

PERCHANCE TO DREAM

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Robert F. Young was a mainstay in these pages more than a decade ago, and has appeared more recently in our sister magazine, AMAZING SF ("No Deposit No Refill," February, 1974; "New Route to the Indies, August, 1974; "The Decayed Leg Bone," December, 1974). Now he returns to FANTASTIC with a remarkable story about dreams, the collective unconscious, the reality of myths, and the healing power of love ...*

ILLUSTRATED by STEPHEN FABIAN

RANCH FOUND HIMSELF standing before the castle without knowing how he had got there. The fact did not disconcert him: the castle was the first symbol his mind had supplied since his entry into Darkspace, and without symbols, Darkspace—the collective unconscious—could not be perceived.

Actually, the castle was not a true symbol but a symbolic interpretation. It existed, but as something else. Something similar, perhaps, but not quite the same. The dream-drug, Cuiranin, enabled mentally conditioned endo-analysts like Ranch to enter Darkspace whenever they wished and to retain consciousness throughout their stay; but the Noumenon—the thing-in-itself—was as imperceptible to them in Darkspace as it was in Light.

What Ranch did "perceive" was a crude stone edifice consisting of four outer walls, four towers and a domed central structure. Vertical slits functioned as windows in the walls and towers, and each of the latter had a circular balcony near its vertex.

The sky was gray, there was no sign of the sun, and a flat graylit plain stretched horizonward in all directions. Logically, to have reached the castle, Ranch must have crossed the plain, and the dampness of his shirt and the dustiness of his boots seemed to bear this out. But he knew better. He had encountered symbolic realism before, and moreover he felt refreshed rather than fatigued.

In all probability, the plain didn't even exist.

Directly before him a flight of stone steps led upward to the castle's entrance. He mounted them and crossed the threshold. *Deja vu* touched him, but he knew it was false, that it had been triggered by a parallel rather than a repetition. As an endo-analyst he had visited Darkspace many times; but in Darkspace, time per se did not exist: its passage was a purely subjective phenomenon.

The same gray light that bathed the plain illuminated the castle's interior. It had no source—it was as one with the atmosphere. The room into which he had stepped appeared to be a foyer. It contained no appointments, and its gray stone walls were bare. A fine film of dust covered the stone floor, and directly opposite the entrance there was a wide doorway. Ranch walked across the room and stepped boldly into the castle proper. Again, *deja vu*. He shrugged it aside.

An aisle formed by two rows of massive stone columns stretched before him. He walked to its farther end, found himself on the threshold of the rotunda. It was vast and somehow sepulchral, and filled with the same monotonous gray light that permeated the foyer and the aisle. A crimson carpet led to a round dais located directly below the apex of the dome. The floor consisted of intricate parquetry, its luster dimmed by dust. The concave walls were a study in chiaroscuro, and there were granite benches standing at even intervals along their base.

On the dais, side by side, stood two golden thrones. Seated on the one on . Ranch's right was a girl with long yellow hair. She was staring raptly off to her left—ostensibly at one of the granite benches, but to Ranch's practiced eye, into nothingness.

Seated on the other throne was an archtypal figure with the head and shoulders of a lion and the

torso and limbs of a man. Its mane ran halfway down its back, and it had a long tufted tail. It was naked.

"Come in," the lion-man growled. "I've been expecting you."

RANCH WALKED the length of the crimson carpet and halted at the foot of the dais steps. He could now see the yellow-haired girl in greater detail. She was wearing a blue swept-skirt suit, an azure Easter hat and maroon hose-shoes. There was a slackness about her small face that indicated a state of deep depression. She bore but passing resemblance to the attractive heroine of the holograms turned over to him by the ecto-analyst who had been treating her before dichotomy occurred. This was not wholly because of her depression—the other Naomi was depressed too. It was largely because a sub ego-complex, by its very nature, could seldom project a true facsimile.

Ranch faced the lion-man. "My name is John Ranch," he said. "You said you were expecting me?"

"Yes. Are you her mate?"

Ranch shook his head. "I'm here because I want to help her."

"She doesn't need your help," the lion-man growled. "It is my intention to make her *my* mate once she becomes accustomed to the *Abzu*. My name is En-ki."

"I know," Ranch said. "You were one of the four major deities worshipped by the ancient Sumerians."

The lion-man frowned.

"No doubt you were never aware of them as such," Ranch went on. "Nevertheless, they created you. When they grew more sophisticated they tried to change you by sculpturing anthropomorphic statues of you, but you had already concretized in theriomorphic form, and it was you they continued to see in their dreams. They even created a mistress for you. Where is Ninmu now, En-ki?"

"I do not know," growled the lion-man. "Besides, I do not need her any more."

Ranch looked at the yellow-haired girl. "Did your new mate accompany you here of her own free will?"

"Naturally."

"I submit that in her own eyes she did nothing of the sort."

En-ki half-rose from his throne. "You dare impugn the word of a god!" he roared. "You dare—"

Ranch cut him short. "As a wise and just god," he said, "You are of course aware that reality sometimes presents two faces, and would in this instance, if you could, view both so that you might determine which is the more valid?"

En-ki sat back down. "Of course."

"Then you will have no objection if I describe the 'face' your mate-to-be saw while you were seeing yours, and explain why she saw it?"

Trapped, En-ki could only glower. "Very well," he growled. "Proceed."

Ranch placed his right foot on the first step of the dais and rested his right elbow on his knee. He had found the position relaxing in similar—parallel—situations, and he found it so now. Ostensibly he addressed the lion-man; in actuality he spoke to the yellow-haired girl:

"The 'face' that Naomi saw was the 'face' of a repetitive dream. She experienced the dream many times before its final culmination, and this is how she described it to the ecto-analyst who subsequently transferred her case to me:

"It is Easter Sunday morning and I am in the rearmost pew of St. Stephen's Cathedral, seated next to the center aisle. In real life I am not a Catholic, but once when I was a little girl I attended Mass at St. Stephen's with my uncle. The priest singing the Mass in the dream is the same priest who sang it that day.

"The auditorium is filled to capacity, but I can recognize none of the members of the congregation. I can see all of their faces, even though I am sitting in the rearmost pew and almost everyone present has their back turned toward me, but in none of the faces can I detect the

slightest awareness of my own presence. No where do I see my uncle's face, although I search for desperately. Its absence should not surprise me, for he died several years ago, and yet it does: He was a kind man, and I know he loved me very much. I loved him too, and yet I did not regret his death, nor did I shed any tears at his funeral. I remember being embarrassed by my mother's grief (he was her brother), which I considered excessive, and to a large extent affected. My father did not attend: for him to have done so would have meant losing a day's work, and neither he nor my mother could see any sense in making such a supreme sacrifice.

"On the Sunday morning in real life when I attended Mass with my uncle there was a lifesize crucifix on the wall beyond the altar, seemingly suspended above the priest's head. In the dream it is absent, and its place has been taken by a large golden wheel, without spokes or hub. I am fascinated by this wheel, and my eyes return to it again and again.

"As I listen to the voice of the priest, which is high-pitched and tinny, and made to seem more so by the English translation of the Mass, I become increasingly aware that as a non-Catholic I do not belong among the congregation, that I am an outsider and am not wanted. This feeling intensifies as I sit there, and finally I can endure it no longer and I get up and slip into the aisle and walk the few steps necessary to bring me to the door that opens into the vestibule. It is a double door, and I open one side of it quietly and step through. But I do not find myself in a vestibule, but in a large vaulted chamber devoid of furniture and illuminated by wan gray light. There are no windows, and except for the one I entered by, no doors. A little distance from where I stand a flight of stone stairs lead downward. Without a moment's hesitation, I walk over to where they begin and start descending them.

"Presently I find myself in a deep vaulted basement illuminated by candles burning in niches along the walls. In real life, I have never visited the basement of St. Stephen's. Indeed, I do not even know for certain that there is a basement. My acquaintance with the building is limited to its auditorium, its vestibule and its neo-Gothic façade.

"Arranged along the walls beneath the burning candles are tiers of oblong plastic boxes that I recognize as coffins. Oddly they neither frighten nor repel me, and I walk boldly into the room. Presently I come to a second flight of stone stairs leading downward, and again without hesitation I begin descending them.

"These stairs are different from the ones I descended before: they are cut into the walls of a large well-like shaft and the stairway is in the form of a spiral. The steps are narrow and they are wet with moisture that has seeped through the walls of the shaft. The same wan gray light that illuminated the room adjoining the auditorium also prevails here. Far below, I can make out what appears to be a circular pool of water.

"I am fascinated by this pool, and I hasten my descent so that I may reach it sooner. The shaft ends about fifty feet above it, and a spiral iron stairway takes the place of the stone steps and extends down to the water's edge. My footsteps ring hollowly on the iron steps as I descend them, and the air, cold to begin with, becomes suddenly colder.

"Reaching the foot of the stairs, I pause, I am in a huge crypt-like chamber whose walls are lost in gray shadows and from whose dripping ceiling long stalactites hang. The pool that so fascinated me from above turns out to be a well. It is dark and deep, perhaps bottomless. Several feet to the right of it is a block of obsidian, and coiled upon the block is a golden serpent. Its head is reared, its jaws are open and its fangs are poised to strike. It appears to be a statue.

"As I stand there staring at it, I detect movement in the shadows along the wall beyond the well. Gradually the movement acquires form, and presently an abominable creature with the head and shoulders of a lion and the torso and limbs of a man emerges into the graylight and gazes at me with golden eyes.

"For the first time since the dream began, I experience fear. But I experience something else as well—an overwhelming conviction that I have seen the lion-man before, but in a different form. In the dream, I cannot remember where, but the conviction was well-founded; Upon my desk in the public library's Department of Sumerology stands a limestone figurine of the Sumerian god

En-ki, unearthed during the Ur excavations of 1998. The figurine has a lion's head and a human torso and limbs. It was assumed by most sumerologists before it came to light that En-ki had always been an anthropomorphic deity; but the figurine proved beyond doubt that in pre-dynastic Ur at least he had been nothing of the sort.

"The lion-man leaves the shadows behind and advances slowly across the floor of the crypt. I try to turn and re-ascend the stairs, but I find that I cannot move. It is as though a part of me stronger than I am wishes to remain.

"The lion-man reaches the opposite edge of the well, still staring at me with his golden eyes. He begins to circle the well. Screams carom from the walls of the crypt, and I know they are my own. The lion-man passes within inches of the serpent's coiled body, and I pray for it to come to life, to sink its fangs into the lion-man's flesh. But it does not.

"The lion-man continues to advance toward me. It is so close that I can smell its fetid breath. It reaches out for me with a huge paw-like hand. As its taloned fingers are about to close around my wrist, I awake.

"Naomi did not seek help till after she had dreamed the dream dozens of times over a period of many months," Ranch concluded. "The ecto-analyst whom she consulted should have foreseen its inevitable culmination and have transferred the case at once to an endo-analyst; but he did not, and it was not till after dichotomy had occurred and the lion-man had transported her sub egocomplex—her dream-self—into Darkspace that my services were solicited."

Ranch looked at the yellow-haired girl he had indirectly been addressing. She had not stirred, nor had she moved her gaze from the granite bench. Through her eyes, the other Naomi—the one in the psychiatric wing of the Clinic—was also staring into nothingness. B.C.—Before Cuiranher—her withdrawal would have been incorrectly diagnosed as catatonic schizophrenia, owing to the similarity of the physical symptoms, and she would have been condemned to live the rest of her life, half in Darkspace, half in Light.

En-ki said: "I am not a fool. It is my mate-to-be you have been speaking to—not me. Obviously you think that your words will in some way alleviate the stupor which her coming here afflicted her with. But go on: I find your rationalization of reality interesting."

"The dream is neo-Jungian," Ranch said, again indirectly speaking to the yellow-haired girl. "It contains a few Freudian elements—the stalactites, for example—but they are not essential to its understanding.

"Its focus is the well beneath the cathedral. This symbolizes the collective, or mythological unconscious. The basement of the cathedral, the spiral stairway and the crypt represent Naomi's personal unconscious. The golden serpent is almost always present in such dreams: it functions as the guardian of the well, or collective unconscious, but it is also a symbol in its own right.

"I referred to the dream as neo-Jungian. The distinction had to be made, because even though the Jungian symbols are present, Jung himself saw the collective unconscious as a deep place into which the dreamer descended so that he might climb the heights that lay beyond—as a lake or a well, into which he sometimes dived and discovered a rare and wonderful treasure. Naomi's motivation is diametrically different.

"Why did she descend through her personal unconscious to the threshold of the collective unconscious? We find the answer in the first phase of the dream.

"The cathedral symbolizes the society of which she is a part, the congregation the members of that society. As a 'non-Catholic', she does not consider herself to be a part of society; in fact, she feels herself to be an unwelcome outsider. The congregation's unawareness of her presence indicates her inner conviction that the real world is indifferent to her existence; her inability to recognize any of the faces of the congregation indicates a deliberate withdrawal from the world.

"Her digression concerning her uncle's funeral provides additional insight into her psyche. She says that she loved him, but that she neither regretted his death nor cried at his funeral. Then she adds that her mother's grief, which she considered excessive and largely affected, embarrassed her. It is obvious from

her ambivalence that she was already experiencing the initial stages of psychic dichotomy, and it is equally obvious that the part of her that felt grief felt it so overwhelmingly that she could not cry, that she could not fail to see that her mother's grief was partially put on.

"We come now to the spokeless, hubless wheel hovering beyond the altar, seemingly suspended above the priest's head. This is unquestionably a mandala, or magic circle—the classic Jungian symbol for regaining self unity. Naomi was dimly aware that within her psyche a new Naomi was being born—a Naomi that wanted no more part of the world, a Naomi that wanted to die. Through the archtypal mandala, which the collective unconscious had supplied, she tried to re-unite herself, but she failed, both in the first and in successive dreams, and each time symbolically left the world behind and descended into her personal unconscious—the crypt—to the threshold of the collective unconscious—the well.

"The appearance of ancient arch-types in modern dreams is a fairly common phenomenon. Generally, their nature is determined by the unconscious needs of the dreamer. In Naomi's case, the need was for a god.

"Since in dreaming of the well she had unwittingly created a psychic fistula, there was an excellent chance that the collective unconscious would supply her with a god, and a better than even chance that he might help her. But unfortunately there existed in her endo-psyche a vivid memory of the figurine on her desk in the public library's Department of Sumerology, and it was the memory rather than her Christian predilection that determined the nature of the god in whose personal unconscious the fistula manifested itself, while the god she really needed and who might have helped her was supplied only symbolically in the statue of the serpent.

"Thus, instead of seeing a savior coming to meet her, she saw instead of reactivated archtypal deity out of the mists of mythology, whom she promptly assumed to be her executioner. But it was death through oblivion that she sought, not death through violence, and since she had not reached the point where any kind of death would do, her first impulse was to flee. At first, she could not, because her will to wake—her will to live—was not strong enough. However, for many dreams she was able at the last minute to summon sufficient will, and managed to wake just before the lion-man grasped her wrist. But with each dream her sub ego-complex grew stronger, and eventually the time came when she could no longer *fully* awake. Dichotomy occurred, and the lion-man seized her subself—her dream-self—and transported it through the psychic fistula—the well—to what in his conception of reality is an abyss. The *Abzu* of Sumerian theology."

RANCH MOVED his gaze from the lion-man to the yellow-haired girl. If she had heard a word of his analysis, she gave no sign. He sighed. It had been far too late when he had taken over Naomi's case to reach her through her primary ego-complex—her real self—hence he had journeyed into Darkspace. But he saw now that he could not reach her through her dream-self either.

Nevertheless, before invading the dream proper he would try once more. He disliked invading "deep" dreams, not for ethical reasons but for purely practical ones. There was often danger involved, and even when the endo-analyst succeeded in changing the dream he did not cure the dreamer. That had to be accomplished afterward, and if the time-reversal occasioned by the invasion was extensive—as it would be in the present instance—the cure sometimes had to be effected without the dreamer's awareness, and no monetary fee could be exacted.

En-ki was speaking. "If the *Abzu* does not exist, as you imply, and we are not in it, perhaps you will tell me where we are?"

"You yourself are where you think you are—in the *Abzu*—the Abyss," Ranch said. "But the sub-Naomi and I are merely in Darkspace. For us, the *Abzu* does not exist as such. But basically, all of us are in—are part of—the Noumenon. The thing-in-itself."

"You talk in circles," En-ki growled. "How can all of us be in the same place and see it as two different places?"

"Primarily because what you regard as reality constitutes the dream-state for the sub-Naomi and myself, while what we regard as reality constitutes the dream-state for you. To compound the difficulty,

your sense of time does not correspond to ours." Ranch abandoned artifice and addressed the yellow-haired sub-Naomi directly: "Jung depicted the human psyche in the form of a diagram consisting of a series of successively, smaller concentric spheres whose common center he called the collective, or mythological unconscious. In this dark circle, he theorized, lived the collective memories of mankind—gods, dragons, heroes, mandalas, fire-wheels: a Circus Maximus of mythogens belonging to every race of people under the sun. Then, three quarters of a century later, Paul Cuiran combined Jungian psychological theory with Kantian metaphysical theory, modified the Jungian diagram and added one more factor, and subsequently lighted the way into Darkspace. I will project the Cuiranian diagram into your mind, Naomi, but you must remember that although you are seeing four levels, the Noumenon—the thing-in-itself—consists of only one; that the levels merely represent our only means of perceiving it:

"The Ectopsychic Level, of course, is what we commonly think of as 'Lightspace' and the Collective Unconscious Level what we think of as 'Dark'. Although you and I are in Darkspace now, Naomi, our presence here is not the result of a physical journey. In one sense, we were here to begin with; we have merely made ourselves aware of the fact through the employment of symbols."

En-ki was laughing uproariously. "Now I can understand your need to rationalize reality," he said. "You are blind! If you had my eyes, you could *see!*"

Ranch studied the yellow-haired sub-Naomi. He studied her for a long time. She was still staring in the direction of the granite bench, no less deep in depression than before. His discourse on the nature of reality had been meant to reassure her, and through her, the primary Naomi in the psychiatric wing of the Clinic. But it was clear that neither his projection nor his words had got through to either.

At length he turned toward the lion-man. "If I had your eyes," he said, "I would pluck them out. They are even bigger liars than mine, and worse yet, you believe the lies they tell."

En-ki was on his feet, his massive face writhing with rage. "Begone!" he roared. "Begone, or I, En-ki, god of the sweet waters, lord of the *Abzu*, will kill you!" Ranch sighed again. "Why is it, En-ki," he said, "that reactivated archtypes can never remember that in mythology it is always the hero who wins—never the god, the dragon or the giant? But do not fear—I will not kill *you*. Indeed, I'm not altogether certain that I could. I will merely inject a brief hiatus into your awareness, which, although it will presently assume the stature of an infinite hiatus, still will not result in your death."

Ranch pulled a pen-size thought-nullifier from his coat pocket and pointed it toward En-Ki's eyes. Instantly En-ki's eyes went blank, and he sank to the floor. Ranch did not wait. He climbed the dais steps, stepped over En-ki's body and began searching for the opening that logically had to be in the vicinity of the lion-man's throne. He found it presently. It was directly behind the throne and covered with a stone slab that weighed at least half a ton. He found fingerholds, lifted the slab easily and slid it to one side. Steps cut into the walk of the shaft spiraled downward into graylit depths. He made out the dark waters of the fistula far below.

Before entering the shaft, he looked once more at the yellow-haired sub-Naomi. The felling of En-ki had aroused her from her listless state and she was looking in Ranch's direction. But the blue eyes that seemingly met his were dull with despair and pain, and he knew that he did not register upon their retinas, that his patient still sat hopelessly in her room, staring into space.

OSTENSIBLY En-ki's personal unconscious had much in common with Naomi's. The walls of the shaft were beaded with moisture, and the narrow steps were wet and precarious. But Ranch was not deceived: he knew that he was seeing it not as En-ki saw it but as he himself would see it if it were his own.

The shaft extended all the way to the level of the well. When he reached the bottom step, he paused to get his breath. Then he dived.

The ice-coldness of the water shocked him, even though he had been expecting it. He had filled his

lungs with air, although there had been no need to, any more than there was need now to hold his breath. Nevertheless, he did so. Employing a powerful breast stroke, he forced himself down, down, down. At length, far below him, he discerned a wan luminescence.

Gradually the luminescence grew stronger. The time finally came when it was no longer below him, but above. With reorientation, came the change.

Now the water was warm, the well like a deep dark pond in summer. He propelled his elongated limbless body rapidly upward with powerful undulations. At last his head broke the surface, and he surveyed the crypt with his ophidian eyes. It was just as Naomi had described it from her dream.

He wriggled out of the well and up onto the block of obsidian. He coiled his golden body and lifted his golden head. He opened his powerful jaws and poised his deadly fangs. Then he froze himself into immobility.

Far above him in the auditorium of the cathedral, the dream was, just beginning.

In entering it, he had done so,, in the only way he could have—as the serpent—and at the only time he could have— when Naomi was beginning to dream it for the first time. In one sense, the dream could not have begun until he entered it, because as the serpent, he was part of its original context. The fact that it had already run its course, not once but many times, was automatically cancelled out by the time-shift occasioned by his entry.

Presently En-ki emerged from the fistula—not the En-ki Ranch had left lying in the rotunda, but an En-ki who had never seen Ranch and who had yet to see the dreamer whose dream he was invading.

He threw the serpent a cursory glance as he slipped into the shadows. Clearly he deemed it to be a statue, as in a sense it was. Ranch did not think he had encountered it before. He was certain that thousands of Lightspace years had passed since En-ki had last invaded a dream, and the identification of the serpent with the savior was a relatively recent concept.

The endo-analyst bided his time. Like all dreams, Naomi's was a delicate mechanism: it could be successfully tampered with only within its original context. He listened for the sound of her footsteps on the stairs. As he listened, he experienced thoughts, memories, that were not his own. One of them—a memory—stood out from all the others. As the serpent in innumerable other dreams, he had experienced it many times before.

He was in a garden, coiled round the trunk of a tree. A short distance away a man and a woman stood conversing in a small clearing. Their naked bodies were dappled with golden sunlight and laughter fell from their lips and lingered in their eyes. Looming in the background, half blending with the forest and the sky, was an awesome archtypal figure of which neither was as yet aware.

The memory faded with the faint sound of footsteps on the stairs. They grew louder, and the crypt lent them hollow undertones. Abruptly they acquired a metallic note, and out of the corners of his ophidian eyes Ranch saw her feet—her feet, and then her slender legs; her blue swept-skirt, her coat, her face, and finally her azure hat riding the crest of her long yellow hair.

When she reached the foot of the spiral iron stairway, she paused. She saw Ranch then, and stared.

Suddenly her gaze shifted to the shadows along the wall beyond the well. She gasped, and raised the back of her hand to her mouth.

En-ki stepped out of the shadows.

Naomi screamed.

She could not flee, because she lacked sufficient will to live—to awake. If the dream were permitted to follow its natural course she would find sufficient will, but this would merely expose her to successive dreams—to the ultimate dream in which she would not be able to find sufficient will. Then En-ki—to whom the successive dreams would seem as one—would transport her into Darkspace.

He had already left the shadows behind him. Now he began advancing across the floor of the crypt.

When he reached the well, he paused. Presently he began circling it on a course that would bring him within striking distance of Ranch's waiting fangs.

Naomi was screaming continuously now, and the screams bounced from the walls and shattered into crystalline shards of sound. The lion-man grew closer to the waiting serpent. Ranch prepared to strike.

He would discharge just enough venom to render En-ki *hors de combat*. It was the dream Ranch needed to destroy—not En-ki. It was doubtful that he could kill him in any case. En-ki would probably never die till he faded from the memory of mankind.

Ranch struck—

And missed.

At the last moment the lion-man had jerked to one side. Now, roaring with rage, his eyes burning like baleful bonfires, he turned upon the serpent and seized it by its golden throat.

Instinctively Ranch coiled his ophidian body around En-ki's barrel-chest.

Naomi's screams faded away. She stood rigidly at the foot of the iron stairway, staring with wide blue eyes at the two archtypal figures struggling beside the well.

For Ranch, the crypt had acquired a reddish cast, and he knew that death was but inches away. He wondered what it would be like to die in someone else's dream, whether, were he to die now, he would awake from his own dream. He could not afford to find out. He tightened his great coils around En-ki's chest, pleased by his prodigious strength. Was it greater than En-ki's? He felt the grip on his throat weaken, knew that it was.

Gasping, En-ki sank to his knees. His hands slipped from Ranch's throat; his eyes began to roll. Instantly Ranch relaxed his coils, and the lion-man fell face forward to the floor.

After uncoiling his golden body, Ranch returned to his place on the obsidian block and looked at the girl. As yet, she had not changed. But the walls of the crypt, the well, the stairway—all were rapidly losing substance, blurring back into the Noumenon. There was little time left.

Fixing Naomi's eyes with his, he projected an image of his human self into her mind and clothed it with an aura of love. To love and be loved—that was the antidote for Naomi's seeming *abaissement du niveau mental*.

By the time he finished, she was wraith-like. En-ki had recovered consciousness, and had crawled back into the fading fistula and vanished.

Presently the dream Naomi dissolved.

Ranch willed his own dream to fade. It had become a dream within a dream. Grayness gave way to darkness, a darkness interrupted by four evenly spaced vertical rectangles of rosy light. Ranch's serpentine body reacquired limbs, became his own again. The obsidian block transmuted to a high-backed chair. Shelves lined with books gradually replaced the wavering walls of the crypt, and a paneled ceiling inset with unlighted fluorescents subtly supplanted the stalactities. Finally the rectangles stood revealed for what they were: library windows looking forth upon the dawn of a new day.

RANCH GOT UP from the high-backed chair and walked around the room. The dawnlight grew brighter, and he was able to make out some of the titles of the scholarly volumes lining the shelves. He saw Naomi's desk with the limestone En-ki figurine standing on it a short distance from its blue blotter. Choosing a book at random, he returned to the high-backed chair and faced it away from the door. Then he sat back down and began to read.

In a little while, Naomi would enter the room—a Naomi he had never officially seen before (except in a dream) and who had never before (except as the serpent and as a projection in her mind) seen him. Uppermost in her thoughts would be the dream from which she had awakened, terrified, at dawn; but she would not know that for herself and Ranch, and for the lion-man she had seen in the dream, a time-reversal had taken place, and that for each a new pattern would supplant the "old." Only Ranch, its author, would know, and would also know that the Cuiranin-induced journey which he had begun after-hours in the same room and from which he had so recently returned, had ended almost twelve months before it began.

SHE ARRIVED at 8:30 by the Department of Sumerology clock. He heard her footsteps when she came in the door and seated herself behind her desk.

He waited till she briefly left the room and returned; then he stood up and walked around the

high-backed chair and over to the desk, behind which she had re-seated herself. She looked up, startled. "Oh. I didn't see you come in."

She paused, staring up at him. She was neatly dressed in a Conservative gray skirt-suit and her yellow hair was done into a meticulous bun at the back of her neck; but there were blue shadows under her eyes and her face was pale.

She lowered her gaze and straightened the blue blotter with trembling fingers. She looked up at him again. "Have—haven't we met somewhere before?"

"I don't think so," Ranch said. Then, "I wonder if you might find me a book called *Fara*? It was written by an E. Heinrich and a W. Andrae way back in 1931."

"I'm sure we have it," Naomi said, and got up and walked over to the files.

He watched her standing there, her girlish profile framed in one of the rectangular windows. Her anamnesis had told him very little of the cause behind her rejection of the world, and it might be difficult to uncover. But truly, she would not be difficult to love.

Presently she went over to one of the shelves, took down a book and brought it back to the desk.

"Do you have a card?"

"No. I'll read it here."

Their hands touched when she handed it to him, and color crept into her cheeks, diminishing their pallor. "I have the day off," she said suddenly. "I didn't feel well this morning and called in for someone to replace me. But I thought I would come down to open up." Abruptly she gasped, and the color that had come into her cheeks deepened to rose-red. "Why, I don't know what came over me!" she said. "Why in the world should I have told you that?"

"It doesn't matter," Ranch said. "What matters is that you did. How soon will your replacement be here?"

"Any minute now."

"I'll be glad to drive you home," Ranch said. "I have my car outside." He frowned. "That is, I think I do."

"I'll get my hat and coat."

IN THE *ABZU*, En-ki—exhausted after his aborted attempt to acquire a mate—had fallen fast asleep. He had begun to dream the moment he closed his eyes. It was a dream he had dreamed many times before. In it, he was made of stone and was standing upon a smooth plateau near a blue lake.

Often, giants invaded the dream. There were two of them present now, standing near the plateau and towering high above it. He listened to the booming of their voices, but was unable to make out their words. One of them was a female giant, the other a male. The male giant frightened En-ki. There was something about him that made En-ki think of a great snake.

Presently the two giants were joined by a third. En-ki was glad when the first two departed, walking hand in hand.

He hoped they would never come back.

—ROBERT F. YOUNG