

CHILDREN OF THE GODS

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A Strange Secret That Remains Safely Guarded by Two Great Scientists

Casts a Shadow Over the Love of Their Children, Aneeya and Cappi!

HAPPINESS came into my life the night I met Aneeya. Her father, the great scientist Dean Carmody, brought her to my room and she set fire to my mind dulled with the long hours I had been working in the laboratory.

Her beauty was extraordinary, and I could find in it no single flaw, no slightest imperfection, not one of the defects inherent in other girls. She was as different as an oriental lotus set against a jewelled altar. When, quite by accident, her soft hand brushed against mine my blood warmed and pounded strangely.

She was smiling as her father presented us, but he seemed strange to me even then, a gargoyle grimacing at life. Not her sort at all. She was as alluring as she was beautiful, exquisite and something more, something not to be possessed, but worshipped, a slender flame in a quiet cathedral.

Of his scientific brilliance I knew. In his cold, disturbing way he resembled a hard, white light,

incandescent and massively stable; rotating within his own plane, bespeaking by the set of his face that he was master of his particular world. He was the genius of the powerful cyclotron buried deep beneath University campus.

I remember marveling at his matter-of-fact manner as he introduced us, and wondered what could be so deadening in advancing years that he, too, was not stirred by her beauty; why the rotation of his methodical thoughts had never fallen into simple parental pride at the loveliness he had fathered.

I stood dumbly, trying to compose adequate remarks. His monologued observations on his findings in the new science of electronics made it obvious how far above me he was intellectually.

Aneeya's eyes were large, intense, all the time he was speaking. I felt that they were demanding something of me I could not understand. Her father talked of lipins, proteins, and a process he was perfecting to produce synthetic digestions.

He was a peculiarly impressive-looking man, features angular and aggressive, face long, hair frostwhite and fine as rainwashed web covering a shiny scalp which bulged widely to accommodate the massive brain lobes within his cranial box. I had known him at a distance long before that night. He and my father were colleagues in many physical researches, but I had never thought of him in relation with anyone else, far less as the father of a beautiful girl.

He was of all men least acceptable to me as a future father-in-law, for I loved Aneeya even that night with a queer, unexplainable insistence which replaced all other desires and ambitions. I loved her as I feared him and his extraordinary power of knowledge that I knew was far and beyond the ordinary allotment of other brilliant men. I reacted toward him as I did toward my own father, my dominant emotion a weird, intangible sense of helplessness against superior will and devising. Each time his eyes lifted slowly to search my face I could feel my pounding blood chill. Deep in those black pupils was a force, a purpose, a design to be imagined but hardly understood.

I SOON learned he was like my father in other ways. Both regarded science, not the formulated laws of a creative God, but creative genius itself. To them spirit was no more than an emanation of chemical process; love a magnetic affinity between physical masses as exact in its influence as the ratio of pi, with romance as mathematically predictable as gravity when given the distance and ratio of masses.

He watched me intently while I tried to keep my attention averted from the girl beside him. And on the things he was saying. Finally he touched her lightly upon the shoulder and told her to leave us. She obeyed, granting me one mute, uninterpretable appeal as she said good-night.

After she was gone I sat reviewing the beloved memories of her every word, her quaintly fetching mannerisms, glad her father had now turned his attentions to my instructor. My father came in and glanced quickly and inquisitively into my face, exactly as though I were a culture in a test tube. After a moment he turned from me and motioned to the Dean. Together they went into my father's private laboratory.

Had I been less lost in reverie my curiosity would have been keenly aroused by their conference. I could hear their voices as they rose again and again as with extraordinary excitement. Bits of their conversation were of the old, old subject, one they were forever discussing.

It was not *what* they were talking about that astonished me but the unusual excitement in their voices. They were methodical and unemotional men. Why were they so plainly exulted over the deduction that there was cytoplasmic reaction of inorganic structures when highly bombarded by helium atoms from the

cyclotron chamber?

My father had been obsessed by ideas of accomplishing some sort of alchemy. Until this night Dean Carmody had been critical of father's "Bi-polar Conceptions of Inert Structures." Electricity is life, he had agreed, cellular growth merely inherent arrangements and densities of electrical resistance affording certain material sensations.

Now at last Dean Carmody was enthusiastic. Well, thought I, let them rave. They are old men forever beyond the sweet bonds of romance. My emotions that night were entirely untuned to their eagerness about the reactions of slimy, granular semi-fluids in culture tubes. I did not care to be reminded that such stuff was the foundation of all living tissues, even the flesh of the bewildering, bewitching Aneeya.

WHEN Dean Carmody had gone father came into the little room I used as a bedroom. He stood framed in the narrow door, looking down at me with a strange and alarming focus of his cold gray eyes. It was as though he were seeing me as my own flesh might become were it bound to the bombardments of Dean Carmody's machine.

"Please," I cried out, for his scrutiny drove away romantic thoughts. "Can't you act like a normal father? Why are all your thoughts bound up in research, forever and ever? You have interest in nothing else. It's driving me wild!"

"That girl, Aneeya," he said, ominously disregarding my outburst. "I can see you are falling in love with her."

With a queerly penetrating glance that seemed to reach my very soul he went back into his private lab where I had never been allowed to go.

I sat a long time on this stool, wondering what he could mean. Was he in love with her, too?

After that life moved in a hazy routine. My one pleasure was to sit in the room where she had been, remembering the lustrous magnetism in her gray-green eyes, the way they blazed when she was excited, their tender softness when she was moody or deeply in earnest.

I roamed about the campus hoping to see her again. I made guarded inquiries about her to those who knew Dean Carmody. Their answers but heightened my anxiety and bewilderment. None of them knew he had a daughter.

After these attempts my desire to find her became overpowering, yet I dared not invade the subterranean chambers which housed the great and deadly cyclotron where her father worked. It had too many guards, and there was something in his face which warned me it might go ill with her if he knew my interest. My mood turned to despair, to futile longing and hopeless search.

Luck had been against me since my unhappy attack of amnesia not long before. Since it nothing my father maneuvered had turned out well for me. I became convinced he was the overseeing manipulator of my failures to contact Aneeya once more. Despair overcame me.

I gave up hope and then, without any warning she came to me. I was alone in my room one evening when there was a knock on my door, insistent and panicky.

"Come in," I shouted casually, unaware of its portent. There she was, large eyes burning like kindling lamps on a windy night. Softly she shut the door and lifted her eyes to mine. Her impersonal stare dared me to wonder at her coming to my bedroom.

"I could think only of you," she gasped, her little white hands pressed tightly to her cheeks. She kept her back against the door as though to shut out immediate pursuit. "That monster! That mind with no soul! That man, my father!"

STUPID with bewilderment, I could think of no word to soothe her. Awkwardly I dragged forward a chair, but she ignored it.

"I could think of only you," she gasped again. "You've got to help me. You've got to."

I stood up at last and went close to her. I caught her small hands into mine and drew them from her face. They were cold and moist and tense. I was on fire with the nearness of her.

I do not think she guessed how tightly she clung to my fingers.

She came into my arms and I shut away with my body whatever menace lurked beyond the door.

"I'll kill him if he harms you," I growled. With one arm I reached over to lift a snub-nosed gun from my table.

She suppressed a scream.

"No!" she protested, pushing it from her sight. "You would only anger him to think of it. He knows everything—my thoughts, your thoughts. We are both helpless against him."

"Please," I begged her. "We must be sensible."

She sat down on the chair I offered, perching near the edge of it as though to spring away at the slightest sound.

"He's no god, he's just a man," I reasoned. "His power is limited to the power of his machine. Just stay out of that underground vault where it is. Those rays can't reach beyond the leaded chambers. Stay above ground and there's no electronic influence to frighten you."

She raised her face to me. There was no smile at her lips, no color in her cheeks.

"I wish I could be brave as you," she said simply. She put her hands into mine like a little child who desires to be led through the darkness.

That began our make believe—make believe that we could escape the influence of Carmody and my father. That began our love, intense and for the moment, free of all other thought but that we were together. Her palms framed my face, her lips half parted as the terror died in her eyes.

"Aneeya," I whispered, "why have you avoided me?"

I kissed her, and as though by prearrangement to catch us in our rapture there seeped into the room that which I had learned to dread. She too, recognized it. I could tell by the way the softness fled from her lips and her yielding fingers clenched mine.

IT was not a voice nor a shadow that alarmed us. Far more possessing and irrefutable, it was the scent of chemicals boiling silently beyond the door of the room my father had never allowed me to enter.

"We must get away from this place," I said as I tried to control my own fear. I looked into her widening eyes. "We must run away. The world is not all like this!"

"I can't," she sobbed. "I can't leave until I know who I am. He's not my father, I'm sure. He can't be. I can remember nothing before I woke up down there in his laboratory a few weeks ago. My mind was blank with amnesia. He was the cause of it!"

"The low beast," I hissed, hate of him consuming me. I slid the gun into my pocket. I was conscious of the odor again, that acrid, penetrating bitterness. It overpowered me like the passing of a mesmeric hand, warning of the power of the forces we opposed.

"We've got to get away," I finished confusedly.

She smiled at that, her lips twisting at the corners as not quite obedient to her will.

"There is that which is more terrible than loss of memory, Cappi," she whispered, using my name so intimately it all but blotted out that awesome chemical smell which so benumbed the subconscious.

"We'll go away," I repeated. "What do we care about the past?"

"No, I didn't mean that," she said, "there are terrible things I must face here because I must know who I am. It will sound crazy unless you know him as I know him, know what he does down there with that ghastly cyclotron. It's too crazy to speak, but I've got to tell you. I've got to.

"I'm afraid he's trying to turn me into stone, or metal. That he'll set me out in the patio for everyone to see and no one will believe what he has done even if he tells them."

"Stop!" I broke in. "That's what he's trying to do, make you afraid. Get away from that sulphuric den! Forget he has a cyclotron! The only way you'll ever be in bronze would be to model for a masterpiece by Suzzanni, to the artist's everlasting fame and fortune. Your father and mine make me crazy. Now let's go out and forget them for a while."

"I know what I know," she insisted, her big eyes still fixed on mine. "You'd know it too, if you had watched him bombard a penny weight of aluminum with helium particles until it changed from atomic 13 to 15, nothing more nor less than phosphorous. It's alchemy, and he its wizard. He can do the same to my flesh. He can, I know he can.

"Once he took sodium, added a neutron of heavy hydrogen and there it was, not sodium but magnesium. He can do anything he wants to physical structures. He changes proteins into protoplasm, then to cytoplasm, and nourishes it until it becomes moving, living protozoa. Flesh into bronze isn't beyond him. It isn't Cappi!"

Her tones ran chills into my blood.

"Stop it!" I shouted. "I'm going to take you out."

WE CROSSED the campus to a café to crowd under a polished table that almost filled our little varnished booth. Together and alone the monstrous, unreal men who tendered such unnatural parentage seemed to live in another world. I knew there that she loved me, not as a refuge, not as defender against intangible horror, but through a power of affinity, one man for one woman, unpredictable and mystic despite all scientific claims to formulate it.

We talked and she forgot fear, remembering only that we were together. I persuaded her there was no danger confronting her, sincerely believing she would be safe. After all, Dean Carmody *was* her father and there was only imagination and a subconscious perception to raise alarm.

I should have married her then, but she would not allow it. She wanted me to continue my education and I was wholly dependent financially upon the generosity of my father.

We had another and more pressing reason for waiting. We wanted to lift the veil of amnesia hanging over our lives and discover who indeed *we* were. We both felt the overpowering need to find out if our common plight was an extraordinary coincidence, or whether we were the victims of a diabolical conspiracy contrived by our fathers, otherwise two highly respected men. Our only hope of finding out what lay behind the loss of memory was in continuing our lives as they were.

Long after she had gone back to her father I stood picturing her in his laboratory deep below the heavy earth. I wondered many things I did not have the power to put into thought. After a while I left, there was nothing I could do.

Carmody paid another visit to my room that night. He sat there on the bench stool and I on my bed observing him, trying to detect the mysteries masked so ingeniously by his long, genteel face. It told me nothing.

He talked little, at first, though he took every opportunity to scrutinize me. I wondered why he was allotting me so much of his valuable time. Once he spoke of Fiske and the relative nature of human knowledge.

"Each of our senses tells the mind a different story," he explained with a sardonic leer. From his pocket he took a cube that looked like rock salt.

"Touch says this piece of inorganic matter is hard. Taste says it is bitter. Sight, a capricious and versatile witness, defines it as white, opaque, and cubical. Smell testifies there is nothing here at all! A sixth sense would give new and unsuspected evidence. What is the truth of this mysterious phenomena? What is this thing in itself?"

Not only in this did he try to confuse me. He set about to prove that matter was cohesive, it was not cohesive, that monotheism and polytheism are equally logical and untenable; that the possible was impossible and the impossible possible.

As he talked I became dazed and unable to define the real from the unreal. I could feel sure of only one thing—my conviction that he was trying to hypnotize me to the point where I would believe anything he might say.

HE SPOKE of the cyclotron, claiming for it the power to contrive even greater paradoxes of testimony. Electronic ions were the true god, he assured me with great solemnity. They were the thing in itself, the absolute, the creative. His voice grew tense, hoarse, excitedly uncontrolled as he leaned forward as to confide in me.

"Certain bombardments from the cyclotron window can alter atomic structures, change copper into an element that is as pliant as human flesh. In this state it absorbs nourishment. It screams like a child at the lash of a whip. If I hit it and come near, it recoils with whimpering vibrations that run like ripples across its metallic face. You can make your own conclusions as to whether or not it has any of our five senses, or a sixth sense, or is sentient like living tissue. Sometimes I am convinced it understands and fears me. It

seems to regard me as an unnatural master and wonders what I have in my bag of tricks it has not yet guessed."

"Flesh can feel," I said. "Flesh is ash, phosphorous, nitrogen. They do not feel nor reason, until arranged in certain proportions within the cranial box. Why not copper, then?"

"That is what I must know," he iterated. "I'd bombard my own flesh until it became frozen as steel, if I were able to record the process."

I wondered then if he had not discovered the fourth dimension where unpredictable miracles exist. No wonder Aneeya was alarmed. She had seen him in action surrounded by the massive towers of magnetic iron and the squat chamber that impelled such sinister velocities. Her fear-swept face came so vividly to my imagination it seemed as though she had entered the room.

Dean Carmody's bloodshot eyeballs close to mine brought me back to reality. Bulging from slowly lifting lids they were as unhuman and pallid as the rest of the big, egg-shaped cranium so abnormally massive under its scanty web of hair.

"Aneeya," I demanded with boldness born of fear. "Why did you not bring her tonight?"

The pallid lids lowered slightly as his greenish pupils bored me like searchlights following a fugitive in darkness.

"What do you think of her?" he asked. "There is affinity between you, isn't there, an irresistible tug like that of magnetite upon iron?"

He was crafty. He thought to rip wide open my thoughts, my anxieties. But I could be as smart as he. I avoided his question, and quickly swung the conversation back to Fiske and the absurdity of cohesion.

For a long time I did not see Aneeya, nor did her father return to my room. But I saw him many times walking across the campus late in the evening, his bare head silhouetted against the night sky. Was crime upon his thoughts as he passed his colleagues without nod or recognition?

ONE night I had dreams so real, so harrowing, that I got out of bed and took the bus to Carmody's suburban estate. The moon was high and round, casting shadows beneath the sidewalk elms.

When the bus had gone clanging out of sight I peeped over the enclosing adobe walls. I looked with fear, half expecting to discover within the patio a fountain spraying white water upon a copper nymph, youthful, slender, and poised with dainty grace.

There was no statue in the garden. There was not even the fountain I had seen in my dreams. Under the white, cloudless moon I saw only rock-ribbed little pools where Carmody bred queer, jelly-like masses of stuff which was neither plant nor flesh.

I called, my voice running hollowly across the stillness of the night. No one answered. I could see my trip was in vain, but there beside the moonlit adobe wall I renewed my resolve to find her even if I had to go down into the cyclotron vault beneath University Hill.

Reluctantly I left the silent house. It lay behind me like a labyrinth of adobe walls across the distant landscape as I started to walk off my feverish fears rather than take the bus back.

It was broad daylight when I reached my father's laboratory. I found Carmody and Aneeya with him.

The brief, exhausting relief I felt on seeing her helped to heighten my suddenly renewed foreboding. Almost immediately I was aware of some great change. She was not the same.

Every suggestion of feeling or emotion was gone from her face. She moved as by mechanical obedience to her mind rather than her will. She looked not at me, nor at Carmody, but far across the campus at some fixed point at the rim of the afternoon sky. That stoical composure upset me even more than had her hysteria. There was not a doubt she had been schooled for this visit, probably coached hour by hour to betray none of her own concern.

"Carmody," my father bellowed with tones strangely rebellious, "I won't go along with you! Your determination is traitorous. Beyond the bounds of the search for truth! Wait until we win the war."

"Impossible," Carmody snarled, "I will allow nothing to stop me. Knowledge is my loyalty. If Germany wants my formula of ionized transmutations all I demand in return is Franzhaffen's disclosure of neutronic transudation through simulation of living processes."

"I won't allow it," shouted my father. "Transmutation would give the Nazis everything—food, metals, explosives ! This is more than the advancement of knowledge. It is treason. It would result in the downfall of free initiative, free science, Carmody. It's the act of a madman!"

Carmody made no reply. His features set in even a more unyielding expression.

FATHER lifted a phone from its cradle, dialed a number. He asked for a man, then put a hand over the mouthpiece.

"Give me your word you'll not do it, Carmody. It will ruin us both if I call the police."

"You can't stop me," Carmody answered coldly. "Nothing can. I shall send Aneeya as I planned. She can outwit them, you know that. Put down that phone."

My father took his hand from the mouthpiece.

"Send a squad car," he demanded. Carmody turned to Aneeya.

"Go," he ordered. "The plane will take you to Franzhaffen. Receive the divulsion and verify there are no tricks. When you are sure everything is in order give him this answer. If there is trouble stroke the tube with your fingers. Fire will destroy the manuscript. Go!"

"Please, Aneeya, wait!" I called loudly over father's shouting into the phone. "You can't know what this means!"

She did not seem to hear me. I wondered if he had deafened her. He was capable of it. I moved to grasp her, but she was away like a shadow running up a mountain. Before she reached the street police sirens were wailing in the avenue. She did not pause. Whether or not she heard them I couldn't tell. She ran faster than any girl I had ever known.

I reached the street and saw the cars would never overtake her. A plane, propellers whirring bright in the sun, was waiting on a runway of the training school. I ran calling her name, but the wail of the siren drowned my voice.

She reached the plane just as my father came out on a balcony of the patio. He knelt and raised the Garand rifle he was carrying to the focus of one eye. As I turned, he fired a burst of several explosions.

When I saw her again the police car was rushing down the runway and the plane was taking off, but Aneeya, my beautiful becursed Aneeya, was lying upon the cement, her dark hair spread fanwise, her pink dress fluttering in the backwash of air behind the fleeing ship.

I knew she was dead. She was too still, too frightfully still, and her head was doubled down at a queer angle. Her small hands still clutched Carmody's papers.

The squad car skidded to a stop. The men in it seemed stunned at the sight of such loveliness lying broken before them. They removed their hats and stood about in groups of twos and threes. I reached her and stooped to lift her in my arms. Her hair blew against my face, softly caressing it, and as I held her lifeless body in my arms my heart was aching at the thought of life's emptiness without her.

They allowed me to hold her until Carmody and my father came. Carmody's face was twisted in a vicious sneer as he retrieved the papers that had been her undoing. He turned to me.

"Look, my boy," he said, his voice strange. "Look at her wounds. There is no blood from them. Take your arms away and see what you are hugging. Her flesh is torn, and there should be blood but there is none. Look for yourself."

STARTLED, I obeyed his command. It was true! Her flesh was torn, but no blood had come from her wounds, not a drop.

My sudden joy was quenched in a weird sensation. I wondered if I could be awake, if I could trust the verdict of my eyes.

The bullets had torn open her lovely flesh, as they might have opened the breast of a shop window mannikin. As I looked more closely I could see there was not only no blood, there was no underlying foundation of bleeding tissues—only a mesh of copper wires bright and tangled where they had been buried in gummy yellow plastic.

"Suzzanni modeled her himself," Carmody said with a distressed groan, "and I made her organs. They're simple as those of a Model T."

He stooped and ran his long fingers along her body.

I drew her close again, turning away my eyes from the horrible wound, overcome with bereavement and unbelief. After a moment I raised my eyes.

"Let her alone," I defied them and pulled out my gun.

As I spoke Aneeya sighed and moved her head. She breathed again, opening her lovely eyes to stare at me in puzzled astonishment.

"Cappie," she whispered close against my ear, "what has happened?"

She grew warm against my body, but the things Carmody had said had momentarily shocked the foundations of desire, the law of flesh to flesh. Such ridicule was in her face, such open derision that my arms loosened their hold.

"She isn't real," bellowed my father. "I helped construct her myself. Now you know the truth."

"Me?" She stared at the two men as though they were madmen, then her eyes came back to mine. "Me

not real? They're mad," she whispered, her fingers clutching my unresponding arms. "Of course I'm real. How else could we love each other so? That proves it, doesn't it."

To my everlasting shame I drew back from her embrace, as though caught hugging a dictaphone or the sorority radio, answering its love songs with kisses. Too stunned to resist, I let them take her.

Back in my room reason returned. Whatever her flesh, I loved her; nothing could change that. Now that the shock of discovery was receding I realized I had acted the fool—the toy of the two men who sought to rule us.

The memory of her tragic face as they carried her away rose to haunt me.

Where had they taken her, what would they do with her, above all, what would she think of me for deserting her at such a time? If the revelation had been a blow to me, how much greater must it have been for her?

A KNOCK on the door and my father came into the room. He placed a hand upon my shoulder. It was the first time he had ever shown any feeling toward me, the first time I had ever felt any feeling of kinship toward him.

"You should have stayed with her," he said as though reading my mind. "I am sorry now I spoke so in haste. She is real, in a way. Life is electricity whatever its form or affinities, whether its impulse is generated in flesh or in copper cells. It is rather late to be doing this, my son, but I feel I must make another disclosure." He lifted his hand and I saw it held a brightly gleaming scalpel. Before I had grasped his purpose he had laid a deep gash across my wrist. Then he turned and strode quickly from the room.

I looked down at my arm. The cut was deep, but from it spurted no blood. I could see no foundation of living tissue beneath the skin, only a mesh of copper wires buried in gummy yellow plastic.

With a great surge of joy I started for the door. She couldn't be far, but wherever she was I would find her. I'd take her in my arms and tell her how we two, out of all the world, had been made to belong to each other.