I am Lee Chang, one-time marshal of the Emperor's armies.

"I have heard of your name," she said, her eyes wide.

* * * * *

It was difficult to believe that this wasted shell of a man was the soldier who had carried Mongolia's banner to continued victory over three continents. He smiled gravely.

"The Emperor forgives greatly, as he punishes magnificently. However, enough of my personal affairs. Remain here, I shall summon your attendant."

He returned, escorting a young woman, whose agitation was so extreme, she scarcely could walk. Indicating Ardis, he issued curt commands. "Serve her well and faithfully. See there is no cause for complaint from her. You have seen Mongolia's soldiers?"

She wailed an affirmative, shielding her head in her arms, her shoulders bowed as though fearing a lash.

"See the memory does not fade from your mind," he warned, menacingly. She shrank beneath his glance. With a bow to Ardis, he disappeared. The other woman fell at her feet, weeping.

"Who are you?" Ardis asked, gently. "Fordyce Meering. I was captured by a war motor of the Mongolian fleet." She did not add that her machine had fallen into the enemy's hands while fulfilling the Matriarch's savage command to bring Ardis back, that Stephen's humiliation might be made complete.

"You were to marry Mowbray?" Ardis asked, with a curious tightening at her throat.

"The fool!" snarled the prostrate one. "He is responsible for all this horrible disorder."

"You were to marry him?" Ardis persisted.

Fordyce raised her head. Recollection flashed across her face. She sat up and brushed her hair with her fingers, her eyes running insolently over the other's face.

"What could he have seen in you to attract him? A creature of the lowest caste!"

She smiled derisively. "I was willing to take and train him in right thinking. Some day, after all this silly war is ended, I may ask the Matriarch to spare his life in order to have the pleasure of lashing his silly, masculine notions from his head."

Ardis smiled and sank on a couch.

"You think you could do that with Stephen?" she asked.

"Give me the chance!" exclaimed Fordyce, springing to her feet. "Had we been married six months, I'll guarantee he would not now be adventuring on his foredoomed military fiasco. Mongolia would be in the city, and the country would be at peace."

She studied her companion with cold, hard eyes.

"It seems we must play a little game to blind these stupid Mongolian men. See that you do it well, Moore. One false step and I'll have you flayed with whips."

"Indeed?" Ardis asked, still smiling. "Where will you have this whipping administered?"

The arrogance abruptly faded from the young autocrat's eyes. She glanced apprehensively toward the curtain through which K'ung Fu had disappeared.

"There will be another day," she replied, after a pause, but in a more moderate voice. "A wholly idiotic turn of fate has made you a favorite of this Mongolian -"

"Were you saying something?" asked a soft voice.

She whirled to face the Asiatic Marshal, who stood at the curtained entrance, his lips wreathed in an ironic smile but his eyes blazing. Ardis rose from the couch.

"Please leave us together, Lee Chang," she said. "My maid is receiving her instructions."

He laughed aloud and nodded approvingly. One hand on the curtains, he flung back a smiling answer.

"I should worry for my Emperor, if all the women America were such as you, Ardis Moore."

Chapter XII

"I fail to see the justification for the heavy loss of life an air raid on the Mongolian camp would entail," Stephen declared, sternly. "Unless all our calculations are in error, we have two surprises for the enemy - the magnetic war arm and, in final extremity, the means by which to rob him and his military machines of power. I see no reason for a desperate venture by inexperienced troops, who would fall easy victims to the Emperor's trained legions."

General Conquist dissented vigorously.

"This is a war to the death, not only for ourselves and for this nation, but for the very civilization our race has developed. We can leave nothing to chance nor depend too much on the possibility of outguessing so shrewd a field commander as the Emperor. Even if the air raid resulted in the loss of half our fleet, if it crippled the enemy, the results would be justified, in our own somewhat desperate extremity."

Simeon thrust himself forward, his grim, lined face alight with fanatic purpose.

"Aye, she's right, Commander," he cried. "How do we know the old fox hasn't a surprise for us - and maybe more? Did he come here, knowing we had the magnetic arm, unless he had something with which to counter it? Man! He's up there now in his mountain camp smiling at us because we're silly enough to believe he adventured to America unprepared. Strike him, I say! What matters the cost? If we waste five of our machines to crush one of his, we can replace our losses a hundredfold easier than he can replace his."

Mowbray nodded slowly, his eyes serious, his forehead lined with evidence of deep thought.

"Have you overlooked the fact that the magnetic arm is uncertain except at close quarters and completely powerless against inorganic substances? If you are to accomplish anything, it must be with the death ray and our weapons are much less efficient than those of the enemy, which can be depended upon for accuracy at distances of not more than ten thousand feet."

He shook his head impatiently.

"If you were to lead a drive over the Mongolian camp at a distance under 10,000 feet, Simeon, every war motor in your fleet would be destroyed before it came within a mile of the enemy's camp. I should not object to the venture, desperate as it is, if our men had a chance of success."

"You forget something, Commander," Conquist replied, leaning forward eagerly. "What of the ancient weapons we have resurrected - the bombs that were used with such terrible effect in the last of the European wars prior to the Mongolian conquest?"

"Aye, there's the chance, Master!" echoed Simeon, springing to his feet and pacing the length of the commander's tent in which the conference was being held. "Ten thousand feet mean no more to a bomb than ten hundred. Give us the element of surprise - and what a stunning shock it will be to the old devil to have the Americans attack him in his own picked camp - and we'll send down a hail of death that will leave his air motor fleet a wreck."

Conquist pushed the decision to a close, reading in Mowbray's face surprise and cautious hope.

"We will divide the fleet. One half of it will start early and swing around to the east, approaching the camp with the sun at its back, which will be an added advantage. The other half, taking off later, will rise to the level of thirty thousand feet, sweep over the camp and dive down to the ten thousand foot level. Even if the latter force is destroyed, it will distract the attention of the Mongolian so the other fleet can race in, rain down its projectiles and, probably escape serious damage."

"Failure would entail frightful loss of life," Stephen replied, soberly.

"Why think of failure?" demanded Simeon, hunching his broad shoulders disparagingly. "If we do not come back, try something else. As for this venture, let me command it."

"Can you obtain volunteers?"

"Volunteers? Those devils of mine would dare anything rather than gnaw their fingers in idleness!"

"How many machines can you muster?"

"Of war motors, few enough. We should be scattered by the Mongolian in a pitched battle before you could wink an eye. But any air motor can carry bombs. Let it drop one in the right place and what does it matter if it is brought down?"

Stephen appealed to the other generals for opinions. They endorsed the plan with clamorous insistence. They were weary, they said, of inaction. Their troops began to doubt whether America really could wage war whether, when the test came, the dreaded Mongolian might not sweep down on the hastily improvised host and sweep it back to the metropolis as the wind whirled dust from bare ground in a time of drought.

"You have my permission," he said, rising abruptly. "Simeon, command this forlorn hope. Only, make your preparations hastily and at night in order that the enemy may not suspect your intentions."

The conclave broke up hurriedly. Simeon, his face alight with dare-devil purpose, hurried to the American air motor park to give preliminary orders. Night fell on a scene of feverish activity. Speaking in low tones, as though they feared voices might carry over the intervening leagues to the Mongolian camp, soldiers hastened the work of preparation. Hundreds of carriers were overhauled and tuned up to the last degree of perfection for the mad and deadly dash. Long, ant-like lines wound up from underground arsenals, hurriedly constructed to protect the old-style ammunition from a chance raid by an enemy ship. Snatches of song and bursts of low laughter arose from the hastening throngs. The air was electric with enthusiasm. Patrols on distant duty felt the impulse and the sentinel, standing solitary under a starless and cloudy sky, gripped his weapon tighter and peered more alertly into the thick darkness.

"The first squadron leaves in an hour," Conquist said, in a low tone. "These machines will swing in a wide circle to the south and then northeast. They will approach the enemy camp from the east just at sunrise, when the attack is launched simultaneously from this side."

Mowbray, his keen eyes studying every detail of the hurried preparations, nodded.

"Am I to accompany the expedition, Commander?" the Legion leader asked, eagerly.

"No."

Stephen softened the curt answer with a later statement:

"I have other and more important work for you, general."

It was too dark to read the disappointment on her face, but her silence was eloquent. He asked a question, after a brief pause.

"Has Simeon all the volunteers he needs?"

"Ten came forward to one he could accept," she replied, shortly.

The thief leader hurried out of the gloom, his huge bulk grotesquely large and indistinct.

"We are ready," he laughed, hoarsely. "Pray for dawn, Master. It will be a brave day for America."

An aid stumbled through the darkness to Mowbray's side.

"The governor-general has arrived, Commander."

"Harmon?" he queried, surprised.

"Yes, Commander."

"Conduct him to my tent - or, better, ask him to come here."

* * * * *

A moment later, Harmon's heavy voice was heard as he swore vigorously after stumbling over a mass of camp equipment.

"What devil's doings are these, Mowbray?" he demanded.

"See for yourself."

The autocrat stared downward to the fluttering pinpoints of light, dimly revealing hurrying forms.

"Deplorable disorder!" he grunted. "If I had a superintendent who permitted such damnable conditions, I'd reduce him to a contract laborer."

He peered downward more intently.

"They're carrying something. What are those things?"

"Bombs to destroy the Mongolian air fleet." In a few words Stephen sketched the plan of the raid.

"Do you mean that those madmen are to swoop over the Emperor's camp at sunrise and try to land those archaic missiles on his parked war motors?"

"Precisely."

"Magnificent - if it succeeds. Suppose it doesn't?"

"I hope they return to the protection of our camp - those who survive the attack," Mowbray replied, grimly.

"You *hope* , but you *know* they will not! Man, it's idiotic!"

He stamped heavily, first with one foot and then with the other. "All war is idiocy," he declared challengingly. "Command a war motor for me. I shall go with them to the attack."

"Impossible!"

"Why? If you go, why should I not accompany you?"

There was ironic challenge in his voice.

"Neither you, nor I, nor Conquist are going," Mowbray replied, quietly. "We are willing enough, but America cannot afford to risk everything upon one throw of the battle dice."

"Sense for once," he agreed, with acid emphasis.

For a moment, the burly autocrat gazed instinctively to the east, where the grim enemy camp crouched on the broad shoulder of the hills.

"It will be difficult for your people to approach without detection," he challenged.

"They will circle to the south and then east and northeast, approaching the enemy camp finally with the sun at their backs."

"All of them?" Harmon demanded, inexorably inquisitive.

"Half of them," Stephen replied, in a low voice.

"And the others?"

"They are the forlorn hope. Theirs is the duty of holding the enemy's attention while the fleet from the east races in and showers bombs on the Mongolian camp.

"I suppose it is all part of this absurd thing you call war," the autocrat commented, heavily, "but it seems like madness to me, this slaying of men who could be put to better use in industry."

Mowbray changed the subject.

"Is the city peaceful?"

"As much so as any place can be when the population thinks and talks of nothing but war. Your citizen guards have the mob in hand. We have plenty of food and, so far, have been able to supply your army."

He sank heavily on a camp stool before the commander's tent, toward which they had been walking.

"I have become infected like the rest, with the madness of the moment," he declared, with a wry face. "In

my spare moment, I have arranged for the enlistment of additional volunteers. I have been amazed to find so many men ready to exchange the certainty of food, raiment and shelter for the doubtful provender and perils of army life."

"I won't attempt to thank you," Stephen said quietly, "but you know I appreciate your efforts."

"It may be well not to hasten thanks," Harmon replied, in rough banter. "Possibly, I am raising a force of my own for that little personal altercation which is due when you have driven out the Mongolian and I am released from my absurd promise."

A sudden disturbance among the parked air motors attracted both to the entrance to the tent. A figure clad in white harangued the surprised soldiers. They could not hear the low-toned words but the attitude of the men, even in the dim light, indicated amazement and distrust. The intruder's sight must have been preternatural, for he perceived the two figures standing just outside the commander's domicile.

"Woe to the city!" he shrilled. His enshrouded arms were flung toward them.

"Woe to the city!" he repeated.

"Hare!" exclaimed Stephen.

"Yes - and stark mad!" Harmon agreed.

"The insane autocrat seemed on the point of mounting the slight hill on which the commander's tent was pitched. A light gleamed on a knife in his hand. On impulse, he turned and fled toward the massed machines. Stephen sensed his purpose.

"Seize him!" he ordered.

Soldiers sprang forward but before they could lay hands on the madman, he sprang into an air motor, already throbbing in preparation for flight. A maniacal laugh was drowned in the throb of its racing motors. With a graceful sweep, the machine, one of the largest and most heavily laden of the fleet, rose in the air and darted into the night. A hundred pilots sprang to their machines to pursue him, but Mowbray's sharp command called them back.

"We have no time to follow a madman," he declared.

* * * * *

Simeon, his voice husky with rage, vented his anger on his silent soldiers.

"They are more fearful of a ghost than of the Mongolian," he cried, striding to Mowbray's side. "Another ten minutes and we would have been gone."

"This will not interfere with your plans," the Commander replied, curtly. "One machine less means nothing. I do not hold you responsible. You could not anticipate the vagaries of a lunatic."

Harmon by his side, he waited patiently until the first machine took the air. On the side removed from Mongolian gaze, it showed a light as a guide to those that followed. Simeon appeared for final instructions.

"The fate of the raid is in your hands," Stephen said, soberly. "I can say no more."

Visibly moved, the burly thief saluted silently. Harmon extended his hand. With a grim smile, Simeon shook it and then hastened to his air motor. A moment later it rose into the darkness.

"There is nothing more we can do?" Harmon asked, after a pause.

"Simeon commands," Mowbray replied, wearily. "All we can do is to pray that good fortune attends him and his command."

Silently, he reentered the tent, Harmon following. As he dropped on a stool, the latter shot a sudden question.

"Where is Ardis Moore?"

"In the Mongolian camp?"

"You knew, then?" asked the burly autocrat, in amazement.

"I was informed by the King himself."

"Then, you know about Fordyce Meering as well?"

"No."

"You had not heard she also was captured by the enemy?"

"It is news to me."

"Arston told me. She sent Ardis to the Mongolian as a peace offering. A moment later she heard I had accepted the office of governor-general and had the absurd thought I could be influenced to betray you. So, she sent Fordyce to recall the air motor carrying Ardis, and she also was captured."

He strove vainly to restrain a groan.

"I dread to think of her fate. What can I do?" he demanded, turning a drawn and haggard face toward his companion. "I love her, Stephen, I'd go single-handed into the Emperor's camp to rescue her. There isn't a man in America with brains enough to advise me except yourself."

"I can offer only this slight solace - I believe the Emperor will treat her honorably."

He sketched rapidly his last meeting and conversation with Field Marshal Lee Chang, the Asiatic conqueror's representative, recalling particularly the proud declaration that the master of the world did not war on women. Harmon's drawn face relaxed.

"I feel we can rely on this assurance," Stephen declared. "The Emperor's nature is chivalrous. He feels himself so superior to any man or combination of men, he could not stoop to despicable conduct toward the defenseless."

"You hold him in higher esteem than I. Yet, I hope your estimate of him is correct."

"What of your administrative problems?"

"Nothing worth mentioning," Harmon replied, brushing the thought aside with a contemptuous hand. "Arston tried to incite an uprising among her immediate retainers. However, others of her caste refused to join the conspiracy, fearing confiscation of their property. They are awaiting the outcome of your war with Mongolia. I had little trouble restoring order. From the southern, middle and northern units, I have called for supplies and volunteers. The former have come in sufficient amount, but I do not expect soldiers. Dissension and doubt are rife and they do not quite understand what is occurring or what is safest and best for them to do."

The Commander nodded thoughtfully.

"At this time, their defection is unimportant," Harmon continued, "but it might become vital if the struggle should be prolonged."

"It will not be prolonged," Stephen replied, quietly. "Either the Mongolian will surrender before he emerges from the foothills or all America will lie as prostrate under his feet as Asia, Europe, Africa and Australia now are."

The burly autocrat drew in his breath sharply.

"Are you gambling everything on this one campaign?" he asked, in wonderment.

Mowbray laughed harshly.

"Do you think I ever should find time or place to recruit and train another army if this one should fail?" he demanded. "I should be doubly proscribed - by my own caste in America and by the Mongolian overlord."

Harmon nodded, this time slowly, thoughtfully and somberly. Stephen arose nervously and stepped to the tent opening.

The triangle of light, shining through the opening, was reflected on a thin white blanket.

"Fog!" he exclaimed, joyfully.

"Thick, too," Harmon agreed. "A nasty night for your air motor fleet."

"Give thanks for it! Under its cover, our machines, guided by men who know this mountain country intimately, will race miles nearer the enemy camp before being brought under a destructive ground fire than they could have hoped to be able to do under other circumstances."

"I see what you mean. It is a stroke of golden luck."

"It is and for two reasons. The fog will cloak the raid and the Mongolian, not being as well acquainted with the terrain, will risk fewer patrol ships in the air."

A new confidence thrilled his voice as he continued. "Harmon, by this time tomorrow night, I believe shall be celebrating the first victory of American arms in this struggle!"

Chapter XIII

Rousing from restless slumber, Ardis pressed aside a hanging and stepped outside her tent. Heavy mist hung over the encampment, through the dense mass of which came muffled the noises of the army. She stood solitary in a world of fog. Behind her, a voice cried her name and Fordyce stumbled to her side.

"I thought you had left me," she cried.

The other's presence dispelled Ardis sense of isolation. She returned to the tent, but did not go inside. The light gradually grew stronger, but she could only guess at the hour. Her thoughts turned to Stephen and she wondered what he was doing and how he was hastily improvising a defense for helpless America from the menace of war-trimmed Mongolia. As she dreamed a terrific explosion shook the camp, flames tore the fog curtain and a gust of wind struck the tent, causing it to rock crazily. Other explosions followed rapidly and the camp was in an instant uproar, as soldiers rushed to their weapons and began searching the brightening sky with lights and death rays.

Abruptly, the mist, torn by successive heavy explosions, opened up before her eyes and she perceived a fleet of air motors which, she knew, must be American machines. After the first stunning moment of surprise, the Mongolian veterans had begun a systematic attack upon the racing flyers.

"What is it?" demanded Fordyce, hysterically.

"It is our people," Ardis replied. "They are attacking the Emperor in his own camp."

"Oh, the cowards! The stupid, blundering cowards!" moaned Fordyce. "To subject me to such peril! They must be mad!"

A hundred crimson Mongolian war motors seemed to leap from the ground. As they shot upward, war birds seeking greedily to close with their foes, the death ray gunners picked off the attackers. Machines whirled in crazy circles to the ground, to explode as their freight of bombs detonated. Even this destruction brought consternation to the enemy; as each doomed machine's contents spread destruction far and wide. One American craft, far in the van, had swung away from its companions. It seemed in ignominious flight but even as Ardis watched, it swerved back over the camp until it was directly over the parked air fleet, where thousands of soldiers strove frantically to get their charges into the air.

A death ray battery swung toward the long voyager. She prayed with paralyzed, unmoving lips, that the daring adventurer might succeed in his mission. Abruptly, the machine drove earthward in a screaming rush that brought it down until she could perceive its white-robed pilot spread one arm over the massed red war motors in a gesture of demoniac joy. In an agony of apprehension, she flung her hands upward in a gesture of appeal.

"Now!" Ardis screamed. "Now!"

As if in answer to her command, the man thrust right and left with nervous hand. Again and again, as the machine raced over the helpless enemy fleet, he made the same motion. From the air motor descended a rain of black dots, falling at terrific speed upon the Mongolian ships and their laboring crews. A blast hurled her to the ground. Others followed rapidly, until she was deafened by the noise and bruised by repeated shocks as she was raised from the ground and thrown down again. She was dimly conscious that the tent had fallen and thankful that none of its supports had dropped upon her prostrate form. She wondered vaguely what had become of Fordyce and whether her companion had been injured. The explosions stopped as abruptly as they had begun. However, the surcease was only temporary. She heard a roar of amazement from the Mongolian camp and the din recommenced. The whole world

seemed reeling. Yet, she experienced no sensation of fear, but instead, was sustained by an emotion of proud thankfulness.

"Stephen has won!" her heart sang madly.

The blasts terminated as abruptly as they had recommenced. The second attack from the east, although planned as a surprise, found the Mongolian gunners at their weapons. Only a few machines of this group penetrated the death-ray barrage. Still, their bombs added enormously to the total of destruction effected by the surprise attack of the first squadron. By the time, the survivors of the American fleet had drawn off and were racing back to their camp with news of the first victory over the Mongolian, Ardis was becoming conscious of a smothering sensation. Burrowing under the heavy tent, she reached the air.

The scene that greeted her eyes was so frightful that she drew back, horrified. Fearful as had been the pictures of war painted by the textbooks of her schools which declared conflict sanguinary insanity, they had not prepared her for such slaughter. The graceful air motors that had been surprised while still on the ground were masses of metalwork, down which trickled a bloody stream more sinister than the paint with which they had been decorated. Tents had been leveled in every direction, including the palatial one in which the Emperor had had his headquarters. Doctors and nurses were moving swiftly among the injured, whose groans and screams filled the air. She clasped hands to her ears and raised her eyes to search the heavens for the American fleet

A single air motor, torn and blackened by the death rays, had pitched upon a nearby hillside. As she gazed a white-robed figure painfully reared itself erect. Somewhere in the Mongolian camp, an alert gunner saw the solitary survivor and, turned his weapon in that direction. She saw the searing ray strike the machine, but the American leaped from sight behind a boulder and disappeared. Ardis became conscious of fear for her own safety. She had no difficulty in visualizing her fate if she was seen by the maddened soldiery, roused to fury by the unexpectedly successful American attack. She crawled back under the tent flap and lay quiet.

* * * * *

Hours passed with leaden feet. As the sun mounted in the heavens, its heat beat down upon her until her refuge became an inferno. She longed for water and air, but knew better than to venture out. Even if she could reach the Mongolian ruler, she doubted whether she could be sure of his protection. With his plans for the conquest of America in jeopardy, he would have no time or thought for other matters.

Trampling feet passed her hiding place and great war machines, recklessly guided, rumbled on, only a few yards from her head. Fortunately, the military street in front of the tent was broad and open. Passage along it was easier than across the tangle of leveled tents. Soldiers and weapons followed the easier route. The dust raised by passing thousands of feet settled on her dried lips and parched throat. Once she coughed and listened for moments, in agonized suspense lest the noise had betrayed her hiding place, She heard her name called faintly.

"Ardis!"

Although muffled, the voice was recognizable as that of Fordyce. She thrust her hands out on either side and encountered soft, yielding flesh. A despairing scream left no doubt the form was that of the young autocrat.

"Hush!" she whispered. "They will hear you!"

Fordyce crept to her side, trembling and weeping. Ardis comforted her with signs. She dared not speak, for the heavy tread of marching men sounded only a few feet distant. In a pause of the shuffling march, she rounded out a tiny tunnel in the tent covering. The breath of air from the outside was as delicious as water to a wanderer in the desert. New detachments of soldiers appeared, their lean faces grim with resolve. Immense war machines, evidently including many rescued from the wrecked war fleet, rumbled by, some painfully dragged by men hitched to rudely improvised gear. Following them came others staggering under packs of munitions or boxes of foodstuffs. She knew that never before, in all the history of their campaigns, had the royal veterans been forced to such drudgery. She sensed that they were bewildered, surprised and, most of all, enraged at those who had engineered the coup, which had robbed them of so large a part of their transport.

As the sun declined, a cool breeze swept the mountain plateau and the heat grew less oppressive. The passing lines thinned, the intervals between detachments became more extended. The breeze grew chill and blew more briskly. The hidden pair enlarged the tunnel-like opening and drank in refreshing draughts with avid lungs. The great camp was silent. Even the wounded had been removed as the vast array wound its way from the heights to the lowlands, seeking the American army and battle.

"I think we can escape now," Ardis whispered.

"Where shall we go?" wailed Fordyce.

"Anywhere, except along the trail followed by the Mongolians."

"Nowhere in the world can we be safe from these horrible barbarians."

"Is it just to speak so harshly of those who treated us with so much generosity?" Ardis asked, gently.

"Generosity!" echoed the other, haughtily. "Was it generous to make me the servant of a middle-class woman?"

The other's silence brought repentance.

"Forgive me," she sobbed. "I am unstrung."

Ardis did not reply. Her quick ear caught the sound of voices and she gestured for silence. Two men were conversing in English.

"This is their tent," one said.

"I see no trace of the bodies," the other replied.

He spoke with difficulty, his utterance interrupted by a dry, rasping cough.

"They may have been covered when it was blown down."

"If so, they probably were smothered under its thick covering."

The speaker cleared his throat and coughed huskily.

"Ardis!" he called. "It is I, Lee Chang."

For a moment, she lay irresolute then, with decision, flung aside the enveloping folds and stood up, Fordyce following, fearful of emerging, but in greater fear lest she be left behind. Beside Drusus stood his youthful secretary. "It is fortunate I found you," the Mongolian noble declared.

"We must leave at once. The King has given orders that the camp be abandoned."

They ran through the gathering dusk, Lee Chang leaning heavily on his youthful companion's arm. He gasped a warning.

"Faster!"

Worn by excitement and waiting, the young women had been lagging, but the foreboding in his voice lashed their weary feet. They stumbled into a shallow canyon in the hillside cutting off at right angles from the road the royal veterans had followed in their march to the lowlands. Drusus permitted a momentary pause, then urged them forward again.

"Climb!" he gasped, pointing to a narrow, precipitous path.

The rude trail ascended the canyon for a short distance, abruptly turned and led into a mere gash, up which they toiled with difficulty. For the first time, they observed the mouth of a shallow cave.

"At last!" Drusus cried, coughing violently. "I feared we might be too late."

Unable to control his labored breathing, he sank to the rocky floor of the cave, leaning back against its rough walls and desperately striving to gain control of heart and laboring lungs. Ardis glanced out, but could not see the King's abandoned camp and surmised the cave faced to the west. After a time Drusus controlled his coughing and spoke rapidly.

"I discovered this cave by chance and while the army was marching out today stocked it with a few supplies. Remain here until after the battle that is now in the process of making. It will decide the campaign. If the Emperor wins, it will be safe for you to return to the city."

He shot a curt command at his companion, which sent the latter stumbling down the dim path.

"I can speak of other possibilities now that he has gone," he continued. "Should the Emperor be defeated - a possibility not altogether remote, now that his transport has been crippled - you must follow your own devices. It is probable I shall not be alive to aid you."

The young Mongolian scrambled swiftly up the path, as though in fear of danger. He shouted a warning and Lee Chang hastily urged the young women to seek the safety of the cave's inner recesses.

"It is coming!" he warned. "The King has been forced to abandon vast stores of war materials and will destroy them to prevent their capture by your people."

He thrust a weapon into Ardis' hand.

"Keep it," he ordered. "It is a last, bitter resort for those threatened with worse than death."

An unearthly flare of light revealed his lined, anxious face. They reeled under a shock that seemed to rend the mountain to its foundations. The light died and she heard Fordyce cry out in fear. Again, the sky was illuminated by the ghastly light. She saw her companion, head flung back and arms out-thrust rigidly,

in the arms of Drusus' secretary, whose eyes blazed with passion. The next moment the Mongolian nobleman had dragged the girl from the other's grasp and sent the man reeling with a savage thrust, which told of the gigantic strength which had been his in days of martial leadership.

"Go!" he commanded.

The next horrible flash of light revealed a cave tenanted only by the two women, one prone on the rocky floor and the other hovering above, seeking to restore her unconscious companion.

Chapter XIV

The flaming destruction of the Mongolian camp signaled a warning to alert American patrols, who flung hasty messages to the Commander's headquarters.

"He is preparing to evacuate his position on the plateau," Conquist declared.

Simeon, a broken arm strapped in splints to a sling and his face lined with suffering and weariness, nodded assent. Stephen flung a question at him.

"What proportion of his war-fleet is available for service?"

"At most, not more than one-half. Of course, that is only a guess. We were too busy unloading our bombs, fighting the enemy in the air, dodging death ray barrages and, finally drawing off after our mission had been accomplished, to be certain of our observations. However, I believe we destroyed fifty percent of the Mongolian warships."

"He still has a formidable fleet, although not enough to transport his troops and equipment. We have crippled the Mongolian lion, but he still is powerful and dangerous."

Hardtmuth nodded vigorous assent.

"We have compelled him to march at least half his troops overland, through terrain where we can select a battlefield in advance. That gives us a tremendous advantage, particularly as our soldiers are new and untried, while his are seasoned veterans. Still, he can cover his advance with the remnant of his air navy and I doubt whether we have the ships, trained men or equipment to challenge his supremacy in this arm."

"There is our greatest weakness," Delachaise admitted. "I gravely question whether our untrained levies will stand up long under an attack by skilled death ray gunners, whose fire is accurately directed by aerial observers."

"There still is a chance our new magnetic weapon will be a surprise to the enemy and you will remember we have a defense against the death ray," Stephen argued, studying his generals thoughtfully.

"Against such small weapons as those employed by the Amazons - yes," Hardtmuth agreed, "but we know, from the reports of our scouts, that the defense is utterly insufficient when men are exposed to the improved and more powerful weapons with which the Emperor's veterans are armed."

"You forget the magnetic arm," Mowbray objected.

"True, that involves a possibility of surprise for the foe and surprise is an important element in war," Delachaise declared. "Still, I would feel more comfortable if I knew the Mongolian war fleet had been

completely eliminated."

An aid entered hurriedly.

"Commander, a report from the commanding officer of the advance forces," he said, saluting.

Mowbray turned to the thought-transmission machine, from which leaped a red spot of light, centering on his forehead and completing connection with the distant officer.

"Colonel Caesar Calmetti reporting. My scouts announce a movement of the enemy, in considerable force westward from his camp on foot toward the plains."

"Yes," Mowbray commented voicelessly. The voice droned on:

"I regret to report our magnetic ray weapons are valueless. The enemy evidently has perfected a defense. By Etherscope observations, I gain the impression he had developed a mask or a simple solution with which clothing and exposed portions of body and equipment are immunized. Our only effective arm is the ancient rifle, with which hits have been made, but the powerful Mongolian death ray artillery has forced our scouts to retreat on the main advanced force."

"Is there anything more?"

"We are contesting the advance and losing heavily. I am reporting by order of the Brigadier-General commanding in this sector."

"Very good. I will communicate with him direct."

The red-spot died. Stephen turned to his Commanders.

"The time has come to use our final defense agency. Professor Sconeiff, are the radionic de-energizing machines in readiness?"

A tall, scholarly man rose, saluted awkwardly and nodded.

"This is the crucial moment of the campaign," Mowbray declared. "We are depriving the enemy of power. Simultaneously, we are terminating our own command of the same instrument. It is a desperate expedient, justifiable only because the situation will be more unexpected and, therefore, more harassing to the Mongolian than to ourselves. Are you ready, gentlemen, for this final expedient?"

He glanced slowly around the circle of faces and saw grim resolution and assent.

"Remember, that from the moment Professor Sconeiff sets his machines in motion, we shall be without transport and also without communication, except such archaic methods as flag and semaphore signals, carrier pigeons and couriers. Each one of you will be compelled to carry on in accordance with the general plan of campaign as discussed and agreed upon at our councils. This is understood?"

One after another, the assembled commanders signified assent. He signaled them to rise.

"To your posts! I shall make a last round of our positions and you may check with me then on final disposition of forces and equipment. An hour after I give the signal, Sconeiff will start his giant machines. This will still all energy - our own and the enemy's. Consider it is the signal to advance to designated

positions in preparations for the final conflict that will decide the fate of the Mongolian invasion."

Accompanied by Simeon and Conquist, the Commander made a swift tour of his front. By Etherscope observation, he discerned the massing of considerable enemy forces along the course of the stream flowing down from the mountain plateau where the Emperor had pitched his camp. Its easy gradient and broad paving furnished a splendid highway over which to advance troops and heavy machines, the latter moved by men and such hastily improvised power plants as could be salvaged from wrecked warmotors. Of the surviving flyers in the Mongolian fleet, he saw a number.

"They are awaiting the emergence of the main army from the comparatively restricted confines of the mountain road before launching an attack," Conquist said, quietly. "It is good strategy. Once the advance guard has reached the open country, where it can deploy, the air navy will swoop down on our troops and try to shake their formations and shatter their morale."

Mowbray nodded.

"He is somewhat disorganized by the loss of part of his fleet," the Commander commented. "He will be completely disorganized when the others are put out of action while his death ray artillery and other arms are rendered useless through loss of the radionic power upon which they depend. Then, he must drive through to victory by sheer physical force against our old-style weapons or face complete defeat."

"The Emperor will make a fight of it," Hardtmuth replied, positively. "Surrender will be the last thing he will consider."

"It will be a desperate situation for him," Conquist replied, quickly. "His only route to the plains is along this road, which we now command."

"Here he is to be halted," Stephen declared, sternly. "The road has been mined as I directed?"

"Yes."

"Material is at hand for the erection of barricades and the troops supplied with intrenching tools to throw up breastworks?"

"We have taken every precaution to be in readiness, Commander," Hardtmuth replied.

* * * * *

Mowbray made a swift visit to the selected position, viewed the final arrangements and nodded approval. On either side of a canyon, at the bottom of which ran the main road, the enemy must travel; troops were massed behind every patch of cover. Grim-faced and confident, the men watched their commander and ripples of subdued applause ran down their lines. Delachaise hastened up, his face flushed with exertion but wreathed in smiles.

"We have prepared still another little surprise, *mon general*. On the cliffs above are massed my giants, the strongest of the strong, each with his shoulder to a boulder. When the word comes - pouf! They will thrust like Titans and rocks shall fall upon the enemy until he thinks the very skies are raining death."

Stephen rewarded him with a word of praise and passed on to the artillery.

"Clumsy weapons, Commander," agreed the general heading this arm of the patriot forces, "but better

than none, particularly when the enemy possesses nothing with which to counter our attack."

"Are your supplies of ammunition adequate?"

"Not for a prolonged engagement. However, we have everything that has been manufactured, including even the supplies turned out yesterday in our munitions factories."

"Let us pray, then, general, for a short fight and victory."

The phrase was caught up by his suite and passed on to the rank and file. It rippled through the lines like a prophecy.

"A short fight and victory!"

"Our work is concluded," Mowbray said, turning to Simeon and Conquist. "Let us hasten to headquarters."

Conquist laid a hand on his arm.

"Am I to be denied the right to lead my Legion?"

"I had hoped we should not need them."

"Why not?" she demanded, challengingly.

"This is a war of men."

She frowned sternly.

"This is a war of Americans defending their homes. My command is trained and loyal. Why should we not stand shoulder to shoulder with your militia?"

"Go, if you will, General. We shall need every trained soldier we can muster."

She saluted and left. Accompanied by the wounded thief leader, Mowbray returned to his headquarters. A delegation headed by Arston awaited him.

"What do you desire?" he demanded sharply, his mind on the coming battle.

"Peace," the Matriarch replied, as sharply.

"For whom?"

"The nation - ourselves - the Mongolian."

"Have you interviewed the Emperor?" he asked, ironically.

"How can we enter his camp now?" she replied, with asperity.

"Then, how can you speak for him?"

"This is silly bandying of words. We demand that useless slaughter of our people - our workers and craftsmen - shall cease. We are prepared to make a truce with the Emperor and free America of his soldiers."

"You would buy off an already defeated foe?" Simeon demanded, contemptuously.

"You, I believe," she replied, running a haughty eye over him from head to foot, "are the man they call the 'Thieves General?'"

"Did you come here to insult my commanders?" Stephen interposed, sternly.

"We came to ascertain what plans have been made for the safety of our property and our workers," she replied, curtly.

"My plans are my own and my generals," he said. "Was there anything else?"

"You mock us!" she exclaimed. "Our mission is one of help for our doomed and distracted nation."

"Then, go down there," he said, pointing to where soldiers were streaming to the front, flanked on both sides by lines of trucks straining every effort in a last race against time to get their freight of supplies to the battleground before power was cut off. "You can be of real benefit to America by fronting the enemy at our gates as those men are preparing to do."

"You would risk our valuable lives with those of the rabble you have led into this mad adventure!" she exclaimed, haughtily. "Preposterous! I command that you cease this mad nonsense. Advise the Emperor we will make peace on any terms and at any price."

An aid hastened to his side.

"A message from Professor Sconeiff, Commander. He is in readiness."

"You intend going through with your mad plan to resist the Emperor?" Arston asked, her eyes wide with amazement. "You reject our effort to bring peace?"

"Peace at the price he would demand and you would pay - yes!"

He flung a warning over his shoulder as he entered his tent

"If you would return safely to the city, leave immediately. In ten minutes, you will be too late."

Soldiers barred Arston's way when she would have followed him.

"The Commander is not to be disturbed," said a grim militiaman.

She laid a hand on his mighty arm, as though thrust him aside, reconsidered and rejoined her delegation, the members of which had been silent auditors of her vain argument. Dejectedly the group climbed into an airmotor and disappeared in the direction of the city. Stephen had made connection with Sconeiff through voiceless communication.

"In eight minutes, Commander, I shall act," the professor reported.

"You have your orders," was the silent answer. "Obey them explicitly."

Followed by Simeon, Mowbray raced to a waiting warmotor and darted toward the front. He planed down literally under the shadows of enemy flyers patrolling a front only a short distance removed from the advanced American positions. The morning sun glinted sanguinely on their red-painted sides. Orders evidently had been given for a concentration, as ships were racing from the far-flung wings of the squadron toward a machine bearing the proud flag of Mongolia. Stephen wondered whether the Emperor had elected to assume personal command of the air fleet, unconscious of the doom that impended over it.

Abruptly, he was conscious of sudden, overwhelming silence. Down below, where the laboring trucks and engines had been making last hasty disposition of troops and artillery, all movement had stopped. Simultaneously, the enemy warmotors wavered in their swift flight. His eyes were glued to the flagship, which seemed to glide gently earthward. A second later, its downward movement was accelerated and it turned slowly on its side, overbalanced by its engines or weapons. As it revolved, forms were thrown out. He surmised these were members of its crew who had been on the upper deck. Then, its gravity-dispelling machinery inoperative, it became a mere mass of metal, hurtling earthward with terrific acceleration and followed by all others in the fleet.

The air was swept clear of enemy fighting-craft in the twinkling of an eye. From a distance came the sound of terrific explosions as the doomed machines struck the ground, throwing up immense clouds of dust. Stephen shuddered involuntarily, as he thought of the frightful slaughter precipitated, when Sconeiff started his generators. Simeon came running to his side, face aflame with savage joy.

"It works!" he screamed. "The enemy is helpless. Victory is ours!"

Chapter XV

The moments succeeding the explosion and prior to the departure of Lee Chang and his aid were periods of almost delirious suspense for Ardis. At no time since she had entered the Mongolian camp had she experienced terror such as now overwhelmed her. She trembled before the menace of an unmentionable dread, as she leaned over Fordyce, dashed water on her face and chafed her cold hands. The yawning cave-mouth exerted a strange fascination. She kept glancing over her shoulder toward it, anticipating the return of the chivalrous Field Marshal's treacherous secretary. The death ray weapon that had been pressed into her hand by the Mongolian nobleman had fallen to the floor of the cavern. She recovered it as her companion regained consciousness and simultaneously began screaming incoherently, her half-waking thoughts filled with dread. With surprising strength, the young autocrat flung aside a hand laid upon her arm, but Ardis drew her close, whispering a soothing message.

"Has he gone?" whispered Fordyce, terrorized eyes searching every dark nook of the cave.

"We are alone, dear."

"Horrible!" the girl cried, glancing about wildly. "Did you see his eyes?"

She sprang to her feet, weariness forgotten.

"Let us escape!"

"Where can we go?" Ardis asked, gently. "We might walk into his arms if we left the cave."

"When will this terrible night end?" Fordyce exclaimed. "Oh, Ardis, I never dreamed anything ever could happen like - like this!"

Forgetting her own fears, Ardis comforted her. Locked in each other's arms, they waited for an interminable period, no sound breaking the stillness except the young aristocrat's convulsive sobs. A pale moon bathed the cave mouth in thin, cold light. Ardis thought she heard a voice speaking in the Mongolian tongue, but as the sound was not repeated, became assured she had been tricked by an overstrung imagination, which magnified the rustle of a falling pebble until it became the labored approach of a climbing man.

Hours passed and Fordyce slept, head pillowed on her companion's shoulder. Ardis fought sleep valiantly, but weariness weighed down her eyelids. She was tempted to rise and walk about the cave, thinking thus to fight off drowsiness but at her first gentle motion, arms were coiled about her in the grip of fear. Strange, unreal phantoms seemed to dance at the cave mouth. She nodded and then started in wonder whether she had dreamed or had perceived a flitting, uncanny figure pass the entrance, its flapping robes trailing in the light breeze. She drowsed and awoke to find the muscles of her neck and shoulders grown stiff and cramped. A moment later, she heard a sound, as of some one scrambling cautiously up the steep path. A moment later, a stone slipped with a rattle into the narrow gully on which the cavern faced. It was followed by a hail of pebbles.

She sprang to her feet, nervously clutching the weapon Lee Chang had pressed into her hand before his departure. There was a sound of falling rocks at the entrance, a scraping of metal-shod footgear on the rocky path and a muffled sound. She entertained a fleeting hope the intruder might be an animal. In her desperate situation, she would have welcomed any creature, no matter how savage, rather than the hated Mongolian. Fordyce crouched at her feet, her voice paralyzed by fear. Nothing could be hoped for from her. Whatever defense they offered against the skulking intruder, it must be hers to provide it. The opening was darkened by the figure of a man, who paused uncertainly, vainly striving to pierce the darkness of the cave.

"Stop!" she cried.

She heard the man utter an exclamation of satisfaction.

"I am armed," she continued. "If you enter, I shall shoot!"

Fordyce's terrors no longer could be restrained.

"Help!" she screamed. "Help!"

"Silence!" the man ordered, his exultant voice booming through the cave.

"Stop where you are!" Ardis commanded, "or you die."

"Fool!" he replied coarsely. "Your death ray is impotent."

She pressed the button as he advanced, but no answering deathly flash followed. The man laughed exultantly. The next instant, he was flung to the floor of the cave by a leaping form which sprawled over his prone body, its rags flapping as they rolled about at the cave mouth. Above their labored breathing sounded occasional words in Mongolian and American. Though taken by surprise, Drusus' aid fought savagely. Once he called out in his own language, as though seeking to discover the identity of his opponent, but received no answer.

Ardis perceived the stranger was tiring and that the Mongolian was on the point of overcoming him. A note of triumph broke from the Asiatic's lips. He of the flapping rags gathered himself for a final effort, which brought him astride his adversary. She saw something bright flash and heard the Oriental utter a cry of fear. Then, a shriek rang through the cave. For a moment, neither man moved. Slowly, the white-clad visitor rose and hung over his foe, who writhed and subsided into dreadful quietude. Spurning the prone form with his foot, the victor stumbled to the cave mouth, where he paused and flung his hands upward.

"Woe to the city!" he cried.

With the halting slowness of complete fatigue, he passed from sight. Fordyce raced to Ardis and flung her arms about her companion. On the verge of nervous exhaustion, the two cowered in the rear of the cave, agonizingly watching the glooming entrance in fear lest their mysterious rescuer or another, even more dreaded, appear. The body on the moonlighted portal had a strange fascination for both. At times, it seemed to move an arm or leg or to mutter unintelligible words. Terror magnified every noise of the night a thousand times and lent to it a fearsome portent.

* * * * *

Dawn came on leaden wings, but as soon as it was light Ardis resolutely stole to the cave mouth, followed by Fordyce, who feared above everything else that she might be left alone. Bent double, as though surprised by death in a moment of triumphant physical effort, the young Mongolian rested on his right side, his left arm flung back to reveal a gaping wound, from which blood had welled until it formed a sinister pool.

"Let us leave this frightful place!" Fordyce exclaimed. Ardis snatched up food and light clothing and, with head averted, led her companion past the corpse and along the narrow path. Eager to place as much distance as possible between themselves and the scene of their fearsome adventures, they raced down the steep hillside to the plateau where the Emperor's camp had been pitched. With a cry of warning Ardis thrust her companion behind a bush and studied the abandoned site. Gigantic machines were scattered everywhere, overturned by hasty hands; which had smashed the delicate equipment for concentrating radionic energy in the production of death rays. From their vantage point, they could perceive the terrific damage wrought by the American bombs. Chasms had been opened in the ground, trees shattered, tents rent and war equipment torn into fragments. The warmotors, that had been the especial objective of the raid and which had been surprised while on the ground, were riven masses of metal.

"Is there no end to these horrors?" Fordyce asked, in an agonized whisper. "Can men do nothing but destroy those things which other men create."

"It is war," Ardis answered. "Had it not been for the success of our countrymen in wrecking this equipment, greater damage and life loss might have been inflicted on the city by these Mongolian military flyers."

"As you explain it," the other answered in weary agreement, "all this turmoil and disaster seem inevitable. I am commencing to understand something of what you mean, Ardis. In a way, it all seems so senseless, so useless. However, when I remember what happened last night in the cave" - She shuddered and drew closer to her companion - "when I remember those frightful hours, I seem to see big causes behind this apparent madness."

Ardis did not pursue the subject.

"We must hurry on," she urged. "While the camp now is deserted, some of the Emperor's soldiers might return at any moment."

Skirting the edge of the wrecked encampment, they hastened in the direction of the city, prudently following trails high above the mountain road, down which the Mongolian legions had advanced to their defeat by the American troops. The region was wild and unpeopled. It comprised an area the Companies with customary decisiveness had ruled as unfit for cultivation. Those among its people, chiefly forest rangers and miners, who had not fled before the enemy advance, had been driven out by the invader following a ruthless policy of preventing spying by the complete elimination of hostile populations. The flight told heavily upon physical strength and they paused frequently. Ardis could have pressed on faster than her companion, but Fordyce, unaccustomed to walking, needed rest. She stretched out on the turf beneath an overhanging rock, which partially screened them from the goat path they had been following.

"I can't go on any farther," she said, hopelessly.

Ardis found a tiny, spring at the base of the rock, where they bathed hands and faces and then ate sparingly; her friend, utterly exhausted, fell asleep almost immediately. Head pillowed on her arm, Ardis drowsed. A figure in flying rags stole up the road, skulking from shelter to shelter and peering around constantly as if in fear of attack. Over the man's face fell a mass of tangled hair. His eyes were glazed and his lips worked tremulously, while one arm hung stiff at his side, as though rendered almost helpless by recent injury. Thorns and sharp stones had cut his feet and he limped painfully.

Unconscious of the sleeping girls, he stole to a basin below their hiding place and dashed water into his mouth with quick, animal-like motions. After thirst had been assuaged, he thrust his torn feet into the pool and gazed about furtively. The sleeping women caught his eye and he leaped erect, fumbling at a knife in his belt. A moment later, he stole forward, seized a box of concentrated food and wolfed it silently. While he ate, he studied their faces and gradually an expression of bewilderment appeared on his own drawn countenance.

After a time, he crept away a short distance and sat down, still watching the sleepers. The sun mounted higher in the heavens and a beam, striking Ardis, awakened her. The first object upon which her eyes rested was the silent, white-clad man, his rags fluttering in the light morning breeze. He indicated neither fear nor hostility.

"Who is that?" he croaked, pointing to her companion.

"Fordyce Meering," she replied, fearfully.

He nodded slowly and smiled. His grin, if anything, appeared more menacing than his former expression.

"How did she come here?"

The words were broken, uneven, groping, as though connected thought was difficult.

"She was captured by the Mongolians."

A fierce light flamed in his eyes and he flung his hands upward.

"Woe to the city!" he shrilled.

Fordyce awakened, screamed as she saw the stranger visitant and sprang toward Ardis. A moment later, however, recognition dawned. She rose and advanced toward the wanderer, scanning his face intently. "Martin Hare!"

The man's bewildered countenance worked pitifully. "Mad!" she exclaimed, in mingled horror and surprise. "Oh, God! What next!"

Hare had arisen to his feet and now confronted her silently.

"How did you get here?" she demanded.

He replied in unintelligible gibberings, pointing upward toward the Emperor's abandoned encampment, beyond which lay the cave in which they had found refuge, and then downward in the direction of the city. He beckoned them to follow and they hastened after him. Despite his bare feet, at which the stones of the trail tore painfully, he plodded forward determinedly, pausing only when his companions signified, by words and signs, that they must have rest. After a time Ardis heard distant explosions and a passing breeze brought to her ear a roar of voices, sounding like the distant beating of the surf on a storm-swept coast.

"What is that?" Fordyce asked, startled.

"I am not certain, but I think it is the noise of battle," said Ardis.

Hare had heard the noises and now quickened his steps. Despite their protestations, he refused to delay longer, seemingly being driven onward by an inward compulsion to seek and find the source of the strange noises. Pushing themselves to the extreme of exhaustion, the girls followed. Abruptly, a voice challenged them. Hare vanished instantly into a clump of low-branched trees as a detachment of soldiers came into sight, their weapons menacing the women. For a single, heart-sickening moment, Ardis was silent. Then, she clutched Fordyce's arm in a crushing grip.

"They are Americans" she cried. "We are safe, at last, among our own people!"

Chapter XVI

Stephen watched a thin line of enemy skirmishers creeping slowly down the canyon road. Availing themselves of every shelter, the Mongolian veterans advanced to a great gap in the highway, where explosives had been detonated at the moment the crimson air navy plunged to its doom. The American soldiers had completed their hasty trench and breastwork. Crouched behind it, they awaited in silence the slow approach of the Mongolian foe, many of whom glanced up curiously and fearfully along the precipitous walls, obviously speculating on the dangers to be apprehended from this direction. An order halted them at some distance from the barricade.

Thus far, there had been no exchanges. The barricade might have been a peaceful wall, erected by husbandmen to safeguard a field from straying cattle. The canyon top appeared void of life. Stephen saw a crouching officer distinguished only by his bright red collar, rise to his knees and peer at the entrenchment from the shelter of a rock. He went about his work coolly and methodically, studying the breastwork, the ground in front of it and searching with keen eyes for signs of its defenders. It seemed a trivial matter, a petty prelude to the gigantic impending conflict. Mowbray was startled to observe the crouching figure fling up its arms and crumple at the base of the rock behind which the man had been sheltered. He had not seen a rifle flash but now the echoing crack came to his ears. The first American shot had been fired!

The thin line of skirmishers retreated. A soldier paused for a moment beside the stricken officer, running a practiced hand over his heart to ascertain whether his wound had been fatal. Assured the man was dead, the Asiatic veteran followed his retreating fellows, skillfully taking advantage of every protection the canyon bottom afforded. The dust raised by the movement of the scouting patrol swiftly subsided. Stephen was impressed by the grim silence that prevailed over the sinister war theatre. The Americans had concluded their shovel labors and now crouched behind their breastwork. Not an enemy was in sight. Only the still body of the Mongolian officer testified to the grim actuality of the scene. An aid raced to his side with word that a Mongolian column was advancing. The Lion of Asia had elected to go down fighting! It was what Mowbray had expected.

He marveled at the audacity of the Oriental commander and the intrepidity of his troops, moving to an assault without weapons other than their bare hands and the clubs represented by their impotent death ray weapons. The column swept into sight at the bend in the canyon wall and advanced calmly, methodically to the great pit created by the American explosions. There was no delay. On either flank, parties commenced creeping along the shattered lips of the depression and closed up at the foot of the barricade. A burst of rifle-fire swept the rampart, littering the ground with dead and dying. The decimated attack was swept back, a few survivors reaching the shelter of the bend in the canyon wall. The first clash had ended.

To Stephen, it seemed the battle was being fought without conscious direction by himself. Cut off from his generals by the severance of familiar forms of communication, he could only watch the slow unrolling of the campaign plan he had laid out in advance with his war council. A massive Mongol machine was thrust forward from the shelter of the canyon wall, the men propelling it sheltering themselves behind its massive sides. He wondered what they were planning. The weapon was impotent, like those of the infantrymen who trundled it forward, crouched behind its heavily armored guards. In a moment, he understood their purpose. Without pausing, they pushed it to the edge of the trench and tumbled it in. The crash, as it rolled to the bottom and careened on its side, was heard above the roar of American rifle fire, which swept the ranks of the racing Asiatics, taking a heavy toll from the daring column.

Another machine appeared. This time, systematic sniping picked off numbers of the veterans tugging at its immense weight, but they dragged it to the dry moat and shoved it over the edge, scattering instantly and seeking shelter. The third machine was crippled by an accurately placed shell from an American cannon, firing over the men at the barricade, but more Mongols swarmed out from shelter and by sheer brute strength, toppled it into the depression.

The American infantry played remorselessly upon the procession of enemy machines, but the Mongols were able as well as brave. They increased the number of men at each useless weapon, rushing the bulky mechanisms to the pit edge at a run. Their mission accomplished, they scattered instantly, racing at top speed to shelter. Occasional shells wrought terrific havoc in their ranks, but the Americans had been without training and the efficiency of the artillery did not compare with that of the riflemen at the barricade. The ground was strewn with Asian dead, over which the huge weapons rolled like juggernauts, but the work proceeded remorselessly. An officer who seemed to bear a charmed life directed the enemy efforts. It was Lee Chang. untouched by the storm of missiles under which his men were swept to death, his voice could be heard barking hoarse commands. Stephen watched him with sadly fascinated gaze, wondering just how long the intrepid soldier would survive the scathing American fire. An acrid smoke, caused by exploding shells, filled the canyon, partially cloaking the Mongolian operations. Only at times, when vagrant morning breezes brushed the gray pall aside, could the Americans see how rapidly the work of filling the pit was proceeding.

Stephen, spellbound at the spectacle of enemy devotion and courage, remembered the story of the

mythical Russian general, who had ordered his soldiers to make of their bodies a corduroy road, over which artillery galloped to a new position on his battle line. With steel and human bodies, the Emperor was laying a road for the advance of a storming column, upon the success of whose efforts depended the fate of his army and of the American defense. But the cost was too great, even for him, had the emergency not been desperate almost to hopelessness. In this awesome labor, Stephen read the lesson that the world conqueror, checked for the first time in his military career, now pinned the desperate fortunes of baffled Asia to a forlorn hope, ordered to sweep through that narrow valley to victory or death.

An aid dropped down by his side, but he did not notice the man's arrival for several moments.

"Where are you from?" he demanded.

"The barricade, Commander. General Conquist reporting."

"How near is the trench to being filled?"

"She reports it is ready for the enemy advance."

"Does she ask reinforcements?"

"No, but she urges that more reserves be stationed in the second and third lines, as she believes the enemy never will relax his efforts so long as men are available to be poured into the attack."

He dictated an order, which was seismographed to a distant division. "I have ordered additional troops to close in on either flank and their generals to report to General Conquist for instructions. Advise her immediately."

The firing slackened and for long, tense moments, the canyon battleground echoed only to spasmodic rifle shots and occasional shell explosions. The heavy smoke pall gradually dissipated. Stephen could perceive the masses of Mongol dead, a few on the road, but more thrust aside by their living comrades to make way for the passage of the last machines. A runner from Delachaise raced to his side, chest heaving.

"General Delachaise begs to report, sir, that a dense body of enemy infantry has advanced to within a short distance of the turn in the road and is preparing to move out for an attack on the barricade."

"Signal this information to General Conquist," he commanded.

* * * * *

The crucial moment had arrived: The Emperor, knowing that delay meant siege, starvation and eventual ignominious surrender, had determined to hazard all on an attempt to storm the American defense with unarmed men!

"It is magnificent," he murmured, recalling a famous phrase of an earlier era, "but it is not war."

A column of enemy infantry swept past the turn in the canyon road, its men roaring the deep-throated Mongol war cry that had echoed over victorious battlefields around the civilized world. They had stripped the guards of their useless weapons and advanced under cover of them. The scene recalled to Mowbray pictures he had seen of Roman and Medieval men-at-arms advancing to assault under a roof

and wall of shields. Their lines accurately spaced, as calmly as though on parade, they advanced toward the trench and barricade at the double quick.

To Stephen, watching with every nerve tense, it seemed they traveled the space in breathless time. It seemed impossible their determined rush could be checked. Crossing the trench, their lines were broken by the unevenness of the footway, but those who survived closed up instantly and continued the charge. In unending flood, the column poured from behind the shelter of the bend in the road until it seemed that those in the lead were being thrust forward by the very press of the courageous thousands at their backs.

General Conquist had reserved her fire until the greater portion of the Mongol force was in the open. Now, a blaze of flame lighted the top of the American parapet. Under the hail of missiles, the shield bearers stumbled and fell, the huge defenses clanging to the road. Others snatched them up and pressed forward doggedly. Lightning flashed above the massed troops behind. The batteries had come into action. The raging masses of Asiatics were decimated. Men fell in windrows, until the column, closing up even under this terrible punishment, was struggling through masses of its own dead. It seemed impossible that men could be brought to endure such prodigious losses, but the Emperor's veterans did not falter. They broke into a run as they neared the barricade, in 'such masses it seemed they could tear the defense to pieces with their hands. They had ceased to be an army fighting only for conquest - they were an elemental force moving irresistibly, against all odds, toward a victory that meant food! In their desperation, Stephen read acknowledgment that the Mongols, bereft of transportation, also had found themselves perilously short of supplies.

The first Asiatics appeared at the foot of the barricade. Hand grenades rained down upon them. Their bodies formed a parapet for the next wave, which leaped upward. American bayonets gleamed in the sun, while Mongol death' ray weapons, useless except as clubs, rose and fell like flails. One instant the barricade was dear. The next, it was covered anew with assailants. At several points, the Mongols broke through and Stephen could detect raging knots of conflict as his militiamen and Amazons doted with the desperate enemy in close combat. Abruptly, a roaring American cheer rose to his ears. The second line of defense came in, like a sea wave, washing dear to the barricade and clearing the ground behind the parapet of all foe-men. Simultaneously, the attack slackened. The last desperate survivors died before the barricade; but the main column withdrew, at a run, behind the shelter of the turn in the road, leaving the road piled high with dead and dying. A runner hastened to Stephen's side.

"General Delachaise asks if it is time for him to launch his attack, Commander."

"I will go with you," he replied, rising

Unconscious of fatigue, he strode up a winding path leading to the canyon top and along an uneven path to the headquarters of the officer commanding the heights. Delachaise saluted and pointed downward with eloquent hand [sic]. The defeated assaulting troops had filtered through another gigantic column, which filled the canyon behind the turn in the road from side to side. Behind a body of stalwart veterans, carrying more shields taken from useless weapons, was arrayed a body of men armed with bows and arrows! In desperation, the Emperor had his men manufacture rude and primitive weapons from timber growing wild on the mountainside. Stephen saw them trying their crude bows and fitting arrows to the strings with clumsy and unfamiliar fingers.

"It-is [sic] absurd - mad!" gesticulated Delachaise. "Storming modern defenses with the weapons of primitive man!"

"Absurd, yes!" Stephen replied, soberly. "But, general, such courage!"

"We, too, had courage," the soldier replied, grimly, "We, too, knew how to die in Europe, when these Mongols swept over our armies. But valor alone did not CHAPTER XVII win victories nor did contemplation of our devotion stay the hand of the Asiatic conqueror and his hordes."

He indicated the piled-up masses of stones on the canyon edge and gestured toward similar preparations on the opposite side of the gorge.

"I am ready," he said.

Mowbray glanced downward. A portly officer, distinguishable from those surrounding him, advanced along one side of the road, the massed ranks parting. Stephen recognized him instantly. The King of Mongolia was adventuring his royal life in the final assault! Lion-hearted to the end, he had elected to win victory that would assure world conquest, or perish among the men he had led to repeated victories. With a groan at the impossibility of such a contingency, the Commander entertained a momentary hope that, in some way, the chivalrous monarch might be spared. A weird figure flashed to the brink of the chasm on the opposite side. Its tattered rags waved in the breeze, its unkempt hair hung low over its face as it peered into the depths.

"Woe to the city!" the man screamed, flinging his arms aloft.

"Hare!" ejaculated Stephen.

While the massed Mongolian soldiers gazed upward with surprise and alarm, the mad autocrat drew something from his girdle and whirled it rapidly around his head. It was a sling, a primitive weapon such as a shepherd boy of old had used in defense of his homeland and people. From the loosened weapon sped a stone. Downward it flew to where the Mongolian monarch, momentarily suspending the direction of his entrapped troops, stared upward. It struck squarely on his forehead and without a cry he fell forward upon his face.

A hoarse roar of rage and grief burst from the hordes. Bows were trained upon the white-clad figure, which now bent forward in full view peering upon the prostrate form of the man to whom the world had seemed too small a conquest. A lone soldier, who had crept to a precarious perch far up the canyon wall, deliberately drew back the string of his rude weapon. Stephen watched the arrow as it drove upward, saw it strike Hare and witnessed the sudden jerking of the madman's body as he drew himself erect and gazed uncomprehendingly upon the missile buried in his body. A moment later, he whirled to the brink, tottered a moment and plunged into the depths.

As though this were the signal for which the Americans had been waiting, a storm of giant boulders descended upon the trapped enemy. Enormous stones rolled through the packed ranks, sweeping men to death in half companies. For a moment, officers sought to rally the doomed column, but as the avalanche increased, they turned to the mountain entrance of the canyon, seeking only escape. Simultaneously, an American column debauched from the other end of the road, having swarmed over the barricade at a signal from Mowbray.

Rifles belching flame, they swept the ranks of the fleeing enemy and took up the pursuit, while Delachaise's men, abandoning their stone heaps, leaped along the canyon top to fire down upon the routed foe.

"It is over!" said Delachaise, folding his arms and confronting Stephen. "Mongolia's empire crashed to ruins in that canyon. America has rescued the world from the terror of Asiatic conquest!"

Chapter XVII

"ARDIS!" cried Stephen, joy and amazement mingled in his voice. She came to him on swift feet, her eyes alight with love and happiness.

"How did you escape?" he demanded.

She sketched her adventures in a few words.

"And Hare brought you to our outposts?" he asked, in surprise. "The man had a glimmering of reason at the last."

"Is it true that you have been victorious?" she asked.

"The disordered remnant of the Mongolian army raised a flag of truce an hour ago. Their position is hopeless. Unarmed, in an enemy country and without a leader, they will surrender to escape annihilation by my troops. I am awaiting the prince royal, now the Emperor, to state the terms on which I will permit them to lay down their useless arms."

"The danger of invasion is over?"

"So far as this force is concerned, it is. Personally, I believe it is ended forever. The new Emperor has neither the ability nor the ambition of his father. I believe the world-girdling Mongol empire will fall to pieces, particularly as one of my conditions of surrender will be that its troops shall be withdrawn immediately from all conquered countries into Asia."

She clung to him, studying the tremendous import of the statement.

"Death of the Emperor and of Drusus clouds my victory," he continued. "However, it may be best for the world. So long as the monarch lived, we always would have had to fear a resumption of warfare. Never would one like himself have been satisfied, cooped up in his own country, after having had all the world except America at his feet." The familiar red spot appeared at the Electrono at his A side. He centered the ray on his forehead for a moment. The electric power had been turned on.

"The new king and his generals have arrived," he told her, as the radiance subsided. "I must go."

Unconscious of their presence, Harmon brushed aside the hangings of the Commander's tent and entered, accompanied by Fordyce. Her face was bright with happiness and she nestled close by the burly autocrat, whose arm was thrown protectingly about her. "I cannot tell you how happy I am," she murmured. "The future is ours, dear," he replied. "We have broken the Mongolian. Stephen has saved the nation and we shall have peace for years. America becomes again the greatest nation of earth."

"He is a superman," she replied. "I know he must be to win your loyalty so completely."

"He is greater than our age," he declared, with conviction. "I cannot understand where he is headed. Sometimes, I wonder whether he knows himself. However he has proved master of every emergency thus far and I am willing to follow and work with him and under him to accomplish whatever ends he considers best for our country and its people."

"I'm afraid we are unconscious intruders," Stephen whispered, mischievously, beckoning to Ardis.

He thrust aside hangings and led her to another apartment in the huge tent.

"Sit here, at your ease, behind the curtains," he said, softly, "and witness the closing acts in the drama."

With a nod, he stepped into the adjoining room, to exchange greetings with his commanders and a heavy-lidded, obese young Mongolian, behind whom grim Asiatic soldiers had grouped themselves. Had she not been aware of America's victory, the attitude of the opposing groups would have told her the whole story. The Americans were triumphant, assured; their late enemies stern and grave. The stolid successor to the great Asiatic conqueror alone remained impassive.

"Let me express to your majesty my profound regret at the death of your father," Stephen said.

The fat young man nodded slowly.

"He died as he would have preferred - in battle. It was idiotic - this invasion of America. I urged against it, but he brushed my advice aside. Now I reign." He glanced, with calm complacency, over the soldierly suite at his back. "Your terms?" he asked, after a pause. His eyes lighted up with satisfaction as Stephen stated his conditions.

"Mongolia is war-weary and bled to death with slaughter of her sons," the new emperor declared. "We will retire within our own borders. I seek only to be known in history as The Peaceful."

Followed by his silent suite, he left the tent in company with Delachaise, to whom Mowbray had committed the entertainment of the royal captive until he and his troops had been transported across the broad Pacific. Stephen came to Ardis, his face alight with excitement.

"More history was written in those few moments, dear," he exclaimed, "than in any similar period in American annals. Not only have we rescued America from invasion and Europe from conquest, but the way has been paved for the reforms I project, which will revive free government in this country and in all others prepared to exercise its rights and duties."

"You will have one faithful follower," she smiled.

"You mean Harmon?" He smiled reminiscently.

"I knew he would be with me, in the end. The man is an idealist, though he hates the very sound of the word. I needed him badly but wondered whether his idealism would take the form of devotion to the old cause or to the new. When he consented to cooperate for the duration of the war, I had no further fears. He will be a tower of strength in the reconstruction work I see ahead of us."

He paused and his smiling face grew sober.

"I almost forgot another mission," he continued. "Come, dear, there is one whom we both want to see."

He led her to a hospital tent where Hare, delirious in his dying moment, lay outstretched upon a pallet. Four attendants restrained the unfortunate. Stephen placed his hand upon the doomed autocrat's forehead while a physician whispered information.

"The wound is not necessarily fatal, sir. However, he is certain to succumb. He is a complete wreck."

Disjointed sentences, snatches of song and bursts of maniacal laughter broke from the sufferer's lips.

Mowbray leaned over him. "Listen!" he commanded.

Hare's eyes opened slowly.

"Do you know me?" the commander asked, sternly.

"Yes! You are destiny!"

He reached up a trembling hand, clasped the other's fingers, and spoke.

"I saw you tonight - was it tonight? What matter! You planted a seed. It was such a little seed - such a tiny seed placed in rank earth, that gave forth noxious vapors. Serpents writhed above it. Dank grass strove to strangle it. I laughed and you whispered: 'Wait!'"

"He is dreaming mad dreams," Stephen whispered. "A tiny shoot came forth," Hare continued in a weary voice. "It was so helpless, I smiled and stamped upon it. It pierced my foot and I shrieked in pain. Again, you whispered: 'Wait!'"

The physician, his face stamped with astonishment, drew near as if to relieve Mowbray, but the latter motioned him aside.

"It grew until it towered above me, above the dank grass and the hissing serpents. It was greater than anything - anything, except you! Then, you spoke, again: 'This is the tree of liberty. God planted the seed and it shall never die!'"

He sighed heavily and the hand clasping Stephen's fingers relaxed. The physician leaned forward and pressed an instrument to his chest.

"He is dead," the practitioner announced, softly.

Mowbray drew Ardis gently from the awesome scene. In silence, they returned to his office.

"What is the next step, dear?" she asked gently. He rested a weary head on his hand for long moments before replying.

"Checkmating the invasion was only the opening skirmish in the battle," he replied, after a pause "Greater struggles loom in the future."

"You are confident of the outcome?" He thought soberly before answering.

"In some respects, yes; in others, not so sure. However, of one thing I am assured."

"What is that?" she whispered.

"That the tree of liberty Hare saw, in his mad moment of prophecy, was planted by God and it shall never die."TopofForm1

BottomofForm1

