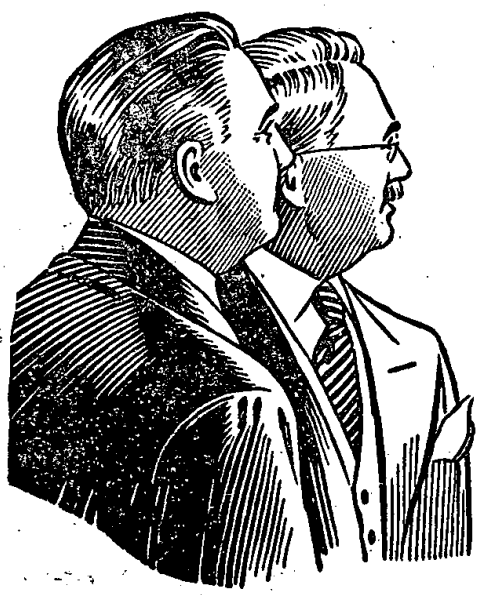
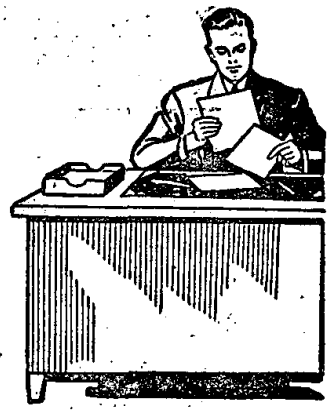
"He's going places, that boy!"





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VOL. 9 DECEMBER, 1947 No. 2

Book-Length Novel

The Man Who Went Back — Warwick Deeping — 6

Two loyalties . . . two ages . . . two loves . . . a man that Time forgot. . . .

Short Stories

Atlantis' Exile — Cyril Hume — 104

The isle of strange delight which lives in all men's dreams was his for a while, before he was banished from its silvery gates, forever remembering —forever damned. . . .

The Horror of the Heights — A. Conan Doyle — 108

"There are jungles in the upper air, and there are worse things than tigers which inhabit them. . . ."

In the Next Issue — 101

Masters of Fantasy — Neil Austin — 103

Robert W. Chambers—"Maker of Moons."

The Readers' Viewpoint — 117

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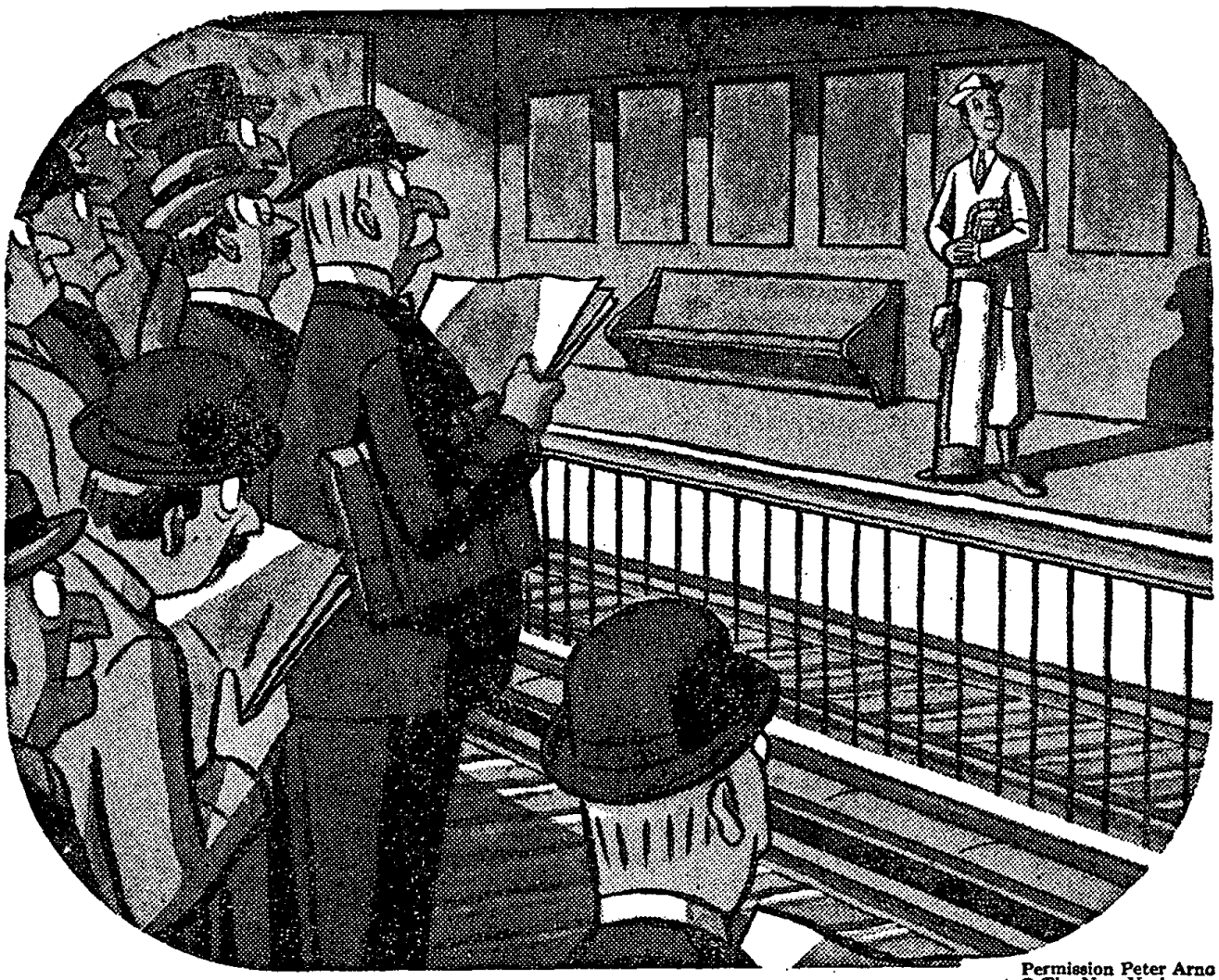

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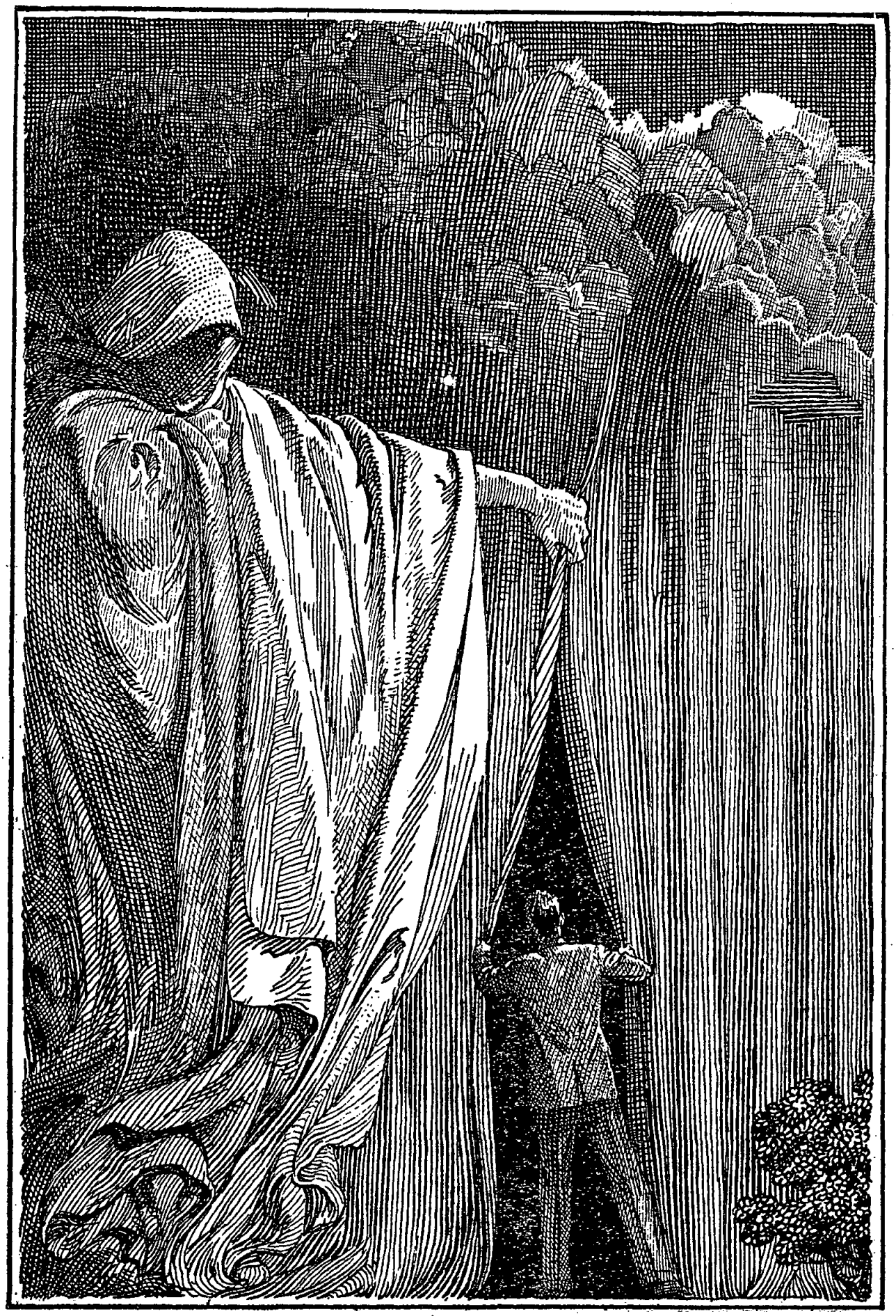


THE MAN WHO WENT BACK

By Warwick Deeping

Two loyalties . . . two ages . . . two loves . . . a man that Time forgot. . . .

CHAPTER I

I WILL not attempt to explain anything. Such an experience cannot be explained, save by the mystics, or by some of our mathematical dreamers whose feet are washed by the waters of other dimensions.

It will not appear even credible to my generation, though, a thousand years hence, our thinkers may have knowledge and understanding of these matters.

Psychologists would say I had dreamed a very elaborate and lengthy dream.

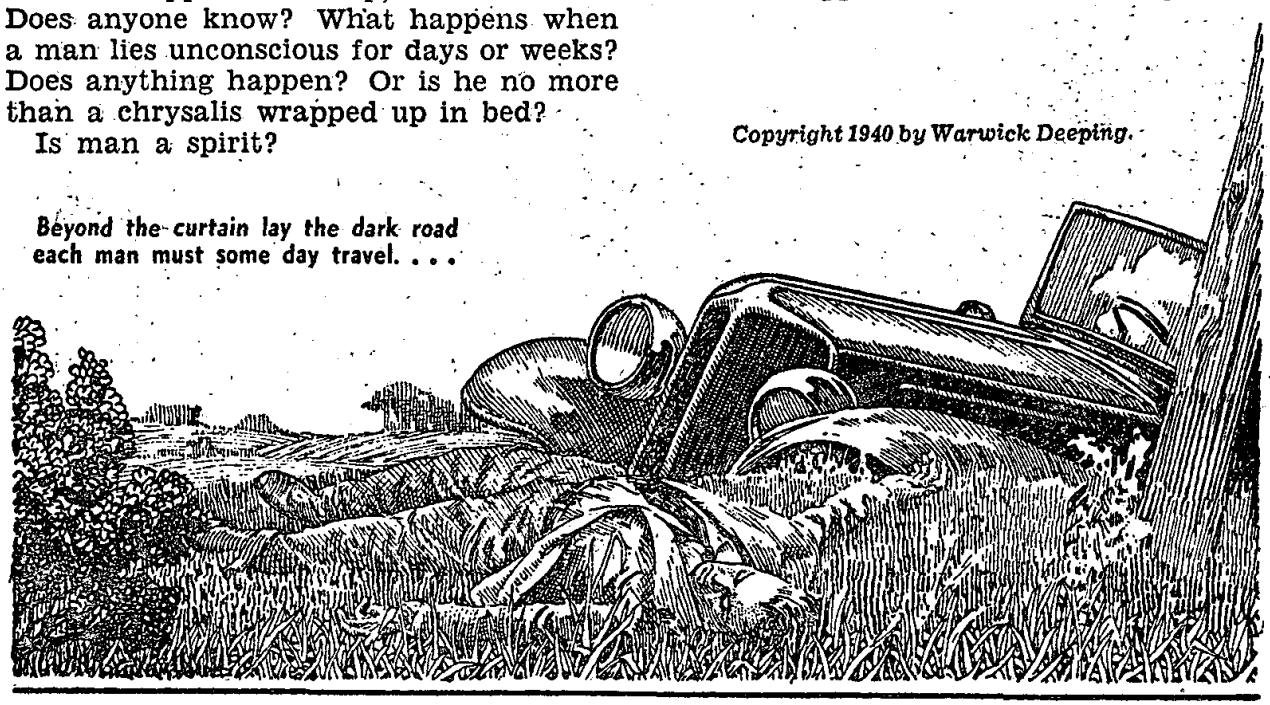
What happens in sleep, or in dreams? Does anyone know? What happens when a man lies unconscious for days or weeks? Does anything happen? Or is he no more than a chrysalis wrapped up in bed?

Is man a spirit?

I shall always believe so after the things I have suffered.

Always, I have been a great dreamer and my dreams have been vivid and spacious, and for a young man sometimes peculiarly logical. I have had what I can describe as fourth dimensional dreams, but what to call this other piece of existence I do not know. I can remember being immensely piqued and challenged by that most exquisite play, *Berkeley Square*, but my jump into the past was not willed and planned, and it exceeded that hero's experience by many hundreds of years. I had read Mr. Dunne's suggestive and fascinating works

Beyond the curtain lay the dark road each man must some day travel. . . .



upon dreams and Time. I had seen one of Mr. Priestley's plays. I had read Ouspensky and dabbled in psychical research, but my job in life was completely utilitarian. I was a young consulting engineer, aged thirty-one. I had been married for five years.

At a time when the Dictators were presenting us with a series of crises, and those murderous little brutes, the Japs, were creating a new sort of Mongoloid terror, I, like most young married men, lived in a state of worry and suspense. The future seemed so black and problematical. Business was bad, and the weather as bad as business. Moreover, one's soul could never possess itself in peace, even in one's garden, or in one's favourite chair. Aeroplanes reminded one perpetually that it was a waspish world, and one turned on the wireless, wondering whether another crisis was flaring up. The Germans had put both hoofs in Prague. The tragedy of the *Thetis* had shocked me. I had joined up as a Territorial, and, in five months, my wife was expecting her first baby.

She was away, staying for a week with her people. We lived at Weybridge in a little white house near the Heath. That particular Sunday happened to be fine, and feeling that I wanted to lose myself in the country, I took the car out, meaning to leave it in the Newland's Corner car-park, and walk. One of my hobbies was exploring old trackways and earth-works. I had an ordnance map with me, and some sandwiches and a thermos in my haversack, and my plan was to follow the sunken lane down to Albury, and strike an old packhorse trail that led up to Farley Heath. It was a warm Spring day, and the thorns must have been in blossom on the Downs and the bluebells out in the woods by Newland's Corner. Actually, I must have changed my mind, and driven down past the Silent Pool and the gates of Albury Park, and up the steep hill to Black Heath. It was here, where the road to Ewhurst joins the Shamley Green Farley road that the crash occurred. I have no recollection of it. The last thing I can remember was getting the car out of the garage of White Lodge at Weybridge.

* * *

I had been asleep.

I woke, staring at the sheeted blue of the sky. I was lying on my back on a little mat of rabbit-nibbled grass in a sea of heather. It was old heather, high and clotted, shutting me in like a low hedge, but above it, towards the east I could see a clump of Scotch firs with the sun shining upon their red throats and rich green polls. My head ached slightly. Beyond that I was not conscious of any strangeness. I supposed that I had just fallen asleep, though I could not remember having spread myself here.

I sat up. I could see nothing but heather and the Scotch firs. I felt thirsty. I looked round for my haversack, and then it was that something very odd struck me. My haversack was not there. It was not its absence that was strange. I could have explained that to myself. I had left it in the car, or some tramp might have pinched it. The surprising fact was that something else was lying there in its place, a kind of leather wallet with a rawhide strap or thong.

I was conscious of surprise, curiosity. Fear had not yet gripped me. Had someone been playing a trick? I reached for the thing, opened it and saw a curious-looking knife, a piece of brownish bread, and one or two little metal things. Coins, money! I picked up one of them. It was of silver, and though only very slightly tarnished, it had for me the appearance of an antique. The coins in the wallet were Roman coins.

I believe I said, "Well, I'm damned!"

But what was the meaning of this? In a dream one may accept the most fantastic details without questioning them, but I was asking questions. How had this wallet with the Roman coins managed to substitute itself for my haversack? Had some errant archaeologist played a trick on me? Were cinema people "shooting" on these Surrey hills, and had they left me a piece of property-stuff, and borrowed my haversack? Both suggestions seemed absurd. And then I became aware of something else that shocked me into a staring, gaping stillness.

The last thing a man may notice may be his clothes. They may be so much part of himself on a ramble that he is unconscious of them, provided they are comfortable. I sat staring at my own feet. They were shod in queer, leather shoes that suggested sandals. My legs were bare, and covered with bruises and scratches as though I had been blundering through brambles and undergrowth. I had set out from Weybridge wearing old plus-fours, rough stockings, and a pair of brown, crêpe-soled shoes. I sat and stared. What the devil? My glance travelled higher. I was wearing a pair of white linen drawers, and a greenish tunic.

I fingered the things. Yes, they were real enough. And then I began to be frightened.

I stood up and looked about me. Apparently I was in a little hollow, and the ground, rising round me, showed me nothing but heather and sky. A winding path led through the heather. I followed it, and it brought me to a dip in the ground where water oozed into a little black brown pool surrounded by rushes, and shaded by alders. I felt very thirsty, and I suppose my feeling frightened made my mouth more dry. I put the wallet down and knelt, and in that very still water I saw my own reflection. It startled and scared me. My hair was a black mop, and looked as though it had not been cut for months. I had black stubble all over my chin and my upper lip. My face looked strangely haggard and starved. There was a dark mark on my forehead, and when I put my hand to my head I felt that something had clotted itself into my hair.

And suddenly, I was afraid, acutely afraid. I wanted to see things, things that were familiar and reassuring. I drank from my palm, dashed water in my face, picked up the wallet and ran. I ran up the long, low hill that seemed to end in a dark ridge, and as I topped the rise I saw the great swell of the North Downs spreading across the valley. Yes, there they were, familiar and friendly and serene. I stood still, realizing that I was panting. I saw the grey-green slopes, and the yews and thorns. Yes, Newland's Corner was just over there. Thank God! Then, a certain strangeness about that landscape surprised me. Many people must know those two chalk mounds with their clumps of beech trees. The trees were not there, but the two mounds stood out white and clear like markers. Moreover, I saw on the hill-side below a kind of white gash running straight up the hill-side like an arrow pointing to the gap between the two white mounds.

What the devil?

I gave a shake of the head, closed my eyes for a moment, and then looked again.

No, there was no doubt about it. I saw those two great tumuli and the white pointer like a finger on the hill-side.

But the Ridgeway was there. I could pick out in places its broad green track.

And St. Martha's? Yes, of course I should see St. Martha's on its hill in the valley. I waded on through the heather.

Yes, there was the hill, a green pyramid with sandy scars in it.

St. Martha's chapel was not there!

I THINK I have never known such fear as the panic that seized me as I stood there in the heather. The feeling was penetrated by a kind of terrible premonition, and a sense of desolation. I think I cried out, "Lucy, Lucy, wake me up." Lucy was my wife. I felt like a terrified child in the anguish of some nightmare.

I began to run. I came to a road, a narrow road of gravel. Thank God, for a road! I wanted to see a car. I followed the road, and suddenly I knew where I was, on Farley Heath. Over there should be the mass of bracken, and the solitary thorn bush which marked the site of the Roman temple.

The thorn tree was not there.

A little, white-pillared building with a red-tiled roof stood in the tree's place. The Roman temple!

Again I shook my head, closed my eyes, waited and looked a second time. The temple was there with the sunlight shining upon it.

The road ran up and past it, cutting through the grass banks which marked out the enclosure.

I was more and more afraid. I shivered. I think I shook at the knees, and though I had just drunk at the pool my mouth felt dry. I was conscious of desolation, of being alone in a strange world, a dream-world that was, somehow, terrifyingly real. I kept saying to myself, "Wake up, wake up. O God, let me wake up!" I wanted that building to disappear, the thorn-bush to take its place, and St. Martha's to pop up again on its hill-top.

The temple did not disappear.

I felt drawn to it, pulled by a bitter curiosity. I must go and look and touch. Perhaps when I touched the thing the little building would vanish, and my own world would come back. But I was afraid of that building. It seemed to challenge me. I could see no human figure anywhere in this strange yet familiar scene. I left the road, and wading through the heather, got my back to the sun and approached the building from the west. It had a little portico at each end, and suddenly I stood still. I saw a figure in the northern portico, leaning against one of the pillars. It had an arm round the pillar. I could see the line of a purple dress, and the back of a dark head. It seemed to be a woman's figure.

Here was something alive in this strange, dead world, something that could speak to

me. I think I was yearning to hear the sound of a human voice. I moved forward and to the left so that I could see more of the figure. I was within twenty yards of the temple. I could see the girl now. She was leaning against the pillar, her right arm round it, and she was looking northwards towards the Downs and those two white tumuli.

She was utterly still, and yet her very stillness suggested suspense, a watchfulness that was so concentrated upon something that might happen over yonder, that she was quite unaware of my presence. She was a very dark girl, tall and slim, with one of those creamy skins faintly tinted with an olive brownness. Her mouth was a red thread. Her eyes stared away into the distance with a kind of black fierceness. It was not a gentle face, though very lovely. There was pride in the nostrils of her little beak of a nose. I saw that she was wearing red leather shoes strapped across the instep, a purple-coloured robe-like garment fastened on the left shoulder by a brooch. She wore her very black hair in coils upon her head. A green girdle encircled her loins, and from it hung a pouch, and a little dagger in a gilded sheath. I stood and stared and stared at her, finding in her strangeness something poignantly familiar. It was as though she and I had met before.

She must have become conscious of being watched, for suddenly she turned her head and saw me. Her arm slipped from the pillar. Her face became alive; her very dark eyes seemed to flash.

"Pellias!"

She was down off the podium and coming towards me.

She gave me the name with the I in it lengthened to an E. Pell-e-as. Pellias! Was I Pellias? My bewilderment was absolute. I must have stood and gaped at her.

"Why do you not speak?"

She was giving me Latin, and though my Latin was as dusty as death, I understood her, which was strange.

"Why don't you speak? Where are the others?"

I heard myself say, "I do not remember," and I realized that I was answering her in Latin.

She had paused about two yards from me, and so vivid was she to me that my bewilderment increased. She was staring at my face with those fierce dark eyes of hers, and I seemed to divine in her a quality that was different from the rather tepid and dreary casualness of twentieth-century England. She seemed more vivid, more poignantly alive, more capable of being played upon by the passionate things of life, its loves and its angers, its loyalties and its hates. She was looking me in the face with a frank, challenging intentness as though my face could reveal something to her, even though I stood mute. And then those disturbing eyes of hers looked me over from my unshaven jowl to my bruised, scratched legs.

"Where is your armour, your sword?"

Good God, what did she mean? I was feeling so utterly lost and bewildered that I blurted those words at her again.

"I do not remember."

Which was true, but the mordant truth of it was beyond her comprehension and beyond mine! She stared me straight in the eyes. Then her glance lifted to my forehead and remained there for a moment. She seemed to see something that made her face grow more gentle, something that explained to her my dazed, loutish helplessness.

"You have been wounded. There is dry blood in your hair."

"I do not remember."

She spoke to me as she might have spoken to a child, and with the air of one accustomed to being obeyed.

"Kneel down! Let me look!"

I WENT down on my knees, feeling that I was being carried along by happenings which had the inevitableness of things that had happened, and over which I had no control. I seemed to be part of a pattern, a figure in a picture that had been painted long ago, and yet it was a moving-picture. Surrender seemed to be my only resource, to let myself drift, to repeat those words: "I do not remember." She bent over me, and I felt her fingers touch my hair and I could smell some perfume that she used. But her touch both thrilled and frightened me. I became conscious of a strange, exquisite anguish. I trembled. Even the soft sward seemed to quiver under my knees.

"A sword cut. Poor Pellias. So, the battle was lost. Those accursed savages!"

I raised my face to hers. So helpless did I feel that I realized that my only hope lay in accepting helplessness. Let her take the tragedy or whatever it was, as it had happened, and assume that I was a poor devil who had been broken by it, and who had forgotten. So, I had had a blow on the head! I had been fighting savages. What savages? And where and why?

I said, "I have forgotten everything."

She drew back and looked at me considering, and again her face grew fierce. She turned again to the hills across the valley. I saw her hand go to her bosom. The fingers seemed clenched over her heart. She was hating something, defying something. Her head went back; her nostrils seemed to dilate and quiver.

"Those German swine!"

A shock went through me. Those words might have been uttered by some of the moderns. Good God, was I dreaming? I seemed to remember something. It was like a beam of light passing, pausing and disappearing. She was looking at me again with a kind of passionate impatience.

"So, you remember nothing? Were many slain?"

"I remember nothing."

She gave a shrug of the shoulders and seemed to despair of me. I was a poor thing to be pitied, a fugitive, a fellow who had thrown away his arms. I had a sudden feeling that I did not want to be pitied by her, or be treated with tolerant and tragic scorn. She was so vital and vibrant that her eyes and her lips and her proud black head could set the man in me alight.

"Wait. They are waiting for news down yonder. I came up here to watch."

She turned away and mounting the steps of the podium passed along the little portico and disappeared into the temple. I knelt there watching, wondering whether this dream, or whatever it was, would end. Would the temple vanish, and she with it? I was conscious of a fierce desire to see her again. I knelt and wondered whether the little, pillared building would vanish like a picture from a screen, and the thorn tree take its place, but the white pillars and the red roof remained solid and real against the green of the woods and the hills. I heard a voice, her voice. She seemed to be praying aloud.

To whom did she pray? Christ? But this was no temple sacred to the Man of Galilee. Her gods were Roman gods, or British gods, or perhaps the Unknown God. I heard her voice utter the words, "Dea Mater."

I wanted to see her again, and when I saw her again she looked different. She stood on the edge of the platform, and spoke to me.

"Pellias, come here."

I rose and went to her, and looking up into her eyes, saw pity in them.

"Pellias, I have prayed that you may remember. I will you to remember."

She reached out and touched my forehead with her finger.

"Close your eyes. Remember."

I closed my eyes. How hopeless was all her praying! Were we two ghosts who had met in some strange, twilight world? I shook my head.

"I cannot remember."

She gathered up the folds of her robe, came down from the podium, and took to the road. It ran diagonally across the temple enclosure, and seemed to head in the direction of Guildford and the crossing of the Wey. I followed her, limping a little, for now that the first excitement had passed, I realized that I was very footsore. She had taken the lead, as though born to it, and I followed her half a pace behind, feeling, I know not how or why, that I was neither quite her equal nor her servant. Dear God, who and what was Pellias, this other I? What manner of man was I supposed to be? My gaze and my thought went to the place I knew as Guildford, that steep street with the confusion of its cars, its shops and shoppers. Was it over there as I knew it?

She was walking fast yet with an easy glide, a young stateliness that seemed part of her young splendour. How she might despise a man who was weak, a man who had thrown away his harness! And I, the child of democracy, deeming myself an intellectual, a Leftish person, dared to draw level with her and to walk at her side. I was aware of the quick turn of her head, and the look she gave me. It put me in my place, and yet there was a kind of compassionate comprehension in it. Almost it said, "You have forgotten other things, what you are and what I am; but, poor creature, that sword-blow must be remembered." The sense of humiliation was quick and hot in me, but I fell back and followed on her left, half a pace behind her.

Then a gradual and new curiosity stirred in me. Whither were we going? What was I to see down yonder in the valley that held what were for me Shere, Albury and Chilworth? I remembered that Martin Tupper lay buried in the new Albury churchyard, the Martin Tupper of flowery poetical platitudes who had dug trenches through and round that very temple, and had caused later explorers to curse him as an interfering busybody. If I had been shot by some trick of time back into Romano-British England, where was the soul of Martin Tupper? Where were the things he had found on the site of that Roman tem-

ple? In museums? But had a bronze urn or an unguent bottle souls that could manifest both here and there, then and now? This fantastic drama left me dizzy.

WE WERE going down hill now, and we left the road for a path or pack-trail that plunged down into the woods. Here were birches, firs, an occasional oak, and this sandy track seemed to me very familiar. I was sure that I had passed along it before. It was one of those timeless tracks whose only evidence of age may lie in the hollow ways they trench where the ground slopes up and down from a valley. I saw a great ants'-nest at the foot of a Scotch fir, just such a nest as I once had stirerd up with my stick. There were stretches of heather, pools where the crooked bracken was showing through the blackish peaty crust. A couple of jays scolded at us, and in one green glade a yaffle flew away, uttering its laughing, mocking cry. The girl had not spoken to me since we had left the road, but when the woodpecker laughed at us, she turned and looked into my face.

"Has the bird no voice for you?"

I think I smiled at her.

"What name would you give it?"

She frowned.

"Do you not remember even that?"

There was a flick of scorn in her voice. What a poor, limping sloven was this Pellias! I flashed back at her.

"No more than I remember your name."

That seemed to startle her. She paused, looked at me steadily as though to challenge some lie.

"What is my name?"

"I have forgotten."

"You might be a fool or a newly-born babe."

"I am that."

"I wonder! It may be wise to forget some things."

Irony! What was she suggesting? That I was playing a part, which God knows I was. She moved on again and I followed her along the track that swung up and down through the woods and heather. I felt that we must be nearing the great valley, the valley which had seemed to me the most beautiful in England, and suddenly the trees thinned and we came out on to the shoulder of a hill, and I saw ewes grazing, their lambs with them. But even they were not like the sheep I knew, though I cannot claim much knowledge of sheep. These animals looked smaller, rougher, longer in the leg. The ewes nearest to us set up a maternal bleating, and their lambs ran to their mothers.

I felt that I wanted to break the silence that this haughty young woman had imposed upon me.

"A good season for lambs, I gather?"

She answered me curtly over her shoulder.

"You should remember that. You and your father numbered them."

Good God, had I a father in this world, another ghost to be confronted!

"My father! I have forgotten his name."

She answered me again over her shoulder.

"Almost, it seems to me, that you have forgotten to be man."

That was a devastating snub, and it galled me more than my tired feet. I heard a sudden piping, and saw the shepherd, a mere lad, sitting unedr a thorn tree and playing upon his pipe. He was looking towards the Downs, and he had neither seen nor heard us, nor had he been disturbed by the bleating of the ewes. The girl called to him, and her voice was the voice of young authority.

"Alban."

The lad took the pipe from his lips, turned, stared and started to his feet. He had fair hair and very blue eyes, and was dressed in a woollen smock that reached below his knees. His feet were bare.

"Is that how you guard your sheep?"

He flushed up, gave her a kind of bob or curtsey, and then he stared at me. His eyes grew rounder and rounder, and seemed to bulge like blue pebbles. Obviously my sudden manifestation in his world was as startling and as tragic to him as it had been to the girl. His mouth hung open. I might have been a figure of fate, terrifying and ominous. I did not know then that his father and my father had marched to fight those invading Saxons, and that both his father and my father were dead.

But my lady was not for lingering or for explaining my presence and my wild look to this shepherd lad. She swept on, and I followed behind her, only to find the shepherd lad at my elbow.

"Master, speak to me. What of my father?"

His beardless, boyish face, with its frightened eyes, bothered me. How was I to tell him anything? And he had called me "master," which made me assume that my unknown father and I were men of some weight in the valley.

I pointed to my head.

"Alban, forgive me; I do not remember."

I can recall being surprised by this peasant lad speaking to me in the Latin tongue, for I, like most people, had given little thought to the realities of the Roman life in Britain. And here was I speaking Latin like a native! I left the poor shepherd wringing his hands, and hurried on after my mistress, for that was how I had begun to visualize her. Also, I was pricked by curiosity; I wanted to look down into that valley, and compare it with the valley that I knew.

We had come to the shoulder of the hill where the ground began to fall steeply, and now I could see into the valley. I judged that we were just above the village I knew as Albury, and at the first glance the valley did not appear to be very different from the valley that I knew. I saw woods of beech and of oak on the upper hill-sides, groves of thorn and of yew, poplars rising in the bottom. There were little meadows, very green in the spring of the year, and yellowing up with buttercups. I could see the glitter of water, the Tillingbourne flashing here and there, and a great mere with waterflags abloom about it. This was no wild valley, but rich, and ordered, and cared-for.

Then I saw the buildings, a great, long, low, white house roofed with pantiles, a courtyard before it, and its pebble-glass lattices catching the light. It seemed to be surrounded by gardens and orchards. I saw a great yew hedge, clipped like an English hedge, a flint wall, a gatehouse. There were other buildings scattered along the valley, barns, granaries, stables, the cottages of the peasant folk, and a smaller white house that also had its garden. A Roman manor! It was all very beautiful, and rich and serene, lying peacefully there in the May sunshine, yet somehow filling me with a kind of anguish.

Nothing that I knew or yearned to see was there!

SO, I FOLLOWED her down the steep green slope into the valley, feeling that Time had played a fantastic and paralysing trick upon me, and bundled me into this dream-box without a key or a password. How would the people down yonder receive me? What was I to do and say? Still cling to the pretence that my wits had been scattered by a blow on the head? And which self was I to parade before this other world, John Hallard the engineer, or Pellias the—I knew not what?

What a hell of a problem! Were I to try and talk to these people like twentieth-century man they would think me madder than I seemed. No, a nice cunning was the thing; silence, mere blank stupidity. I had to get my bearings, play for time, keep my wits about me, yet at the back of my bewilderment was the thought that all this would pass. I had to play up to this dream world, walk delicately, conceal that other secret self. Somehow, I would escape from it back into my own world. This fantastic dream-state could not last. The thing was ridiculous, ridiculous yet enthralling.

A grass path between hedges and orchards brought us down to the manor road which followed the stream much as the Albury-Chilworth road followed it. I saw some children playing in the road. They stood, stared, ran, screaming as English children might have screamed. The news was out, news of the ominous thing that must have been hanging over the village. I could feel fear in this valley. This little world had been waiting upon rumour, listening, watching, and here was I a beaten man and a fugitive, with death and disaster in my wounded silence.

The thatched, white-walled cottages were strung along the lane much as in an English village. They had their hedges and their gardens, and were part of the peaceful scene in a land that had grown up under the shield of the Pax Romana. These tragic days were like strange, raw wounds in the green silence. People came running, women and old men; they seemed to appear from nowhere. I saw a man in a leather apron come out of the village smithy, a gnarled, swarthy, fierce old man, hairy as to chest and arms. The little crowd waited for us by the mill where a water-wheel was going round and round and making a moist rumble. All those faces seemed to wait for us, beholding me as a messenger of woe and of disaster.

I saw a woman rush forward.

"Mistress, what news?"

The girl stood still, head up, looking steadily into the woman's face.

"What you see, you see, Fanta."

She turned and pointed a finger at me, and the gesture said, "Behold the man, the man without sword or harness, the poor, hunted sloven. Look at him and understand."

There was a murmur from the crowd. I felt all those eyes fixed on me, a kind of breathlessness, fear. They were waiting for me to speak, and I was mute. I understood that old phrase, one's tongue clinging to the roof of one's mouth. The mill-wheel

rumbled round and round; the water splashed. I was aware of that grim old smith glaring at me like a red-eyed dog.

"Has he lost his tongue?"

"Yes, like his sword!" screeched a woman.

The girl raised her arm in a gesture that made me think of the Fascist salute.

"Listen, my children. Pellias has been wounded. He has lost his memory. He says that he cannot remember."

I could see no pity on those faces. The suspense had been too sharp for them. They had been waiting, waiting, and here was I, the symbol of disaster, a poor dumb idiot, soiled, unshaven and bruised. These people were provoked by a passionate impatience. They wanted news, and I had nothing to give them but a silly, oafish silence.

It was the smith who came up and clutched me by the arm.

"Speak, man, speak."

I just stared at him and mumbled. His impatience seemed to become a fury.

"Where is Mabon my son?"

I shook my head, and he let out a savage snarl, and struck me with his open hand. He struck me twice in the face.

"Will that make you remember? Speak, you fool."

Those smacks hurt and angered me, but he was an old man, and beside himself, and then I heard the girl's voice fly at him like some fierce bird. "Niger!" I saw the rage go out of his eyes, and suddenly he became a whimpering old man.

"Pardon, Lady Meona. It was love that got the better of me."

That was the first time I heard her name. Meona! Moreover, Niger the Smith's words might have been prophetic. Love and Time may get the better of us all.

The crowd followed us up the village to the manor house, as though hoping that my memory might recover itself, or because these women, children and old men looked to the great house for succour and guidance. The courtyard gates were open, and in the porter's lodge sat a very old man with a head that shook like a pea on a wire thread. A big brown hound lay at his feet. The dog was up and nosing against Meona's knees, and licking her hands; she spoke to him more gently than I had heard her speak to any living thing. The porter stood up and bobbed his bald head to her, and squinted at me as though I were some horrid apparition.

"Hail, Master Pellias."

The dog looked up at me with great, solemn eyes, sniffed at my tunic, and seemed suspicious. Had he alone divined the fact that the man whom he knew and the man wearing the body of that Pellias who had been dead in Time for fifteen hundred years or more, were not the same creatures?

We crossed the courtyard to the house. The courtyard was paved with local stone, much like the crazy-paving in my garden, and between the stones dwarf herbs had been planted, so that when a foot crushed them a sweet scent rose up. There were clipped yews and box-trees, and great earthen vases in which green things were growing, a water-cistern in the centre stocked with fish. The great house, built in two storeys, had a loggia between its two outjutting wings, and up the pillars climbed vines and roses. It was a rich and lovely house, stately and serene, its windows looking south across the valley at the uplands and the woods.

Three steps led to the loggia, and I saw two women in white smocks standing in the doorway. Meona paused on the second step, and turned to speak to me.

"You will stay here."

It was an order and I bent my head to her, but my spirit was beginning to resent her serene young arrogance. Forlorn and desolate I might be, but I was man and young, and in my own world thinking no small beer of myself. She waved to the women, and they disappeared like mutes. I sat down on the steps, and saw the crowd grouped outside the gate, watching me with a kind of ominous, silent curiosity. The old porter had joined them, and was bobbing his head and shuffling about among them as though trying to pick up crumbs of comfort. The dog came and sat at my feet, and stared at me with huge brown eyes. A disconcerting beast! I spoke to him, but he showed no sign of friendliness.

WHAT a situation! I felt both angry and bewildered. My courage was down in my boots, or rather, in those damned sandal-like shoes. I was a ghost in a live body, a spirit embalmed in the carcase of another man long since dead. Good God, when should I wake up, escape from this dream that was so horribly actual and vivid? Should I wake up? Had I been pitched back to the lower curve of some Time Spiral? Was I dead? Had I to climb that spiral all over again, find myself forking muck on some medieval farm, or washing dishes in an Elizabethan kitchen?

I had heard voices in the house, and a woman came out to me. She was a youngish wench, like a dark pansy, and she looked at me as though I had the evil eye.

"You are to come before my lord."

I rose and followed her into the house, and I noticed that she kept glancing back at me, and that every time she looked she made some sort of gesture that might be meant to repel an evil spirit. The vestibule had a mosaic floor in blue and white and red, and from the floor a huge Bacchic face leered at me. The vestibule opened into a corridor that ran the whole length of the house on its northern side, and it was lit by narrow windows high up in the wall. Its floor was of plain red tesserae. I had no doubt but that I was walking in a Roman villa, a museum piece that had become alive to harass the soul of a poor mortal who was dead or dreaming. I stared at the nape of the girl's neck. It was real enough, with her dark hair hanging down in two plaits, and a comb tucked into the crown of it.

She shuffled along in slippers, waggling broad hips.

I saw a gold-coloured curtain closing the end of the corridor. The girl drew it aside, and shrinking against the wall, spread her first and little finger at me. Yes, I was evil, something sinister and under a curse, a bearer of bad news, a ghost wrapped in blood and horror.

I found myself in what was the summer-room, a stately chamber that occupied the whole west wing. It had windows looking both north and south, and a little apsidal cell recessed in its west wall, and in this recess a lamp was burning. The walls were frescoed, the floor a fine mosaic, depicting the four seasons of the year, but all this was vague background to me for the moment. The human figures alone mattered. I saw a very old man seated in a curule chair, his hands resting upon a white stick set like a sword between his knees. Meona stood behind him, leaning upon the back of the chair.

Here was my Roman master, and never in my life had I looked upon any creature so fine and masterful as this old man. He had a great head, and a mane like a snow-white lion, a clear, fine, sanguine skin, black eyes of peculiar brightness. They were eyes that held you and fascinated you, jocund, wise, and somehow all-seeing. I got the feeling that this old autocrat was what we should have called a super-man, and that he was more than a mere tyrant. There was humour, a touch of mischief in that long-lipped, mobile mouth. He sat and looked at me, and through me, and over me, until I felt like a boy in the presence of some Olympian and spell-binding "Head."

"Well, my lad, you have been in the wars, I see."

Magnificent he might be, but there was something about him that succoured my soul. This old gentleman was human, infinitely so. Almost, I felt that I could blurt things out to him, and that even if he thought me mad, he would tolerate and comprehend such madness.

"Yes, sir."

He looked at me steadily as a physician might look at a case, sitting very still, with the light playing upon his fine white mane. Then he raised one of his hands, and spoke to his daughter.

"Leave us. Pellias and I have matters to talk of."

She passed round his chair, and I, daring to look at her, saw her somehow differently. She seemed to have become more gentle, more compassionate, more like her name, which had a dark loveliness. She smiled at me, and something happened to me when she smiled in that way. Her dark, swift loveliness became a spell.

The old man sat and looked at me, almost as though he understood my secret, though the thing he suspected was not the thing I was concealing.

"Sometimes, my son, it is wise to forget."

I echoed that one word.

"Sometimes."

"When fools and babes are filled with fear. Tell me, Pellias, how much do you remember?"

This was not a man to whom you could lie, and I found myself calling him lord.

"I can remember nothing, lord."

"What do you remember?"

"Waking up in the heather on Farley Heath."

The words slipped out before I could smother them, an English tail to the dog-Latin I was talking. I saw him frown. Farley Heath must have sounded gibberish to him.

"No more?"

"I felt dazed, lord, and my head ached."

His eyes were keen but kind.

"Come hither, my son. Kneel down."

I knelt at his feet, close to his knees, and putting his stick aside he examined my head, passing his hands over it. His hands were cool and soft, and not like an old man's hands. Then, he took me by the chin, raised my face, and looked into

my eyes, as though examining their pupils. He felt my forehead, and my pulse. I might have been in Harley Street.

"A scalp wound. You bled. That cut must have sliced through your helmet. And your father, Gerontius, my steward?"

He may have intended to surprise me, but I looked him straight in the face.

"What of my father, lord?"

"Do you not remember?"

I shook my head. He was very patient with me.

"My son, when the savage terror flamed, the levies of these many manors marched into Kent. Twenty men went from this valley, and your father led them. There were men from the White Ford, men even from Venta. There should have been men from Londinium also, though they are a cowardly, self-seeking people. You remember nothing of all this?"

"Nothing."

He gazed at me intently, and then, putting his hands on the arms of his chair, rose to his feet.

"Stand up, my son."

I rose and standing, found him, old though he was, taller than I was, though I am six feet.

"Come."

He walked to the recess or alcove, and then, I realized its nature. It was the house's lararium, and in its niches were the busts of three gods. The lamp burned steadily on a shelf above the little altar. I remember feeling astonished, for I had believed that Britain in those days had become Christian, and here were the old gods of Rome, not the rustic British deities, but Jupiter, the Sacred Mother, the Genius of Imperial Augustus. Or, so, I took them to be.

The old man placed himself in front of the altar, and facing his gods, raised his right arm.

"O Mysterious Ones, be merciful and strong for our sakes. Let that which has been be."

He turned to me, and moving to one side, bade me kneel in front of the gods.

"Behold, my son, the faces of the Great Ones. Before the gods one does not lie. One may remember."

I knelt down as he bade me, feeling a desperate fool. I shut my eyes, and remembering that favourite play of mine, *Berkeley Square,* I realized that were I to confess to this old man the knowledge that was in me, I might appear as some disturbing spirit of evil, a creature of fantastic and ominous malice. New wine was not for old bottles. I must dream my dream to the end.

"My lord, I cannot remember."

I opened my eyes again and looked at the lamp, and not at those serene, stone faces. How was I to convince him that I could not remember the things that Pellias the son of Gerontius should know?

"My lord, believe me, even your name has gone from me."

He was silent, so silent, that I turned my head and looked at him. He smiled at me as he might have smiled at a sick child.

"That, indeed, is forgetting. You will have to go to school again, my son."

I often wonder what was at the back of those bright and infinitely sage old eyes. He treated me with great gentleness and understanding. I had lost my memory. Such an erasing of the pattern on the tablets of the mind must have been known to him. I was a case, not a mental one, but a clean slate that had been sponged. I must have interested him, and profoundly so.

He treated me rather like a lost child. I was to remain in the great house for that night, and not return to the empty house of my father, that other house further up the valley. I was to eat, sleep, and be rested. He himself saw me settled in a dim little room like a cell where a narrow window showed me the green of the valley. I was given bread and meat, a cup and a jug of water. There was a bed in the room, and a basin and a ewer on a kind of tripod stand.

"Eat and sleep, my son," and he closed the door, and left me.

CHAPTER II

IT GREW dark, and very silent, and with the darkness despair came to lie with me in that narrow room. Never have I known such misery. It was more than mere desolation. I felt like a man buried alive in the body of some stranger. I could not sleep. I tried to lie still and face this horror, and to reason it out, and to assure myself that I was dreaming. I kept on saying to myself, "You will wake up, you will wake up."

But so acute did this anguish of loneliness become that I left the bed and walked up and down my cell. If I tired myself out, if I slept, I might wake up and find myself back in my old familiar world, that mechanical, noisy, confused and half crazy world to which I had been born. I was frightened, most terribly frightened. So

desperate and terrified did I become, that I remember cracking my head against the wall in the hope that the jolt might jar me back into sanity. It did nothing of the kind. The crack left me sick and dizzy, and I had to lie down on the bed.

I lay and listened. The house and the valley had become immensely still. They and I might have been fathoms deep in dark water. There was no moon. Was I dead, and the whole world with me? Had my dream ended in nothingness? I felt my heart beating. And then I thought I heard footsteps in the corridor. They seemed to come to my door and pause there. Someone was listening.

I sat up and swung my legs over the edge of the bed. My impulse was to rush out and seize that listener, and cry out fiercely, "Am I alive? Am I dreaming? Who am I? Who are you?" I sat and shook like a poor, palsied, panic-stricken thing. I heard the footsteps fade away. I lay down again, prone, and drove my face into the pillow. It was soft and warm, and must have been stuffed with down. I wanted either to die or wake up.

When I opened my eyes again, I was in that half-way-house state between sleeping and waking. It was my twentieth-century self that lay and sleeked itself in that feeling of lazy relaxation. What was the day? Oh, Monday, and no black Monday for me, for I was interested in my job, especially so in the job that was mine at the moment. Moreover, Lucy was coming back to-morrow. What time was it? Time for early morning tea?

The room seemed darker than usual, and I turned on my side and reached for my watch which spent the night on the table beside my bed. There was no table, no watch. And then, the horror rushed back on me. I sat up, stark yet shivering. I saw the narrow window, and the green woods streaked with early sunlight, and the red tesserae of the floor, and the pale ochre-coloured walls, and that strange tripod stand with its basin and ewer. My God, I was still in this other world, imprisoned in the body of another man!

I went flat, closed my eyes, and tried to reason the thing out. I wasn't awake; I was still dreaming. Lucy was coming home to-morrow. In five minutes I should hear Mary's knock, and her correct voice saying, "Your early tea, sir." I lay and listened, with my eyes closed. I swore to myself that I could not be in this Roman house; it was a nightmare, a preposterous illusion. When I opened my eyes again I should see all the familiar things about me, Lucy's dressing-table, her wardrobe, her bed with the rose-coloured quilt. I lay in the darkness, and willed myself back into sanity. I had to will myself into opening my eyes. I was cold with fear. I opened my eyes, and saw that damned window, and the green hill-side, and the strange furniture.

I turned over and wept.

* * *

How long that frightened-child phase lasted I do not know. Daylight came about four, and it must have been about six o'clock when I pulled myself out of that pit of despair. I felt that I must do something, escape from this place, thrash my way back to that grassy space in the heather where I had been born into this other world. I was obsessed by the childish hope that if I went to sleep on that hill-side I might sleep myself back into my own world. Moreover, this dream-valley was coming to life. I could remember hearing the birds singing up the sun. A bell began to clang as though calling the valley to its labour. I heard stirrings in the house, a woman's voice, the shuffle of feet.

I rose, and pouring water into the basin, sluiced my hands and face. There was no mirror in the room, but my fingers told me of all that stubble on my chin. I was touched by a twinge of vanity. Was it possible to get a shave in this damned place? I did not want to meet Meona, looking like a tramp. But, good God, did it matter? I was going to shake the dust off my shoes.

I plastered my hair down with water, opened the door—it had a queer wooden latch—and looked out into the corridor. I saw a woman on her hands and knees swabbing down the tessellated floor. She raised her head and looked at me, and her eyes were round and unfriendly. Confound the jade! I was moved by a sudden passionate petulance. Was I such a scarecrow? I would try English on her, and see how she reacted. My other self asked that question, "What time is breakfast?" I remembered feeling astonished when I heard my voice asking her in the Latin tongue at what hour we broke our fast.

She stared at me, muttered something, and went on with her work. I think I laughed, as much at myself as at anything, and it was not pleasant laughter. The woman kept her head down as though she

had no desire to meet my eyes. I walked past her and found myself in the vestibule with its mocking, Bacchic face. The doors were open, and I saw two pillars of the loggia, and the courtyard, the cistern and clipped trees. The courtyard seemed empty, and the gates were open. My mood was to make a dash for it.

I had reached the loggia when I heard those voices, a sudden ominous clamour. There were the deep voices of men, angry, sullen men. A woman's shrill cry rose in a kind of siren note. Another voice, a woman's, set up a wild wailing. I felt scared, penetrated by a premonition of evil. Good God, what now?

They marched into the courtyard, those returning warriors, surrounded, so it seemed to me, by all the women and old men and children in the village. Four of them carried a litter upon which lay a man who was wounded. They looked a dirty and unshaven and desperate lot of blackguards, a veritable Treasure Island crowd, and yet there was a fierce, wild-eyed impressiveness about that that was to make the approaching scene all the more bitter for me. Their weapons were broken, their harness dusty, scarred, and splashed with blood. One fellow's face was all red bandage; another had his arm lashed to his body. These men had fought and been beaten, but they were not mere cowed fugitives.

I saw a woman in the crowd pointing at me, but there was no need for her to point me out. These fierce, weary and bloody men saw me, and their eyes flashed and their mouths spewed scorn. They shouted at me.

"Hail, coward."

"Hail, the cur who turned his tail."

A horror of this new horror seemed to paralyse me. Had I inherited, not only the body of another man, but his frailties, his poltroonery, his panic in the face of the enemy? I stood leaning against a pillar, and looking into these fierce faces of these survivors. I made myself confront them. Whatever my fate might be, I felt I had to grasp it.

The four men set the litter down near the cistern. There was one old fellow who appeared to be the leader, a grim, thick-set boar of a man. His name was Constantine, and I was to learn that he was an old soldier, a legionary, a veteran who had remained behind upon his farm when Rome had abandoned the island. He had teeth like tusks, and a bristling black beard. He marched up to the loggia steps, stared me in the face and spat angrily.

"Hail, coward! There was valour in your legs!"

The crowd howled.

"Yah, coward."

"He left his father to die."

"The good Gerontius."

"Yes, neighbours, one clip on the head, and he ran. I saw it. He had a face like a frightened girl."

How ironic was all this! I suppose I should have been stricken with shame, but the mockery of the thing began to fill me with fury. I wanted to fly in the face of my own fate as it was expressed by the faces of these other men. I believe I folded my arms, and stood up straight, and tried to look haughty.

"You lie."

That enraged them. They shouted at me. I was bold enough among the women and children, was I? They came crowding to the steps as though they would pull me down and savage me. I suppose no man can say how stout he is or what stuff he has in him until he finds himself in a tight corner, but I had boxed for my school, and until my marriage I had played pretty rough rugby football. I put up my fists and dared them to touch me, but I was to be rescued in a way that was not pleasing to my pride.

There was sudden silence. I saw all those faces lose much of their anger. Their eyes were looking at something behind me. And then I heard her voice, and turned and saw her. She had come to the top of the steps, and stood there confronting these angry men. She looked very pale, and to me very lovely, though there was a fierceness about her beauty, a tinge of scorn that was not comforting to my soul. I should have said that her sign was fire, a pale and stinging flame that made one's pride wince, and one's heart beat hard and harshly.

"Constantine, you shall speak."

She looked them over, forlorn and fierce as they were. She seemed to be counting them. Her eyes rested for a moment on the stretcher and its burden. I saw her lips move.

"Who lies there?"

"The smith's son, lady."

"So, Gerontius fell."

"Yes, lady, and seven others. We were too few. It was a battle with wild beasts."

She turned and looked at me, and my humiliation was complete. I, the son of Gerontius, had fled the fight. I had left my father to die, and deserted these other

men. Ye Gods, how was one to confront such shame, especially when one was innocent? I felt like going berserk and fighting the crowd to show her I was no coward.

"What has Pellias to say?"

What could I say? Every eye was watching me. I was a thing to be scorned and mocked at.

"Have you forgotten?"

HER irony scourged me, and I was mute, but the crowd was not mute, and the women were more bitter than the men. She held up a hand for silence, but I was to be given nothing but sarcasm.

"It seems that Pellias has forgotten. It is sometimes easy to forget. You, Constantine, will tell us what happened to this young man."

The old soldier glared at me.

"Lady, he ran away."

"Without a blow at those wild beasts?"

"Lady, those sea-rovers have fierce faces. They fight like the mad. It takes a brave man to look them in the eyes without flinching."

"And Pellias flinched."

"He had one blow on the head, lady. He fought next me. I stabbed the man who slashed him. But when I looked to my right, Pellias had gone. We fought in two ranks, lady, the spears behind and thrusting through to break the rush for us swordsmen."

Another man broke in, the one with the bandaged arm.

"I was behind Pellias, lady. He pushed me aside and ran. I saw his white face, and blood."

"Yes," said another, "he ran."

There was silence, and she turned again and looked at me, and my face must have been stark and as white as the face of the man who had fled in panic.

"Have you forgotten that, also?"

I felt sullen. The injustice of the thing was too damnable.

"Yes, I have forgotten."

The crowd laughed, and its laughter was not pleasant to my pride.

"Let him be put into women's clothes and wash floors."

But a woman in the crowd protested.

"No, no, we women are not like that. Let him go naked and feed the swine."

Meona raised her hand again.

"People, go about your labours. Constantine, and you, Felix, you will stand before my father. And you—"

I drew myself up to meet that blow.

"And you, Pellias, will go to your room and stay there until Aurelius Superbus, my father, chooses to speak with you. Go."

Her voice was a whip, and for a moment I was moved to flout her, to leap down and charge through the crowd, and run for the woods, but I smothered that impulse. Those fierce men would stop me. I could see that they were lusting to lay hands upon the coward. I should be ducked, beaten, pelted, thrown upon a dungheap, and I had had as much shame as I could stomach. I turned and walked into the house. No one spoke or jeered, and the silence was more bitter than any mocking or cursing. I passed up the corridor, and into my cell, and closed the door, and sat down on the bed.

What a bloody riddle had I to solve!

Was this dream to persist, and was I to be a shameful ghost in the centre of the picture?

And what would Aurelius make of it?

Aurelius? Aurelius Ambrosius was a great name shining strangely out of those dim, old, tragic days. Was my white-maned philosopher a member of that notable Romano-British clan? I felt myself enveloped in those twilight idylls, and sharing in the sunset cries of conquered kings. Aurelius Ambrosius, Uther Pendragon, Arthur, Guinevere! I sat on my bed with my head in my hands, and my blood felt like water in me.

An hour or more must have passed while I sat on that bed, trying to remember the little I knew of the history of Roman Britain, to make some sort of pattern of the world in which I found myself. I had read Haverfield and other experts on the subject, and I did know that the period intervening between the passing of Rome and the dominance of the Saxons was obscure, a wilderness of legend and conjecture. Still, the Roman cult had flowered in the island for nearly four hundred years, and that is a long time. I had read that the level of civilization was higher then until, perhaps, the period of the Jacobeans. Nor had the Romano-British culture tumbled after the passing of the legions. It had fought, and often successfully so, for two hundred years, only gradually to be dispossessed of the fertile, civilized south, and driven into Cornwall, Wales, and Strathclyde.

But where was I in this ancient pattern? In the house of a Romano-British notable, one Aurelium Superbus, who might be an uncle, a brother or a cousin of that other Aurelius who had rallied Britain and driven back the sea-rovers, and the Scotch

and Irish? The barbarians had invaded Kent. I remembered the stories of Vortigern and Hengist and Horsa. Had I, as Pellias, marched to repulse one of these many raids? Who had led us? Had the disaster been utter? Would those blond savages come ravaging along the Downs and the Valley of the Thames, and pour with fire and sword into this Surrey valley? The Weald, I supposed, was a wilderness. Londinium might be too tough a nut for them. Silchester or Calleva, that rich little town amid the woods, might prove a lure. There were villas and manors to be plundered in West Sussex and on the Hampshire borders. And this valley? Had the Jutes occupied Kent? Was this a mere raid, or a deliberate advance, a conquering and settling of new lands?

Good God, but what a strange way of learning history, to be tumbled back into it, to live it with every sort of emotion tearing out one's vitals! I was history in the making. I was a blood-stained and desperate participator in one of those dim tragedies of which the learned write with tepid and dispassionate detachment. Maybe I was to listen to the wailing of women, and see houses and cities go up in flames, know fear in the dark woods. Maybe I was to go down to my death in shame and anguish. Maybe, I was to look into the scornful eyes of a girl. Damnation, if I was to share even dreamfully, in these confused and poignant happenings, was I to play the part of coward? Was this the Roman *fatum?* Was I a ghost following a pre-ordained path, walking some prescribed gallery, or was the part mine, to play it as I pleased, even in a dream?

Free Will and Destiny, one can argue those problems interminably, but my furious groping into the past and into the future was broken by a sound. I heard footsteps in the corridor. Someone was coming to my door.

There was a click of the wooden latch, and a face looked in, a face I had not seen before, a moon face fringed with pale hair. It lisped at me. This was a mannerish person, affected, precise, inadequately supercilious, and I seemed to divine the scribe.

"My lord awaits you."

I FOLLOWED this gentleman's gentleman along the corridor to the summer-room, noting the baldish head and the finicky movements of the creature. He walked like a woman. There was no stride about him. This was Gildas, my lord's secretary. He drew the curtain aside, and I saw that he wore a signet ring, a most Byzantine-looking ring. He announced me.

"The man Pellias, my lord."

The man, indeed! Damn him! I felt more than man to this blowfly.

Aurelius was sitting in his chair. His eyes seemed to remain fixed upon me from the moment that I entered, but, somehow, the depth and steadfastness of that gaze did not vex me. I bent my head and shoulders to him, and there was a naturalness in the homage that I gave him. This old man was a serene and princely person. Master Gildas placed himself beside his lord's chair, and produced his tablets and a style. The occasion was to be official so far as this scribbling functionary was concerned.

The old man raised a hand, but without taking his eyes off me.

"You can leave us, Gildas."

The secretary bowed, and looking primly peeved, shuffled out of the room. The door closed, and there was silence. I waited, only to hear Aurelius say a most unexpected thing to me, and to say it with a smile that was like the touch of a friend's hand.

"Go to the door and look. Go softly."

I went and opening it, found our friend, half smothered up in the curtain, waiting to play the interested listener. I smiled at him, and he snapped a vicious look at me, and assuming the attitude of a man who was about to draw the curtain across the door, did so, and minced off.

My lord's eyes were jocund.

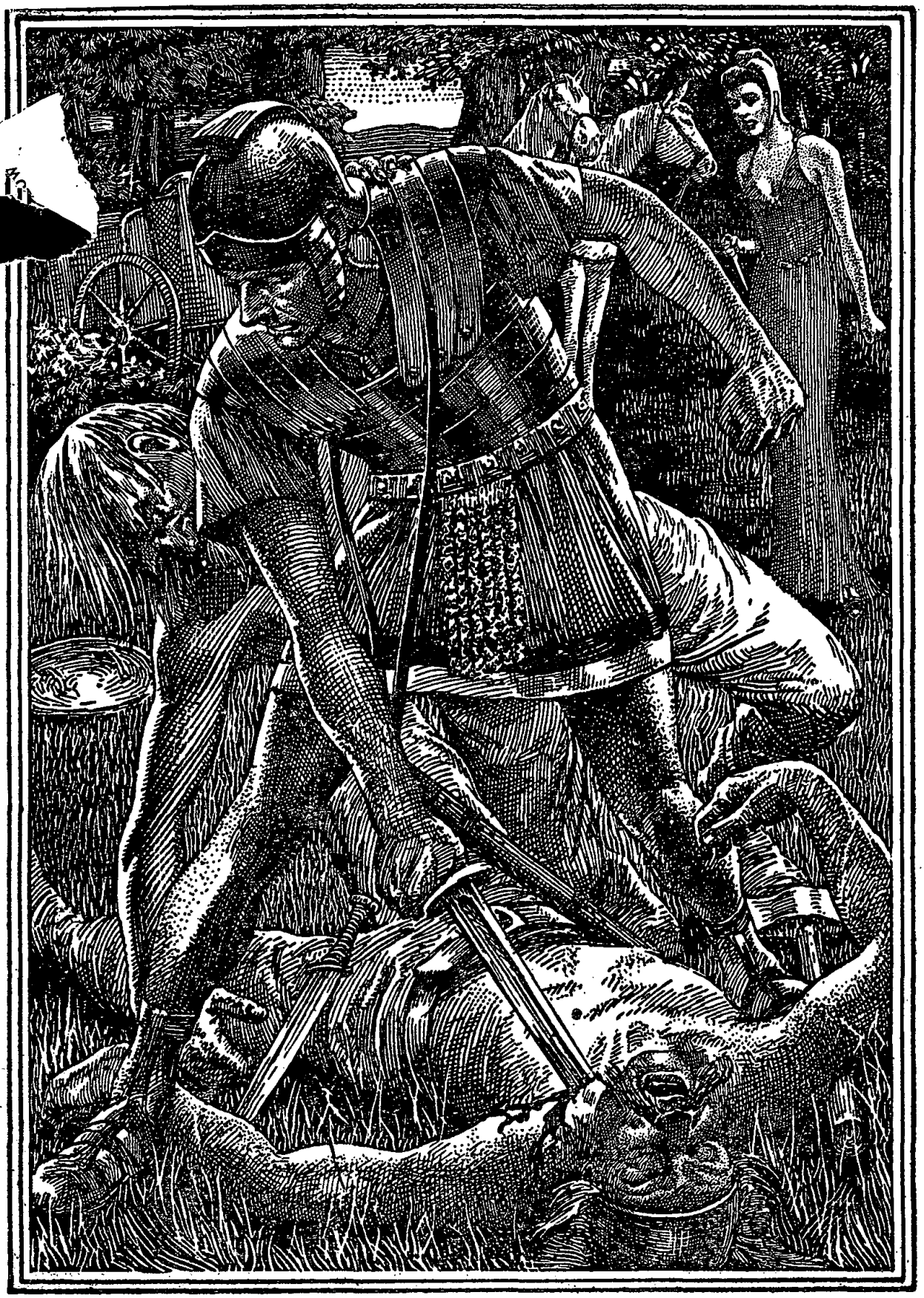
"A man's affairs, my son, may become the property of his servant. Gildas was there?"

"He was, sir."

My lord did not laugh, but his eyes enjoyed the joke. Thank the lord, my Roman master had a sense of humour and a taste in wit. I was conscious of a strange sense of relief, in that I was in touch with a personality, and a mind that had a modern flavour, which, God forgive me, sounds like priggery. I had a feeling that there was greatness and wisdom and a calm courage in this magnificent old man. He was both timeless and dateless. He was Jove and Jehovah, and Aristotle and Galileo, Walt Whitman and Lloyd George. Something seemed to laugh in me as those names poured out, and God knows, I needed laughter.

He bent his brows on me.

"There is something strange in you to me, my son."



Those two Saxons would fight no more.

My heart gave a leap. Should I tell him? Could I tell him? I was wild to unburden myself to some human soul, and after all, he could only think me mad.

"You have great wisdom, sir."

He smiled at me almost roguishly. I was not to flatter.

"I know what I do not know. The gods are figures on a curtain and beyond that lies mystery. But let us remember that the mystery must have meaning. No Euclidian figure that, my son, but divination."

I looked him straight in the face.

"My lord divines something."

He was silent, surveying me.

"My son, you have not the eyes of a coward."

I moistened my lips. The confession was on my tongue.

"My lord, I am no coward."

"You do not remember?"

"I am not that Pellias who fled."

He leaned forward, and his face was like white light.

"Who are you?"

I wanted to blink under his gaze.

"You would not believe, lord. It is not credible."

He answered me sharply.

"Granted that there is mystery, everything is credible. Who are you?"

I felt my legs trembling under me. Should I tell him? And if I did confess, would he think me some evil spirit, a thing to be cast out? Would he have my body crucified, torn asunder, burnt and thrown to the winds? I felt I had to dare it.

"Lord, I will tell you. I am a man yet to be born. I am a man who lived hundreds of years hence. I am a ghost out of the future, somehow thrown back into the body of your steward's son."

His hands gripped the chair arms. I could hear his breathing in that supernatural silence. His eyes seemed to look right through me.

"A ghost out of the future! Poor ghost."

There was such gentleness, such understanding in those two words that suddenly I fell on my knees before him. I stretched out my hands.

"Master, I am lost, bear with me. I dream, and yet my dream is real. I am alone, ye Gods, how alone. And yet, to you, this must seem madness."

He put out his hands and drew me to him.

"My son, I too have dreamed dreams. There is more in this strange world than one wots of. I believe souls pass. But in dreaming one thinks of souls as passing on, not back. How did it begin with you?"

I raised my face to his.

"Is it possible that you believe me?"

"My son, I listen. One can do no more than listen, and marvel, and ask of The Mystery questions it will not answer. How did it begin with you?"

I told him.

"In the year nineteen hundred and thirty-nine I drove out in the horseless chariot we used in those days. I remember no more. I woke up in the heather, wearing strange clothes. I was afraid. I looked for the things I know, and they were not there. I saw things that were strange to me, a temple, your daughter, a landscape that was the same and yet different."

He continued to look steadily into my eyes like some diviner gazing into a crystal.

"Are such things possible, or is the man moon-struck? And where, my son, is the spirit of that other Pellias, my Pellias?"

That was a problem that had puzzled me. If I had stolen the body of that other man, where was his spirit?

"Who knows? If I am a ghost—"

He laid his hands on my shoulders, and bore heavily on them.

"It is a very solid ghost. But this is beyond human understanding. Do you remember the life in the world from which you came?"

"Everything. That is the strangest part of it. I am a new man in the body of one—" And then I paused, remembering *Berkeley Square,* and the way the long-since dead had flinched from the ghost unborn.

His face seemed to grow very old. I think he had caught my meaning.

"So, to you, my son, I have been dead a thousand and a half years. And to you, our little tragedies and wars and terrors must be the dust of history. You know what we fear, the to-morrow."

He gripped my shoulders and stared me in the face.

"Does Rome still stand?"

I nodded.

"And Byzantium?"

"Yes, master. But—"

I felt his fingers pressing into my flesh. If he was afraid of me, as well he might be, he feared other things, the horror of knowing that which might be to him disaster, and to me, mere history. He rose, and going to the window looked right and left, and then he closed the lattice. He

passed to the door, opened it, pulled the curtain aside, and stood listening. Then he closed the door, and began to walk up and down. I felt his eyes upon me as upon some fatal thing. I might be a lantern in a dark house, or a cup of poison. I felt accursed.

PRESENTLY, he came and stood over me.

"In your days do you speak the Latin tongue, my son?"

"No. We learn it in our schools, as a—"

I caught myself up. Nearly had I said, "A dead language."

"And yet you speak it."

"That is part of the strangeness."

He looked hard at me, walked to the alcove, and stood before his gods. Mystery! Those little stone busts were impotent, mute, helpless. He came back and stood over me again, as though reflecting fiercely upon this problem.

"Is the lad possessed? Is it a dream? Ye Gods, but there is peril in such dreaming."

I understood him.

"You would have me dead and silent."

"Not dead, my son, but silent. My soul is torn by a dreadful curiosity, but even I do not dare—"

I looked up at him as a gentle ghost might look at a mortal and apologize for haunting him.

"I will be silent."

"Is there that strength in you?"

"I will attempt it."

"That is well, my son. Otherwise, even we might will you to be dead. Words can slay; words can make men mad. We have other things to fear."

I nodded at him, for I understood. Violence might be very near to this valley and its ordered life, and my lord was no man to quail or to surrender to a crowd of savages. But how ironical it all was, for I was a descendant of the savages! None the less, his need was courage, courage for his people if they were to defend what was theirs and make headway against invasion.

He was still standing over me.

"By the Gods, my son, it puzzles me what to do with you. Are you a meteor, heralding disaster? Or have you been sent to succour us? I must think, I must think."

He tossed his great white mane, and I, still kneeling there, was moved by his emotion.

"Master, some strange turn of time's wheel has brought you and me together. What is there to do but accept the mystery? I will swear silence. I will answer no questions save the questions that you ask of me."

He looked hard at me again.

"My son, I will trust you. Stand up, and come with me before my gods, and swear by the Gods behind the gods that you will be silent."

I stood with him in the little sanctuary, raised my arms, and swore, and then, holding me by the shoulders, he kissed me upon the forehead.

"There is my seal, Pellias. You and I must keep faith with each other."

Having put me upon my honour he straightway treated me as a man of honour. He told me that I should remain in his house for the next few days, and eat at his table. His kindness both comforted and disarmed me, though I did suspect that were I to break faith with him he could be ruthless. He asked me whether I wished to be alone and to shape myself in solitude for the strange part I had to play, and I, remembering my foul face, asked if I could be barbered. He was amused, and he was Roman in his cleanliness. A barber should be sent to me; I should be shown the bath.

In fact he treated me like a privileged guest. I was shaved by a fat little man who served me with circumspection; and who seemed to fear that I might try and snatch the razor from him and cut my throat or his. The fine temper of the razor surprised me. I was given a robe and taken to the bath, a fair chamber off the east wing. It had a hot bath and a cold plunge, and the water had been heated for me. The floor and the lining of the baths were of mosaic, white and slate-blue tesserae, the walls distempered yellow. I bathed, and my barber friend dealt with me, planking me on a marble slab, and massaging me and rubbing in perfumed oil. He examined my cracked head, washed away the clotted blood, and applied some ointment to the wound which had sealed itself up cleanly. When I went back to my sleeping cell I found clean clothes laid out on the bed, a white tunic, a kind of purple cloak, new shoes, and a green girdle. I put them on and rather wished I had a mirror to see how I shaped as a Roman Briton.

I heard a knock at my door.

"My lord awaits you in the garden."

I followed the barber. He led me to a

little door at the end of the corridor, and passing through it, I found myself in the garden. And what a garden! It astonished me. It seemed so English. It had a high flint wall, and gravel paths, and box edging, and a pergola covered with vines and roses and wild clematis. Fruit trees were trained against the high grey walls. There were few flowers in it as yet, for the year was young, but some of the fruit trees were still in blossom. At the end of the pergola I saw a great stone seat set in an arbour made of clipped yews. Aurelius was sitting there, leaning upon his stick, his white head looking as though it carried a garland.

I could see his eyes studying me as I walked up under the vines. The garden backed upon a steep meadow and the high woods, and I was to learn that the high wall was to keep out the deer. There were wild-boars and wolves in the Weald, but the wolves were not many, and were dangerous only in winter. I am something of a gardener, and a garden is always associated in my mind with a pipe, but my hand did not go into a non-existent pocket for the ghost of a pipe and pouch. I had not smoked, for how long was it? God knows! But in this other man's body the craving was unborn in me. I think I smiled. No nicotine, no tea, no coffee! In heaven, it is suggested, one gets one's whisky and one's cigar, if one needs them, but in this dream-world my drink was to be wine and water, and a home-made brew like beer.

We men are vain creatures, and I was no weed. I had fancied myself in football togs, and the body of Pellias was that of a tough fellow. My lord was eyeing me with approval. I was shaved and washed and dressed, and my new girdle was tight. Was my spirit tougher than my double's, and capable of making more use of a comely body? I must have smiled at my master, and perhaps swaggered just a little. He bade me stand before him, and I did.

"You have not the eyes of a coward, my son."

"That is to be proved."

"Tell me, do you new men carry swords?"

"No, sir. We go unarmed, save for the professional soldiers."

"Your legions. So it was in this island until recently. No man was allowed to bear arms unless he was a soldier. That has been one of our misfortunes. We had the Roman peace, but when the legions left us we were tame, untrained men. Our young men had not been hardened to war."

How strange was this! It put me back into my other life and our reaction to the German menace and the sudden awakening to it of an unarmed England. Here was yet another German menace, for the Saxons were of the same stock. I could have pushed a platitude at him, and observed that history repeated itself, but with bombs and poison-gas and propaganda, instead of with swords and spears.

He bade me sit down beside him.

"How like you this garden, Pellias?"

I did not say that its beauty and order surprised me, but he must have divined my thought, for he spread a hand as though blessing the sacred and secret place.

"We of the Roman spirit love beauty and order, or the beauty of order. We ask to control what is round us, either as peasant or as prince. An old man must cultivate his garden. So, have we cultivated this valley. And now we have these half-naked savages let loose on us. Attila scourges the world, and these sea-wolves, escaping from the greater beast, fall upon us."

Had we in my England not confronted the same spectre of ruin, cities blown to pieces, houses wrecked, women and children lying dead in the streets? The order and the liberty and the happy, playful fancy of a free man's life sacrificed to a booted fanaticism!

I said, "Such good things should not pass."

I felt him watching me.

"And what would you do, my son?"

"Fight."

He laid a hand upon my shoulder.

"You are not that other Pellias, it seems. And yet his fate is upon you. Consider what was, what is, and what might be. Can a ghost out of the future strive to serve the past?"

His words moved me very strangely.

"My fate, perhaps, is now and here."

"Consider it, my son. I make you free of my garden, and my trust."

He rose, and I stood beside him.

"Master, that which was—is, and yet perhaps differently so."

He left me to walk in his garden and to meditate upon these things.

HAD all this happened before? How had my poor ghost-brother Pellias responded to the challenge of his fate? Had he continued in cowardice, or

had he discovered in that cowardice the spur of courage? A man is not always brave, or always a coward. Circumstance casts its spell, the web of happenings in which he may find himself.

But what of myself? If I was imprisoned in the body of another man in a dead-live dream-world, was I to play the man or the coward? Did I wish these dream-people to think well of me? Did I desire to shine, or be howled at and treated with savage scorn?

I walked round that walled garden, and looked at the sky and the woods, and those blue distances, and felt the thing we call romance stirring in my blood. What an adventure was this, no tame world, no catching of the inevitable train, no daily paper, no office-chair. What had one's adventure been? Some car-scuffle with a week-end cad on the Portsmouth Road, and since I possessed some sense and decency the cad usually had had the best of it. He could do things which the sportsman in me could not do. Also, if one crashed because of a cad, one's wife might suffer.

Yes, Lucy!

Had she suddenly grown dim to me? Was I forgetting? Would this Roman world prove to be reality, and my other life a dream? The old anguish stabbed me. My bowels yearned suddenly for all those other human contacts, people to whom I could talk, not ghosts who would not understand. This silence seemed too dreadful, too crushing. It was like being buried alive.

I went and sat on the seat under the arched yews, with my head in my hands.

How had that other Pellias answered the challenge?

Cut his throat, fallen upon a sword?

Was that my choice, silence in death, or silence in daring to live?

For the moment I could find no answer.

The answer was to be discovered for me, or thrust upon me as an emotional spasm. I was staring across the garden, when I saw that door open, and a figure appear. Meona! She was dressed in some saffron-coloured stuff, and her black and brilliant hair was loose upon her shoulders. It was plain to me that she thought herself alone in this walled place, though an old, round-backed man had come in by another door and was busy with a long-handled spade in a distant corner. It was like a modern French spade, a tool with a long handle.

But my eyes were on Meona. She came up the broad path under the climbing vines, sometimes in the sunlight, sometimes in the shadow. Her face had a gentleness that I had not seen before, a beautiful, douce pallor. Her eyes looked larger, darker in the broad soft oval of her face, her mouth less of a hard red streak. She was looking up at the sky and the pattern of the vine leaves, and her young beauty wounded me. That haughty little nose of hers looked less cruel about the nostrils. But how impossible it is to describe a face, especially a face that is sensitive and swift, and so strangely significant as hers was. All I can say is that the exquisite outlines of her, her symmetry, her poise, the sharp sweet flavour of her colouring, the very way she moved, filled me with a kind of wounded sadness.

I stood up, and then she saw me. Never have I seen a face change its mood more swiftly. Her head went up, her eyes flashed, her nostrils seemed to swell. She looked at me as at something that was less than man, less than that lumpy old fellow digging over yonder. Her scorn stabbed me. I understood that in a wild world such as hers might be, a woman had no use for cowards.

"Who gave you leave to be here?" she asked me.

I must have reddened up like a boy, at that.

"My lord, your father."

That might be news to her, but she stood as though waiting for some mean thing to remove itself. I was less than a flea-ridden cur. And I was angry, angry with the deep and urgent anger of primitive male pride.

"You do me no justice, Meona."

When I spoke her name she gave me such a lift of the head, and a look of such devastating scorn that I knew my place. That vulgar phrase "Hoity-toity" flashed into my consciousness. One might have said to a modern wench, "Cut it out, old thing, cut out the pose and the Dietrich business." But my lady was not a modern wench, nor was I a lad in sloppy grey bags and a coloured pullover. Her prides and her scorns were actual and vivid, and so would her love be, like lightning or the rush of rain, or the wind sweeping the tree-tops. I was her father's servant, and a sorry and a futile one at that.

I had no honour in her eyes, not even the honour of crude courage.

I stood aside, and she swept into the arbour and sat down, and since I did not immediately remove myself, she looked at me steadfastly and with a sharp serenity that left me in no doubt as to my duty. This garden was no place for me while she chose to walk or sit in it. Had I been toiling with a spade, like the old gardener over yonder, she might have tolerated me, but as it was I was a poor, spunkless lout who did not know his place. And I had rather fancied myself in my new tunic and cloak and girdle.

She said, "It would seem, fellow, that you have forgotten many things."

Fellow! I felt furiously hot about the ears, but her natural scorn was too much for me. Her eyes said, "Remember to go," and I went, and tried to do it with dignity, though I imagine that my reactions were of no more interest to her than the flutterings of a sparrow.

I got back into my cell, and shut myself in, and wondered what her response would have been had I broken my promise to her father, and told her the incredible truth.

Damn it, I was moved to go back and tell her the truth. And what would she have thought? That I was completely and insolently out of my senses?

I AM ashamed to say that her stabbing scorn pushed me into a mood of agonized self-pity. I did not see red for long; but pale primrose. That a creature so indubitably lovely and untouchable as she was should regard me as less than man, and not even as a valued lackey, threw me into such desperate petulance that I did not ask myself how else she could regard me. What had that damned fellow Pellias done to deserve even her tolerance? I sat on my bed and hated my Roman self and her, this black-eyed young tigress to whom I was less than a sheep. I wanted to be back in my own world, oh, terribly so. If I could only turn that mysterious corner and find myself in the 5:37 from Waterloo, reading the *Evening Standard,* and the last example of egregious Fascist insolence. No, not even that. The Wimbledon results would be more familiar and soothing. I simply was not up to the standard of this haughty and wounded young woman, the daughter of a Romano-British petty noble, and for the moment I was as bitter an example of the inferiority complex as any little raging Red.

How long I sat there I do not know, but someone, a servant, came to my door and told me that dinner was served. Good God, was I expected to sit at her father's table with her, and bear her silent surprise and her scorn? She would not understand that her father and I shared a secret. No doubt she might think that the old gentleman had gone potty. But the servant was waiting, a little contemptuously so. If my lord chose to be foolishly magnanimous to his dead steward's son, well, that might be the strange privilege of the gentry! I got off my bed, and followed the fellow along the corridor to the summer-room. An oak table stood by the south window, an oblong table. My lord's chair was placed at the head of it, and he was sitting in it. Meona was standing by a chair on the right. I saw a vacant stool on the opposite side. That was to be my pillory.

There was a feeling of unrest in the room, and I imagine that there had been some high argument between Aurelius and his daughter. Probably she had scorned the idea of sitting down with the agent's son when that person was so poor a specimen of the fighting man, and after she had shown him the height of her pride. Possibly, my lord had been reasoning with her, describing me as a man sick of soul who was deserving of compassion. My lord smiled at me and waved me to my

ool. Meona took her chair, and did not so uch as look at me. In truth, through all ıat dreadful meal she looked past me and 'er me with a calmness and a contempt ıat were complete.

I felt like [illegible]ut, and I blurted like one: "I see, si[illegible] use Castor ware."

Castor w[illegible]it was, and I had recog-[illegible] it, an[illegible]e pattern of animals with [illegible]im flowing bodies. My lord [illegible] of that indiscreet venture, ıile I was bothered about my table anners. We were provided with little lver-handled knives and tiny two-ɔnged forks. So, one did not use one's ıgers!

"I see that you are beginning to remem-ɛr, my son."

I glanced at Meona's face, and its utter oofness challenged me. Could I not show yself as a somewhat responsible person, grown man capable of confronting the ɛry terrible threat that hung over their orld? The manservant who had brought ıe from my room, served us from a little de-table, which, I gather, was carried in 'om the kitchen.

"Wine or beer, sir?"

I chose wine, and red wine was poured ıto a glass beaker. My lord was watching ıe, and I was watching how he dealt ith his food, cooked meat and a green ɛgetable like spinach, and a brownish ɛad. I reminded myself that potatoes ere confined to that as yet undiscovered ew World. I felt that I ought to make ɔnversation, for the silence was smother-ıg.

"Is there any news, sir?"

My lord gave me a sharp look. There as a warning in it, and to cover the ıpse, I raised my beaker and drank. The ine was good, though a little sweet as ıough it had been treated with honey. he silence continued. And then I heard horn blown, and the clatter of a horse's oofs on the stones of the courtyard. 'ith one swift movement, Meona rose 'om her chair and crossed to the window.

"Festus is back from Pons Albus."

The man Festus came into the room. He as a very dark man, about my own age, ith an alert, lean face, and humorous ɣes. He was dusty and hot, and wearing arness, and breast-plate and greaves and kind of leather tunic. A sword was ɛlted to him. I liked the look of Festus. thought him a fine, well-tempered figure f a man, taut and tall and lean and mor-ant, such a man as I might wish to be, nd carrying arms and carrying them as though he could use them. He was wearing a peaked leather cap, rather like a jockey's. He saluted Aurelius.

"Well, what news, Festus?"

"Pons Albus lost seven men, lord. I had a talk with their dux. He said that the men of Londinium left them in the lurch."

"Paltry fellows. Any news of the sav-ages?"

"No, lord. Pons Albus sent two horse-men along the Ridgeway this morning. They rode as far as Cæsar's Head. No smoke, no sign of the barbarians."

Aurelius nodded his white head.

"In what strength were they? My fellows talk of thousands."

"Hundreds, lord, but very fierce and strong. One of our scouts rode round their host. He said that there were women and wagons in the rear."

That, I gathered, was grave news. This was no mere raid, but an advance in force to take land and hold it.

"Which way will they march, Festus?"

"Maybe along the Ridgeway, lord. Or they may come along the river, or if they strike the great road, turn away towards Regnum. Londinium is too strong for them."

"We must watch, Festus, keep scouts on the hills. If our neighbours will gather we may hold them off."

I noticed that Festus kept looking at me with curiosity. I suppose that he had heard my story, and yet his glances were not un-friendly. I had behaved like a coward, and maybe to him I looked stouter than my reputation.

It was Meona who spoke next.

"Let someone ride to Londinium and see what their spirit is. I will go, if Festus will ride with me."

Her father shook his head.

"No. I will have out my chariot and drive to speak with the Aquilas and Pontius of Pontes. We must act together if our country-side is to be saved."

MUCH of this was mere gibberish to me, though it might be grim gibberish, and devastatingly significant to these dwellers in Surrey. I could suppose that the Saxons had conquered Kent, and had established themselves there, and were now pushing forward into Surrey, Middle-sex and Sussex. I had read of the storm-ing of Anderida and the slaughter of the Britons therein, but my dates were as confused as my emotions. Someone had written of London as a city holding out like a citadel, while the barbarians pushed

past it into Surrey and Berkshire, and that London in its death-rattle was a deserted place. And what of Christianity? I had supposed that Britain was Christian, but as yet I had seen no sign of the Cross. What of Pelagius, that gentle heretic?

Festus went out to order my lord's chariot. I was to learn that Festus was a farmer and a breeder of horses on the Downs above what was to be Guildford. I was feeling dreadfully out of things, but I sat glued to my stool. I could suppose that good manners would not permit me to rise before my lord.

Meona was standing by the window, perhaps wishing that she was a man and suffered to ride out armed against these invaders. She looked fierce, frustrated, petulant.

"I go with you in the chariot. I can handle the horses."

I had no doubt that she could, and her father did not gainsay her.

"Festus will ride with us."

"Ah, he is a man."

Did she turn her head and look at me? I sat there, not knowing what to do with my face or my hands. My lord rose from his chair, and took pity on me.

"Rest that head of yours, Pellias."

I rose and walked to the door. I wanted to be alone, even with my loneliness, and yet I wanted to see that chariot, with Meona handling the reins.

I sneaked back into the summer-room and stood at the window to watch them sally. The chariot was waiting in the courtyard with a couple of white horses harnessed to the pole. It made me think of an old-fashioned dog-cart set low between the wheels, which had carved spokes painted white and blue. The hubs were gilded. It was certainly a luxury machine, its dash-board painted yellow, and its broad seat padded with leather. Reins and harness were of red leather, and fitted to the dash-board was a long, trumpet-shaped basket in which were a bow, arrows, and a hunting spear. The chariot had neither springs nor mud-guards, and you entered it by a little side door fitted into the body.

Festus and two other fellows were mounted and ready. They carried spears and wore swords. I'll confess there was a part of me that envied Festus on his great black horse. Festus was a fighting-man, and I less than a camp-follower. I saw Meona come down the steps. She was wearing a Phrygian cap and a soft, green leather jerkin buttoned tight to her throat. She carried a whip. My God, could handle other kinds of whips! lord followed her, helping himself with stick.

Meona took charge of the chariot. did not sit, but stood to her work lik charioteer, and she made me think o figure of Winged Victory. Aurelius t his seat. The white horses needed no from the crack of the short-h for they felt the spirit of th hands held the reins. Festus and his n turned their horses and rode out throu the gateway. The blue and white whe revolved, and Meona, leaning back w her weight on the reins, checked the i patience of those two beasts as the chai made for the gate.

Then, the wall hid them from my ey but they came into view again a lit way down the valley, where the mill sto among willows and poplars. Festus a his men were cantering, and Meona h given the white horses their heads. I s dust flying, and the chariot bumping a rolling, its yellow hubs flashing. Th fierce young woman was a speed-mercha and I wondered how her father felt abo her chariot-charge. Was he holding to t seat, and pressing his feet against t floor-boards? But I was to learn that t lord could be as impetuous and fear-fi as his daughter, with a white head th was, perhaps, a little cooler than her bla one.

CHAPTER III

NO ONE hindered my going, or fle tered me by attempting to inte fere with my freedom. I walk across the courtyard and out of the gre gate into the village street, if one can c it a street. I suppose that to the peop I was Pellias the coward, or Pellias the n wit, and that in such times as these tar lunatics are not given garlands.

I heard Niger the Smith hammerin away in his smithy, and I imagined th he was beating out sword blades or spea heads. Children were looking in at th door at the spark-spurting, roaring forg and watching Niger hammering white-h metal. One of the children, a boy, turn and saw me pass, and all he did was put out his tongue at me. So that w that!

I had in mind the sunken lane th cut its way up out of the valley to th North Downs and Newland's Corner. W it there still? It was, though a much mo

hallow trackway, and its persistence heered me. I felt that I was in a valley f dreams—Honey Village was its name in hose days—and that if I escaped from ; I might shed my ghost-self. I wanted to un, but there was a cunning in me that emembered that I had a dozen or so miles [redacted] across wild country and that I had [redacted]e the climb steadily. I passed [redacted]n, and a large yellow dog came and arked at me. I was polite to him, for I ad not so much as a stick in my hand.

"Hallo, old fellow."

He was an unfriendly dog, and he barked he harder, adding growls to his get-off-ny-earth warning.

It seemed dark and gloomy in this hollow vay with its smother of bushes and trees, ut when I came out on to the uplands I ound that the sky had changed with that tealthy suddenness that is England. A vind had sprung up, and a greyness had pread over the landscape, though the dis-ant hills retained a tinge of blue. How amiliar was this clearness before rain, his grey and gusty sadness! I stood on he hill-side and looked at the familiar cene, Hascombe, Hazlemere, the three lobs that mark Hindhead. I could see Farley Heath, and the little temple very white against the gloom of heather and irs.

No, there was no doubt about that emple, and the absence of Albury's bald ew church, and the uncrowned head of St. Martha's. No silver smoke over Guildford, o trains running in the valley, the Weald a wilderness. I turned north, and saw the yews and thorns and scattered beeches, gorse, and the broad green ribbon of the Ridgeway. And there were those two white chalk knolls with a grass trackway running between them. I understood their signifi-cance now. They were great guide-posts that could be seen through the gap in the green-sand ridge and right across the Weald to the South Downs. They must mark the way over the chalk hills down into the Thames Valley, and the bridge at Staines, or the fords at Weybridge or Kingston. It was so.

When I stood between the two tumuli I saw a trackway heading north, and follow-ing it found it becoming a gravelly lane that went down into the valley. I saw the low ground spread before me, not as I knew it, but wilder, more wooded, with no fa-miliar blobs of tile and brick stippling it. No tall Woking chimney, no St. George's Hill, no distant gasometers, no Newland's Corner Hotel. The absence of that bizarre white building hurt me rather absurdly, for I was rather fond of the place. Lucy and I had dined and danced there.

I took a long look at the landscape, try-ing to find some marker for my route, and I saw one whitish building in the middle distance that seemed to lie in the way I should take. The rough road travelled in that direction, and it occurred to me that this track might head for the junction of the Wey and the Thames and a passable ford there. I did know that one main Roman road to the west had run from London to Staines, and so on to Silchester, and this track might cross the river and join it. I was going down hill now, and I started to trot. I was still buoyed up by the hope that now that I had escaped from that enchanted valley the landscape would suddenly revert to the landscape that I knew.

The trackway took me across the lower ground somewhere between the two Clan-dons, but most of it was wild country, all woods and heather. The only human being I met was a peasant boy leading a donkey with panniers full of charcoal. He

smiled at me as though he knew me, but I, not knowing him at all, smiled back and trotted on. I passed two or three small farms, little secret places hidden in what were glades, but though I saw cattle grazing, no one came out to speak with me. My one duty lay in following this track, for had I tried to cut across country I should have lost myself. Whether it was my own feeling of suspense, or the sudden greyness of the day, but I got the impression that fear was abroad, and that the very clouds were heavy with menace.

The track dived into a deep wood, climbed out of it, and arrived at the edge of a low, flat hill. There were open fields here, and orchards, and I saw ahead of me the white house that I had spotted from the Downs. My mood was to avoid it, but the track ran directly past it, and the fields were hedged and ditched like English fields. Well, what had I to fear? Yet, as I neared the place I became aware of human activities, of clumsy wains and carts parked on a grassy space near the wall of this Surrey villa.

Men were loading furniture and gear into these wagons with a furious haste that was significant. I saw a herd of cattle pour out of a big, walled yard, with drovers and dogs behind them. A man on a horse was riding hither and thither as though directing the men and urging them on. Women fluttered in and about, carrying things and passing them to the men who were loading. I stood under a tree and watched what was, obviously, a panic flight, a country exodus. These people were stricken with fear, fear of the Saxons.

Well, I did not want to be involved in their flurry, to be stopped and questioned. It was more than possible that Pellias of the Honey Valley was known to these people. There was some open woodland west of the estate, and cutting along a hedge I gained the wood and keeping just within the trees, cast a half circle round the place, and striking the track well beyond it, I ran.

Some of those wagons might soon be on the road, and I did not want to be caught up by the fugitives. But their fierce, busy panic had infected me. God, into what a land of strange tragedy and terror my dream-state had landed me! I ran, as though those savage men from beyond the sea were close upon my heels.

THERE was more heathland interspersed with woods of birch and of Scotch fir. It was all so familiar in its colouring and its contours that I mig have been on Ockham Common, or t heathland by Wisley, with the black ba of the Portsmouth Road vibrant wi traffic. What would I have given to ha seen that stretch of tarmac, or heard t rumble of a lorry, but this country w silent, so silent that it made me mo afraid. The track took me past a sh water that was very like the big po the Hut Hotel, and a little further on sighted one or two familiar knolls capp with fir trees, knolls that are familiar all those Londoners who picnic or pau and leave litter among the Ockha heather. Had I stumbled upon a Wal ice cream carton I think I should ha gone down on my knees, picked the thi up and kissed it.

The track turned past one of the knolls, and taking me through a birch wo and across some rough grassland gave r a sudden glimpse of a river. My God, t Wey! But not the Wey as I knew it, decorous little stream, but a more turg affair swelling its way through bog ground set with alders and willows, ree and water-plants. The track kept aw from it, turning right and edging alo the shoulder of a low hill, with marshla and rough meadows on its left.

Where was I now? This might be S George's Hill on the right, and down the in the flats should be Brookland's Trac I was beginning to feel horribly depresse There was nothing here to shock me ba into my own century. Trees, gorse, heath soggy meadows, a grey and dolorous sky. could not follow the river, for the lan was too marshy down there. It began drizzle. The track brought me to a gre heathy space that dipped to the north an the river, and the lie of the land here w so familiar that I stood under a tho tree and looked and looked. Not a hou was to be seen, and yet this heathy slo with its birches and thorns and patches gorse was terribly mine. I was standin just below Weybridge Station, and gazin down towards what should be Weybridg with that distant landscape much as I re membered it, and hanging like a back cloth across the horizon.

I got up and wandered over the groun like some mad archæologist searching fo fragments of the future instead of th past. I walked a little way up the heath and down again. The drizzly rain gre heavier, and was wetting my hair and fac and suddenly an insufferable anguis smote me. I wanted to escape from th

lesolation, this inhuman wilderness that nocked me. I was a ghost, a frightened ghost, hunting for a home that was not here. I wanted to end this horror. I vould go down to the river and drown myelf.

Even that wishful exit from this dead orld was denied me. I went plunging over the rough grasslands towards ey, only to find myself in a morass t sucked at my feet and legs, but was ıot sympathetic towards my thirst for leep water. There were shallow, stagnant ›ools, sinister oozy patches. I found myelf up to my knees in slime, with the river luding me. And if that desolate heath ıad scared me, this sour, bubbling morass ıcared me still more completely. I quelched and blundered out of it back to he solid earth, shaken and overwrought. realized that I did not want to die in hat way, even as Pellias the Romano-Briton. It was both better to feel the wind ınd the rain in one's face, and to struggle ›ack—whither? Yes, where was I, a poor ghost, to go? Back to this other world nto which the summersault of time had hrown me?

Then something in me seemed to say, 'Damn it, be a man." I had a sudden ision of Meona in the chariot, leaning on he reins, and driving those white horses ike a figure of Winged Victory. A strange, ›rimitive thrill went through me. Was I nan, or a poor sap of a creature who could ıeither love nor hate, dare nor forget? became conscious of a sudden surge of motion in me, a desire to swagger. I was hinking with my blood, as the Germans ›ut it.

In this other world, this world of old, lim, tragic things, the vapourings of a ultured "Dreary" were of no account. Arms and the man! Had I no guts for this nonstrous adventure? Could I not be man nstead of ghost? If some fantastic, topsyurvy trick of Time had tumbled me into his tragedy, could I not find the stuff in ne to tackle it?

›I began to draw deep breaths, put my ıead back, square my shoulders. I had gained the top of the heath and the trackvay, and I turned to look back. I began o feel—Roman. I raised my arms and houted.

"Vale."

My shout sounded good. It was like a rumpet-cry to self. It tingled and gave ›ut defiance. Damn it, why should I not ›e such a man as Festus, tough and lean, dangerous fellow, a cool swordsman who could smile and kill? I had never killed anything but a marauding cat, and mosquitoes and greenfly. And suddenly, I wanted to kill. It was as though the primitive in me had pushed up through the thin, tame crust of custom. I was man.

I MUST be describing all this very crudely, but the fact remains that when I turned my face away from that which was in the future, I seemed to become more acclimatized to the past. As I followed the sandy track back towards the white house I remembered the exodus I had watched, those frightened folk loading their wagons and herding their cattle. If they were making for the ford across the Thames I might meet them, unless, of course, they had turned south to strike the North Downs and the Ridgeway. I did not meet them. I saw no live things but a yaffle, and a weasel that bolted across the track, and an occasional rabbit. The wind soughed in the trees.

I came at last to the more open and gentle country where the white house stood. There were no fresh wheel-tracks in the sand, and no hoof slots, so I could suppose that the fugitives had trekked south or west. I worked my way into the open wood, and slipped from tree to tree, until I had a good view of the place. I leaned against the trunk of a beech and looked.

Nothing can look more desolate than a deserted house, and this homestead had been stripped of men and beasts. It was a long, one-storied building with a high, thatched roof like the roof of a Devonshire cottage. The windows had shutters and the shutters were closed. No smoke rose from it, or any sound. The out-buildings and yard were as deserted as the house, and a patch of sunlight falling upon the place made its desolation seem more complete. I think the blind eyes and muteness of this homestead made me realize the nature of the tragedy that was menacing this island world. I felt drawn towards that abandoned house. I wanted to explore it, though the shuttered windows promised to keep me out. Moreover, I was hungry and thirsty, and in need of some sort of weapon. I walked out of the wood and across the meadowland to this Romano-British farmstead.

The house had a thatched portico sheltering the door, which was of oak, and studded with nails like an old church door. I walked up and gave the door a push, not

for a moment expecting it to open, but open it did, with a melancholy creaking. I was so surprised that I just stood and stared into the vestibule with its floor of worn red tessarae. The walls were plastered and coloured an ochrish yellow, and hanging on the left hand wall I saw a hunting-spear. Strange that they should have forgotten that spear, but here was a weapon with which I could arm myself.

I took the spear and wandered down a darkish corridor with rooms opening from it. The doors were open, and I could see that the rooms had been stripped of most of their furniture, but in one dim room I saw a table standing, with the remains of a meal on it, bread, a meat bone with some meat left on it, a large brown pitcher.

My back was to the window, with the sunlight shining in and through into the corridor and painting an oblong patch on the yellow wall and red floor. I had left the hunting-spear leaning against the end of the table, and I remember noticing a little patch of rust on its blade that might have been dried blood. I was feeling much less jumpy, and rather pleased with myself, when I heard that sound which brought me up taut at the table.

Voices, but not very near, voices that seemed to drift from the distance and into the open window.

Were those fugitives coming back? Had they repented of their panic or gathered reassuring news upon the road? I left that table with a chunk of bread in my hand, and keeping close to the wall, slipped along it to the window. I wanted to see without being seen, and it was fortunate for me that I showed such caution.

I saw three men standing on the edge of the open wood under the young green selvage of the beeches. They were tall men, bare-legged, with long fair hair and portentous moustachios. In fact, they were so hairy that they made me think of sheep-dogs. They wore conical steel caps on their heads, and they carried shields and spears. The shields were round, painted in bright colours, blue and white and red, with metal bosses. I stared at these men, flattening myself against the wall, and not showing more than the edge of a face. Who the devil were these fellows?

And then it dawned on me with shattering suddenness. These men were sea-pirates, savages, Saxons.

I saw one of the three, a huge fellow with legs like bolsters, raise his spear and point. Had he seen my face at the w dow? The three of them set up a fie shouting which sounded to me like t sharp baying of dogs. The sound v savage enough to scare me, more especi ly so as their howling seemed to echo the wood and to produce an answering u roar. I thought of a pack of wolves su denly giving tongue. The dark wood came alive; I saw figures moving the trees, with bits of sunlight splinte upon their metal head-pieces and th spear-points. Their coloured shields we like great round flowers. But I did not w for more. I swung round, picked up t spear, and dived for the door, feeling m self trapped in the house. If I bolted fr the front door, they would see me.

I ran down the corridor, and found passage leading to what were the kitch quarters on the other side of the hou I found a door, but it was barred. I flu the bar back, and emerged into a wall yard. Beyond it I saw the trees of orchard. I was over that wall in doub quick time, and sprinting through t orchard. A thorn hedge enclosed it, and saw a gate in the hedge and a meado beyond it. Not till I had got through th gate did I stop to look back, peerin through the thorn hedge. I saw nothin but the orchard trees and the back of t white house, but I could hear those heath en giving tongue like a pack in full cr I did not think they had seen me. Th house and possible plunder were causin all this ululation.

I turned again and ran. I was not chase and so could infer I had not been seen.

Well, what next? Obviously, it was m business to get back to Honey Valley an warn Aurelius and his people. I was feel ing pretty tired now, but I raised a tro and kept it up steadily through that wil country. My new shoes had begun to cha me, and I was glad when I saw the Down rising against the sunset. It was a strang and fiery sunset, and somehow sinister an prophetic. Twilight was falling when reached the ridge. I turned, stood an looked back.

I saw something burning in the distance a knot of yellow flame, or petals of fir licking at and lighting up a cloud of smoke I understood its significance. Those sav ages, finding neither food, plunder, or me to slay, had set fire to the white house.

I turned, and crossing the dark Ridge way, went down into that dim and silen valley.

IT WAS very dark in the valley. The suddenness of the nightfall was such hat had I not found the sunken lane efore the afterglow had faded, I should ave been lost. Moreover, the darkness nd the silence had a strange effect upon e. They seemed to bring me up against go mystery of things, and to translate tter, talisal self in me into the past, and farthdraw it from what I knew as the resent.

This velvet blackness, and the bosky oliage, and the smell of the woods, and his utter silence! I was not listening for rains or cars, or for any twentieth-century sound. I was a more elemental reature who had escaped death by the arrowest of margins; I was in wild, dark ountry, listening, every fibre of me taut. remember pausing under a great shaggy olly, and putting to myself that catatrophic question: Was I dead or alive? Vas I, in fact, Pellias, and that other world he illusion? Had I, a Roman Briton, reamed a fantastic dream of grotesque nachines, of contraptions that flew in the ir, of men in queer clothes, of a montrous world that was, as yet, unborn?

I was nearing the bottom of the valley, nd its silence and darkness troubled me. urely there should be lights here, or had oney Valley experienced a sudden exodus ke that which I had watched a few hours go? Had the Saxons come and left blood nd a great silence behind them?

I crept on, and then I saw a light ahead f me, a mere chink of light. It was where he house of Aurelius should stand. The ooded hills seemed ready to roll in like reat waves and engulf the valley. The hite walls of the house became visible n the darkness. I reached the high wall f the enclosure.

"Hallo, there, hallo," I called.

A man's voice answered me.

"Who's there?"

"Pellias."

They opened the gate, but only a crack, nd the point of a spear showed as well s a dim face.

"Alone?"

"Yes. Who should I be with?"

They opened the gate and pulled me in. heard the gate slammed behind me, and he bar banged into place. Two men were olding me. Another shoved his face close p against mine. He had a foul breath. hese fellows seemed to have the jitters.

"It's brave Pellias come in," said one.

I turned on the voice.

"You mend your manners. I wish to speak, at once, with my lord."

The man with the spear was unsteady on his feet, and seemed to be drunk with weariness, but he laughed, and strangely enough his laughter made me recognize him.

"Festus."

"Yes, Festus, my lad. We seem to be treading on thorns here. I'll take you in. Come."

The house was as dark as the courtyard, and I began to understand this darkness, for, to be without lights was to share the darkness of the valley, and to mask and cloak yourself against beasts that were on the prowl. I saw a slit of light at the end of the corridor, a V-shaped slit between the folds of the curtains. Our footsteps seemed to echo in this silent, breathless house. It was Festus who drew back the curtain.

"Pellias, master."

I heard a voice say, "Let Pellias enter."

I felt Festus's hand upon my shoulders, and it was a comradely hand. Festus was good for such a crisis, a man who could raise a laugh in the face of it, though he was ready to fall asleep on his feet. I stepped into the summer-room, and he let the curtain drop behind me.

"I have news, lord," I said.

The old man did not seem to hear me. He might have been deaf, or deaf to the mere empty sound of my voice, or so sunk in profound thought that nothing I could say would rouse him. After all, what was I? A ghost out of the future, and maybe he was afraid of this ghost. I stood and waited, feeling Meona's eyes watching me. The lamp-flame flickered, and the faces of the gods seemed to pull grimaces.

I heard a voice crying in the night, "There is death in the land." It was a woman's voice, shrill and abrupt with anguish. The still night shuddered. I felt myself stiffen, and looking at Meona I saw her sitting rigid, her hands gripping the edge of the seat. The weight of her body seemed to be carried by those two tense white arms.

Her voice came in a whisper that was almost a hiss.

"Is there nothing, no vengeance, no strength in the land?"

I stood and stared at her and the man in me was fiercely moved by that sound that seemed drawn from her like a jet of blood. But Aurelius had come out of his stupor. He rose slowly from his chair,

saluted his gods and turned to face me. Never had I seen a man so aged in so short a time. His face had fallen in; he looked shrunken; his whole body was tremulous with the tremblings of sudden senility.

"We have seen death, my son."

I suppose my face was vacant, for he looked at me steadfastly for a second or two, and then made a sign to his daughter.

"I would speak with Pellias alone."

But she came swiftly across the room, and putting her arm about him, raised her face to me defiantly.

"I can bear what men can bear."

"You have borne enough, child."

"I will not leave you."

She must have felt his old tremblings and been wounded by them. She seemed to press her young body against his, and buttress him with the fierce, slim pillar of her body. Her face had changed. It seemed to me a different face, so different that I could not help staring at it. Her mouth looked bigger, her lips fuller, and the oval of its shape broader from cheekbone to cheekbone. The dark eyes were not flashing pebbles, but more like dewy, luscious fruit. I would have said that her face had a sudden, mysterious ripeness, that mature richness which comes of deep emotion.

Even her voice and her words were different.

"We, we are young, Pellias. We should be able to dare and to fight."

SOMETHING seemed to happen to me in those three seconds. She was speaking to me as to an equal, as man, as one who had blood in him and courage. She was alive, vibrant and passionate, and I too was alive I felt a kind of singing in my ears, and my heart beat hard and fast.

I said, "Something has happened. All those people out yonder."

She nodded at me, and then inclined her head towards her father's chair. I understood her. I turned the chair so that Aurelius could sit in it without facing that little flickering lamp and the vague and inconstant faces of his twilight gods. Both his gods and his world were chaos, and he was a very old man. She made him sit in his chair, and standing behind it, and leaning over the carved back, she let a hand rest upon his head.

She said, "Be silent, Father." And to me, "I will tell you."

Her gentleness both surprised and won me, for her young compassion was so contrasted with her pride, and with my memory of the young women of my time who appeared to regard old men, and fathers in particular, as tiresome and superfluous old fools. Parents should be seen but not heard. I saw that Aurelius's eyes had closed themselves. He lay back and listened, while her fingers played softly with his hair.

"It was to Collis Alba that we drove. Three miles from the place, where the wooden bridge carries the Regnum road over the river, we met—these people."

She paused, and stared at the wall behind me, as though compelling herself to confront some horror.

"Women and children, and old men. Aquila had sent them away. He and his men had thought to hold the villa and beat off those savages. They had been seen on the hills by his scouts. We drove on. We had crossed the bridge when we saw smoke rising. Again, we drove on, Festus riding ahead. In a little while Festus came back to us. He was very white and grim. He would have stopped us. But one must see, one must know, one must not shirk things. We came to Collis Alba. It was burning. The courtyard gates were broken. Again Festus would have stayed us there. We, and she faltered for a moment, bit her lips, and went on. "Dead men and blood and Aquila's head planted in a pot of flowers by the cistern. Death, and silence and flames. We came away."

I said, "I too have seen those savages. They set the white house over the hills on fire. The people had fled."

Her eyes gleamed out at me.

"Constantine's house! Ye gods! Are the wretches everywhere?"

I saw the old man's eyes open.

"Raiding parties. How many were there of them, my son?"

"Perhaps fifty."

"Wolf packs. Ah, for a single cohort of trained men. That may be our undoing. We are not ready. We are attacked and beaten in detail. There cannot be so many of those fellows, but they are fighting men."

I was leaning heavily on my spear.

"Are there no soldiers in Britain?"

He gave me a quick, warning look.

"Pontius of Pontes has raised a body of horse. If only we and the Aquilas and such men as Constantine could have joined strength."

"Can we not rouse the country?"

He straightened in his chair.

"Someone to lead, someone with courage and a voice. But what now? Do we go or stay?"

My eyes met Meona's, and I was a new man.

"Let us send the women and children away, and stand. Let someone ride and gather people to us. If someone stands we shall be a rallying point. Surely we could hold this house?"

My lord looked at me steadfastly.

"That is how a man should speak, my son. The women and children shall go. But who shall be our torch-bearer?"

I saw Meona's face blaze.

"Why not I? Surely, men will listen to a woman, or be shamed. I will go."

"The hazard is too great."

"We must dare it. I'll drive to Pontes. I'll—"

Her eyes were on me, and I was a man.

"Give me leave to go, too, lord. Let Festus and the others hold this house. We must get help."

I saw Meona smile at me, and her smile was an enigma. Did she think I was still a coward, and being brave in flight! I changed my mind suddenly.

"No, let Festus go. I will stay."

There was silence for a moment. Her great black eyes were studying me.

"No, Festus shall stay. I will take Pellias with me."

I often wonder whether she thought it better to take the coward with her than to leave a coward behind.

We called Festus into the room and spoke to him of our plans. He had brought his own people in from the farm, a young wife, two children and his labourers, and weary though he was, he fired up when we spoke of holding the valley, even of gathering such power as we could and of driving these German swine back into Kent. There were some twenty able-bodied men to defend the house and courtyard and the flock of fugitives, and if there were no arms for all, scythe blades fixed on poles, and bills and axes could make good play in desperate hands.

That was all that the night could do for us. Festus had posted his watches, and we who had work to do next day, went to our beds. My body was weary, but my brain was alight. I seemed to have come alive in this other world, and my old self was growing dim. I was to drive out with Meona in her chariot. I was to be her shield-bearer and man-at-arms. The night was a new, strange dream to me, yet presently I fell asleep.

I WOKE very early to the gradual greyness of the dawn. I heard the birds break into song. It was a marvelous volume of sound in that deep, green valley, exultant, clamorous, as though the trees themselves were singing. I lay for a while and listened to that dawn-song, and my heart exulted in me. If this was a world of tragedy and of tears, I had been reborn in it, to fall in love, and to be wounded by its perfume and its wildness.

I got up and washed myself and dressed, for we had decided to start very early, and strike the road over Farley Heath, which linked up Stane Street with the London, Staines, Silchester highway. I give the English names, which convicts me of perpetrating the strangest of anachronisms. It would be a long detour by the Guildford gap, but since the savages had spread into the Wey valley, we dared not take the track I had followed yesterday. There was a small mirror in my room, and I was looking at my unshaved face and wondering whether Aurelius's man would come and shave me, when I heard footsteps in the corridor. In the days that were to come I was to forget a bearded chin in a world of swift happenings and desperate adventure.

It was Aurelius's gentleman's gentleman, but he brought into my room more than a new suavity, a bowl of hot water, olive soap, a towel and a razor. He carried in a set of harness, helmet, breastplate, greaves and a shield. A sword in a red leather scabbard lay in the hollow of the breastplate, with a belt buckled to it. He laid all this warlike gear on my bed.

"With my lord's compliments, sir!"

So, I had become "sir" to him! I picked up the sword, and drew it out of its scabbard. It was a shortish sword, like the old stabbing swords used in the legions, but it looked a useful weapon, and I remembered reading somewhere that this curt, stiff blade had out-fought the long, clumsy, slashing swords of the Gauls.

"Is this Niger's work?"

He stood waiting to shave me.

"No, sir, it is my master's own sword, as is the harness. He has grown too old for such gear."

The war-harness of Aurelius Superbus! Well, well! But had he not told me that no provincial had been suffered to bear arms? I could suppose that the more

notable folk had been privileged in that respect or that this harness had been ceremonial dress worn on some state occasions. I sat down on a stool, and the man lathered and shaved me, and while he was busy I wondered how I should shape as a fighting man. My blood was up, and tingling. I was to wear harness, and drive with Meona behind her two white horses.

When the barbering business was over, the man offered to help me arm. The breastplate had to be buckled on, greaves fastened, sword belt slung. He appeared to understand the process better than I did, though I checked him when he buckled me up too tight.

With my helmet in the hollow of my left arm, and my scabbard clapping against my thigh, I walked out into the corridor, and along it to the vestibule and loggia. I saw the crowd in the courtyard, and a fire burning, and an iron cauldron slung above the flames on an iron tripod. Two fellows were washing themselves in the stone cistern, which seemed to me a piece of impertinence. I stood on the steps of the portico in my new harness, with the sun shining down over the green hill, and the valley still full of a kind of cobweb light. There had been a heavy dew. The stones of the courtyard were wet with it.

The analysts would have described me as being very much in the shop-window, a tailor's gentleman-dummy advertising the latest in battle-suitings, but I was to escape more and more from a cheap and cramping self-consciousness. One has not much time for self-conscious posings in the thick of a rough rugger match, or when the other fellow's gloves are stinging one. My blood was to be hot blood, not educated milk. As I stood there in the early sunlight, watching the crowd in the courtyard, the two men who were washing themselves discovered my presence. Both of them had followed Gerontius to disaster, and both of them had been witnesses of the same cowardice. I suppose my new splendour peeved them. They made mocking faces at me and became rudely ironical.

One of them spat into the water-cistern.

"There's spunk for the coward!"

"Fine feathers, brother, fine feathers, but that cock won't fight."

I swung my right fist and caught him on the jaw. He went down backward. Then I attended to the other one. Those blows felt good.

Young fighting-cock that I felt myself to be, I was startled when I saw Meona standing in the portico. She had seen me smite those two rough fellows, and they were her father's men not mine, but I kept my chin up and I looked her straight in the face, though, God knows, the wild, proud loveliness of her had begun to frighten me. I am not much use at describing women and their ways, but if I was a big simpleton like John Ridd I could adopt his motto of "Never Be Ridden." Anyway, it was a good bluff when a girl's face made you feel like a flapper in love with her first film star. Meona had a frown on her forehead. She had a falcon's head, and her eyes were like two little daggers of dark steel.

"Why did you strike those men?"

I stood and smiled at her.

"For the good of their souls, and the mending of their manners."

She seemed to be considering me and my new, braced-back pride. Her lips looked dry and thin and pale. Never had I seen lips change so quickly. Almost, I could her saying to me, "Do proud feathers make brave birds? You were less bold with the barbarians." If that was in her mind, the tinge of scorn that hung about her mouth and nostrils was valid. But I was not going to wilt before her, or throw my arms away in this battle of tempers.

She looked past me at the crowd in the courtyard. It was a silent crowd. It watched and listened. A child began to wail, and the mother crooned to it as though such whimpering was unseemly. I think many things must have happened to Meona in those few seconds. She was as swift and as quick in reflecting a crisis or a mood in her mind-mirror as she was in handling her horses. She could turn in the air like a hawk.

"Insolence may have two faces, but that which is high may strike at that which is low."

I do not suppose that they understood her words, but her manner of uttering them was significant. She looked at me again, with her head held high.

"It is time we broke fast. We have things to do."

She turned and swept me in with her as though the draught of her serene young skirt drew me into the house after her. She had used that wild word—"We," and it was strange how wild a significance it had for me. I might be man to her if I could strike with the sword next time.

AURELIUS was waiting for us in the summer-room. He had a roll of parchment on his knees, and he spread it on the table, for half the table served for the meal we had to eat, milk, bread, eggs, and honey. I noticed that the lamp in the shrine was unlit, and the faces of the gods were dim. The old man looked me over from head to foot as I stood before him, and maybe he found me comforting to his eyes, for I was in a striding mood after chastening those two men.

"You carry it well, my son."

I thanked him for the harness and the sword, and for the honour he had done me. I was feeling like one of Shakespeare's heroes. I could utter brave, resonant words, and they did not sound like claptrap.

"May I wear it as it should be worn, sir?"

I felt Meona watching me like a young falcon. How should I shape on the wing, and in the face of peril? That was the question.

Aurelius smiled. He was less the old and bewildered man on this sunny mornig.

"Let us look at the map, Pellias."

His hands held it spread upon the table, and bending over it I was astonished by the amount of detail in this map. It covered the Kentish borders, the Thames, Surrey, half Berkshire, and the northern edge of Hants. Londinium, Pontes and Valleva were marked upon it, and also a number of townlets and villages whose Latin names were a blank to me. The forest areas were coloured green, great wild spaces like the sandstone ridge and the Weald, and the heathlands round Bagshot.

Surrey was dotted with little diagrammatic designs which represented country houses, and Aurelius's finger pointed from one to the other, while in a low voice he deciphered the details. Romano-British Surrey, it appeared, was a pleasant land of great estates where nobles and gentlemen farmed, and hunted and lived an Arcadian life, with perhaps a town house in Corinium or Cavella. London was there with its shops, its physicians, its lawyers and its bankers. The picture was so modern, and so comfortably Victorian, a world of horses, dogs, gardens, farms and orchards that I gaped over it. Both Calleva and Londinium were shown encircled with towers and walls, but otherwise the thing might have been a large estate-map.

Meona had gone to look to her horses, and Aurelius, glancing up at me, laid a hand on my arm.

"How is it with you, my son?"

There was a wise benignity about him that touched me.

"I feel—man, sir, in this harness."

"I am trusting you. Maybe the gods had a hand in this. You see how our country lies. Londinium has its walls, so has Calleva. If we lose our land to those savages, we shall be refugees within those walls."

"Is there no one to help us?"

He produced another map which he had kept between his knees, and when he spread it I saw that it charted all the island south of the Great Wall. He laid his finger on a red crown that lay, so far as I could judge, in the Wiltshire country, south-east of Corinium.

"That is my brother's house. He has sons and much strength. If Calleva and Londinium will not help us, we will send our groans into the west. My brother, Pellias, is wise in war. He has fought in Gaul and on the Rhine, and on the Great Wall. Such a man as he is should lead and bind the country together. With an

island in arms we could beat back the Irish and the Picts, and drive these blond beasts into the sea."

We were to carry a letter to Pontius of Pontes, explain our perilous position to him, and try to persuade him to come to our help with such force as he could muster. If he were to prove unhelpful we were to return to the Honey Valley, and Aurelius would then reconsider our situation. We might decide to stay and defend the manor, meanwhile, sending an appeal for help to Calleva and to Aurelius Ambrosius in Wiltshire. I gathered that this other Aurelius had a strong place at what might have been Sorbiodunum. I questioned my lord about London. Surely, the most powerful and populous city in the island should be able to help us?

Aurelius gave me a look of kindly tolerance. I was very young!

"Shopkeepers and tradesmen, my son. Not very valourous people. They have their walls and their towers. Such folk are apt to believe what they wish to believe, that the storm will pass, blow off a few country roofs, and leave them unscathed. A city is egoist."

"But won't the fools realize that if the island is overrun piecemeal, they will suffer in the end?"

"Fools may see their fate too late, Pellias. So long as food comes down the river to Londinium, they may remain fat and comfortable within their walls."

"Why not cut off their food-supply?"

The old man laughed, and shrugged.

"An idea, my son, an idea! The barbarians may do it for us."

Then Meona came back into the room, wearing her green Phrygian cap, and a long greenish frock that buttoned down the front, and was shaped to the figure. It reminded me of modern riding-kit. She carried a pair of red leather gloves, and a dagger at her girdle. Little did I guess that that bodkin was to be our salvation. We sat down to breakfast. Festus, I heard, was out scouting on the Downs, watching the ways from Collis Alba and the Thames valley.

We were near the end of the meal when I heard the chariot and horses in the courtyard. Meona and I looked at each other across the table, and I could divine the question behind those eyes: "What manner of man will you be if danger comes?" Well, she should see! Never, in my innocence, had I felt more sure of myself.

Aurelius went with us to watch us sally. The two mounted men were in the saddle, and both of them were strangers to me. Their names were Ferox and Marcus. The crowd in the courtyard stood back, and touched their foreheads to Aurelius. I saw that there was a spear in the chariot, and a bow and a sheaf of arrows. An automatic pistol would have been more to my liking! Meona went and spoke to the horses and rubbed their noses. She sprang in and I followed, and she whirled us out of the gate and into the narrow village street. The crowd poured out to wave us away.

She spoke to the man Ferox who was riding on our right.

"Ride ahead, watch."

He saluted her and pricked up his horse, but before he left us I saw his face for a moment. Ferox his name might be, but his face was not the face of a man who liked the adventure. That was an unpleasant fact that I had yet to digest. The blond beasts had put the fear of death into these Britons.

All this country was, in its main contours, so infinitely familiar to me that the reality of this other consciousness was almost poignantly incredible. The road was a mere trackway following the valley, with the green surge of the hills just as I knew it. There was no Chilworth, but two or three cottages or farm-houses, and they seemed to be deserted. The flat stretch of open country between Chilworth and Shalford was like a park, set with great trees, and here cattle were grazing. Wonersh would be behind us.

Contemplation was not encouraged, for Meona drove like Jehu, and the springless carriage bumped and rolled, and I wondered how she kept her feet. I stole glances at this young, dark Boadicea. Did she know what fear was? If she loved, would she love like a young tigress, or was there a capacity for tenderness in her that was as strong as her courage?

CHAPTER IV

WE CROSSED the Wey by a timber bridge somewhere near where the Pilgrim's Way must have crossed it. Our valley track had joined itself to the Farley road which linked up Stane Street with the great west highway. There was a village here in the narrow valley, an inn for travellers with a posting-house attached to it, a shop or two, cottages, a

smithy. The people had not fled, and as the chariot rumbled over the wooden bridge they came out into the street and crowded round us. The inn-keeper and posting-master, a very fat man with a cheerful countenance, came out and saluted Meona.

"What news, my lady?"

He smiled at me, so I presumed I was supposed to know him, and I smiled back. I was standing up beside Meona, for it would have been unmannerly to sit while she was standing.

"Watch your bridge, Paulus."

"Is there much danger, lady?"

"Constantine's house has gone up in flames, and Collis Alba has been sacked, and its men slaughtered."

There was a kind of moaning sound from the little crowd.

"Should we burn down the bridge?"

"Not on your life," said she, "it may be needed. Set a guard and watch. We are going to Pontes to get help."

We drove on, leaving that little, dismayed crowd of villagers behind us, and I had my doubts about the safety of that bridge, and whether we should find it standing when we returned.

And so we came to Pontes with its great timber bridge, and I saw its pantiled roofs and orchards, and one proud white house standing apart with gardens going down to the river. There were swans on the river. That surprised me. But why should there not be swans?

Several barges lay near the bridge, and a boat laden with vegetables and corn-sacks was drifting downstream, with a man leaning upon a long oar and steering. The bridge was guarded. That is to say wooden trestles had been placed across it, and several very amateurish-looking soldiers were swaggering about, and shouting to the bargees on the bank below. Bargee language has always carried a fine flavour, and I gathered that these fellows were cursing the bridge's guardians, and the barbarians, and everything that could be cursed. Apparently Pontius of Pontes had some authority over the bridge, and he had given orders that no barges were to pass down the river because of the Saxons. Also, I was to discover that he was in the thick of a squabble with the citizens of Londinium, and if he stopped their food-barges the laugh would be his.

So busy were the bridge's guardians in returning the blackguardisms of the barges that they did not pay much attention to us until Meona cracked her whip at them. "Wake up, you foul-mouthed fools." That was what the whip seemed to say. The sergeant in charge of the squad, persuaded to take notice, saluted our chariot and ordered the trestles to be moved.

"Pardon, lady."

Meona drove on into Pontes, and the sergeant resumed his slanging-match.

It was obvious, at a glance, that Pontes was feeling the draught of the day's danger. This was the first Romano-British town that I had seen, and it straggled along the main road in haphazard fashion, and appeared to be a perfect example of early ribbon development. We drove into a triangular Place which was in a state of confusion. Farm carts, wagons and carriages were parked here. Dust, dogs, children, tired cross women, horses being watered and fed, an universal hubbub. I saw a large caravanserai and posting-house, and in its loggia people were sitting at tables, much as one might have seen them outside a modern road-house. In fact, in the garden, which appeared to be sacred to the gentry, I saw two or three large red umbrellas in the centre of a lawn, green tables, and two girls in white smocks waiting upon the people round the tables. We came to a gate-house with armed men lounging about. Meona took the chariot through the archway, and I saw the long white house with its pantiled roof and portico, and the garden going down to the river. A brick wall gave a terrace effect, and there were steps leading to the water. A gaily-painted boat lay moored there. A couple of peacocks were sunning themselves on the wall.

Lying on a wattle couch, I saw a very large, black and white young man in a saffron-coloured tunic. When I say that he was young I include in that class those who persist in posing as young-fellah-my-lads at the age of forty. He reminded me of what one would describe as a smart cad-about-town. A servant was in the act of handing him a silver cup on a pewter salver. Two or three other servants were in the background, and a morose, hawk-faced person in harness was striding up and down and casting such looks of unrestrained scorn and disrelish upon Sir Pontius, that I was attracted by the fierce person's air of seething impatience.

WE LEFT the chariot and walked across the grass towards the gentleman who was sunning himself like one of the pea-

cocks. He had taken the cup from the servant, and I saw that he wore gold bangles, and that his flabby fingers were crusted with rings; but directly he saw Meona he lifted his legs off the couch, and with an air of suave languor, got on his feet. He smiled, and his smile had a sallow and sleepy insolence. He bowed to my mistress, but even his politeness was ironic and smeary.

"Hail, daughter of Aurelius. Hail, lovely lady!"

I was standing behind Meona, and I wondered how she would react to this supercilious, flashy cad who seemed to stink of scent. I saw her standing slim and straight, like some young cypress; she was holding her whip crossways across her thighs.

"Greetings, Pontius. I bring you a message from my father."

He ogled her.

"Take my couch, charming one. Wine for the lady. Be seated, child."

Child, indeed! He was like a great white slug to which a yellow flower petal was adhering. He did not look at me, and I supposed I liked him even less for that. The fierce person with the burnt-brick face had ceased from raging up and down, and was watching us and listening.

But Meona remained standing with the whip held across her thighs. Her neck and hands looked tense. I was expecting her to sting the fellow, but she was of finer mettle than I was.

"My lord, my father asks for your help. The Saxons are bringing death to our valleys."

I was watching Pontius, and leaning upon my spear. I could have presented him with a monocle and watched him tuck it into his eye.

"Ah, these savages! My dear, do drink. Be seated. You must be exhausted after this excursion."

The servant had brought another cup of wine, and my lord waved him forward.

"Serve the lady, fellow, serve the lady."

Meona stood very still.

"I ask for your answer, my lord, not for wine."

His great flabby face grew superciliously indulgent.

"Dear lady, why this impatience? Be seated. Yes, I agree, all this barbaric business is very boring. If you will permit me—"

I saw her head give a little jerk; her hands were clenched.

"People are being slaughtered, my lord, and houses plundered and given to the flames. My father is holding the manor, but we need help. You have men here—"

He shrugged, drank, and wiped his lips with the back of a be-ringed hand.

"Oh, a few. Homely levies. But, dear lady, my duty here is to hold the bridge. And the river, dear lady. We do not want these hairy fellows—"

Meona's voice seemed to fly suddenly like some fierce bird into his face.

"I see. You sit and drink wine. You think yourself safer on this side of the river."

My lord might be flabby, but he had thick, white skin, and infinite complacency.

"Tut-tut, temper, my dear, temper. You do not do justice to my responsibilities. Let me suggest—"

"I suggest that you are a coward, my lord."

It was here that the fierce person came into the picture. I imagine that he had been trying to sting this mass of pampered superciliousness into action, and had failed. He came and stood half-way between Meona and the Lord of Pontes. His eyes were glittering and his lips were like the edge of a sword.

He said, "Our friend here, lady, is no fighting man. I do not think you will persuade him to leave his bath and his unguent bottles."

I am afraid I laughed, and my lord of Pontes gave me the look one might give a giggling waiter.

"Ha, dear old Robur here likes to talk the hero-stuff. You must forgive him."

Said Meona, "I forgive any man courage, however great a fool he be. But Robur is no fool. I leave you the fat and the folly, my lord."

I think that touched him. He said, "Lady, I can command a few men. They are gathered at my manor over the hills. I could be with your father before nightfall."

She walked deliberately up to Robur and kissed him upon the forehead.

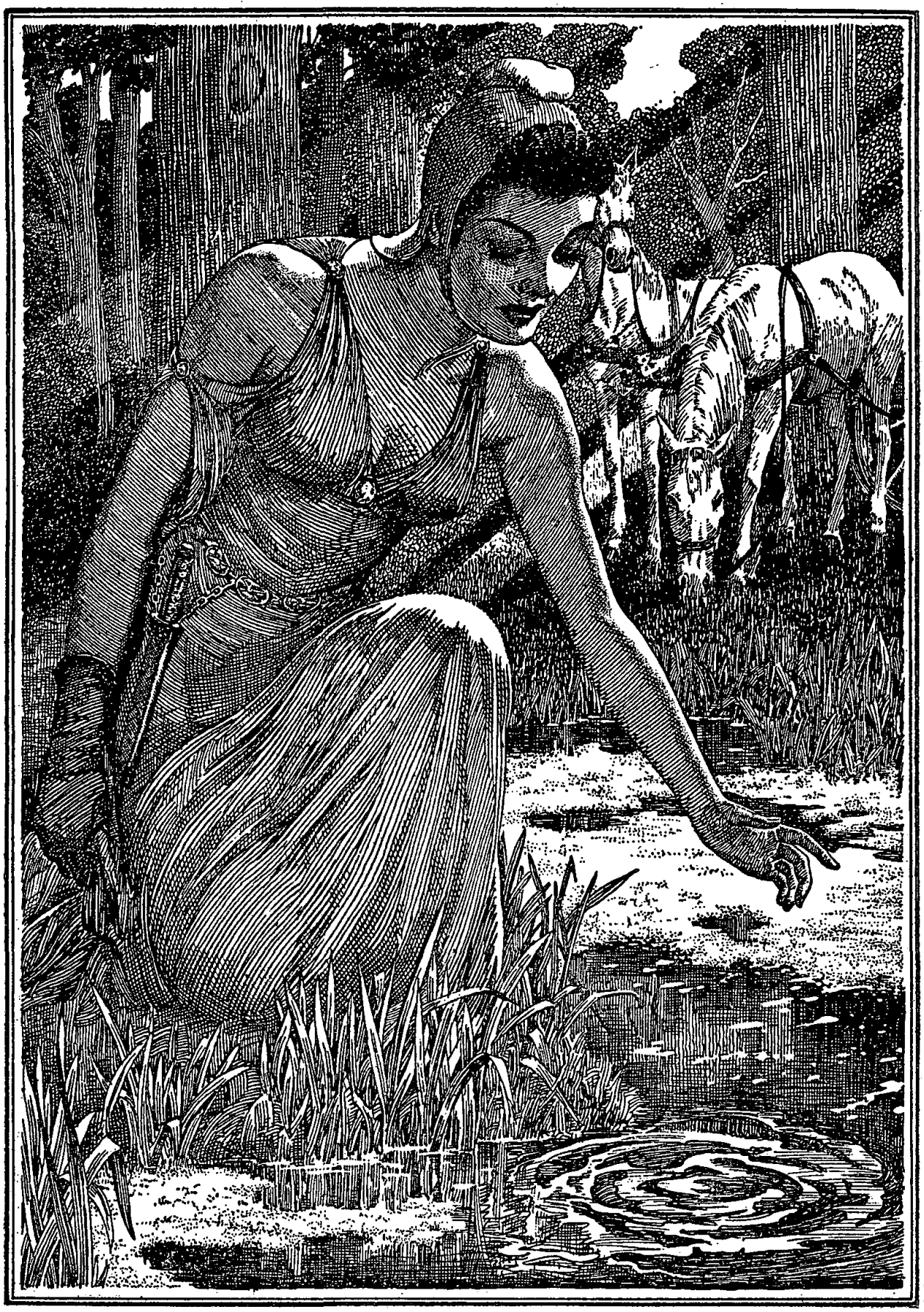
"My friend, I salute you. You know the ways. Stay, I will leave my two men with you."

He smiled at her.

"Why not wait for us?"

"My father waits for news. No, I will go. My horses are fast."

Sir Pontius had strolled off to the river wall, and was stroking the head and neck of one of his tame peacocks.



Her pagan eyes . . . seeking
out the ghost pictures. . . .

"Cross your Rubicon, Robur. You fire-eaters must be singed, I suppose. I have more subtlety."

Meona might not have heard him. She turned and looked me in the face.

"Let us water and feed the horses. Then, we will dare our fat friend's Rubicon. Robur, my friend, I salute you."

Robur laughed, a hard, dry, comforting laugh.

"Tell Aurelius I will be with him before nightfall."

WHEN we pulled up at the posting-house a groom came to take the horses, but Meona would not trust the watering and feeding of her beloved Whites to a stranger. She drove into the stable yard, and saw that both water and corn were clean, and rubbed the beasts' noses and talked to them. That they loved her was just nature, and I, who was a man, had begun to offer up my soul to this quick-tongued, ardent, masterful girl. She could do things, she was thorough. Kind, in the easy sense she might not be, but it has been my experience that a facile kindness is the virtue of fools. There are other and fiercer kindnesses.

A gate led from the yard into the garden, and I followed Meona, feeling suddenly posed by a preposterous problem. If she sat down at one of those tables, was I to stand behind her chair while my lady broke bread and drank? And if she bade me sit with her who was to pay? I had those Roman coins in the pocket of the linen knickers they had given me, but I did not know their value.

There was a vacant table under a lime tree, and Meona took it. I could remember river-days when I had sat on a lawn with Lucy, but the face of Lucy had grown strangely dim. I stood and waited while Meona gave her order to one of the white-smocked girls. She ordered meat and a salad, bread, and a honey-drink. I felt damnably awkward, not knowing what to do.

I said, "Shall I wait with the horses?"

She gave me a quick, upward look over her shoulder.

"Is not my bodyguard to eat?"

She pointed to the other stool, and I sat down.

We could see the river and the placid greenness of the poplars and the willows, and the swans afloat. It all seemed very peaceful, in spite of the armed men on the bridge and the [illegible]d confusion in the town. Yet, over yonder Death was abroad and I could remember sitting in my garden and thinking how strange and incredible it was that war might blow up over the sea, and aeroplanes drop death upon all the peaceful things I knew. Was this life, the eternal recurrence of man's violent urges, his instinct for power, his passion to conquer and possess?

Meona was frowning at the bridge, which we could see.

"I think I would break down that bridge or burn it. As for my lord Pontius— What would you do with such a fellow?"

"Cast him in the river."

She flared, her nostrils dilating.

"I would hang him on the bridge after I had broken it. I would take such a man as Robur, and send torches and trumpets through the whole island, and preach the shame to those who would not stand and fight. But our time is past."

She rose, and taking two or three coins from the little wallet she wore, tossed them carelessly upon the table. It was a stately little gesture, and I could suppose that such trifles were to her of no account. The reckoning and largesse were satisfied, and you went upon your way, and when I came to consider it I could see in that one gesture the serenity of an aristocratic world. No little slip of paper was brought to such a creature as Meona, and three pennies were not slid under a plate.

She rose, and passing towards the gate, was curtseyed to by the girl who had served us. My lady had paid our reckoning, and the amount thereof needed no question-mark. Life before the coming of those wild men from over the sea had been spacious and easy for these patricians. and perhaps they would die as they had lived, if fate so willed it. Meona's scorn caused me to believe that Pontius of Pontes was no national symbol, but some oily upstart, or an urban highbrow whose very spunk was mere supercilious slime.

When we drove out of the posting-house yard we found Pontes even more a place of congested panic than when we had entered it.

Meona had to drive slowly through the crowd, missing legs and feet and cows and bundles by inches. It was a querulous, bewildered mob in which infants squawled and women chattered. I glance at the men, these peasant fellows, and they looked to me stout enough to stand and fight were they properly trained and led, but they

had been rushed into this mass-panic by one of those primitive impulses which carry a whole country-side in flight over rivers and mountains.

So, had the thing happened in my day in Abyssinia, Spain and China. I could suppose that these peasants had no weapons save their sickles and their flails and their axes. Had those in authority failed them? Were the British gentry all like Pontius of Pontes? These men had run away to save their women, their children and their cattle, and if such an exodus was not halted, I could see it ending, as it ended in history, in the wilds of Cornwall, Wales, and the sea.

On the way back we again took the road across the river meadows between the willows and the poplars, but only one party of fugitives did we meet, with their cattle, and their household goods piled on their wagons. Some of their lumbering carts were drawn by oxen, and Meona had to give them the road and take our chariot on to the grass. I shall never forget the faces of these people, and their kind of dusty vacancy. Mouths hung open; their very eyes seemed to show more of the whites than was normal, the glistening, staring eyes of terror.

We came to the wilder country, and it pleased me with its great woods, and bosky thickets, its wastes of heather, and that adventurous sky. The hills seemed higher, the valleys deeper.

"It is all so very peaceful."

Meona's words were like a sigh, and they touched me.

"So it may be. All this panic may be nothing."

"It is hard to believe, I mean, that such things should happen. Well, let us go down and see."

Almost, I could feel her steel herself to the last and most hazardous and most revealing part of our journey. It was not physical fear that troubled her, but that suspended anguish of the soul. She walked the horses down into the valley, and when the road levelled out, put them at a trot. We were nearing the Wey and the bridge and that little cluster of cottages in the valley. There was the same silence here, the same feeling of emptiness, and I knew that both of us were hungry for some human sound, even a dog's barking. I felt myself alone in a deserted country.

A turn of the road showed us the hamlet and its narrow street. The sun shone upon it, but even before we drove into the little place I had divined its emptiness. And empty it was, doors hanging open, the people gone. I saw no living thing there, nothing that suggested life save some fresh horse-droppings in the middle of the road.

Meona pulled up. She looked white and shocked.

"But which way have they gone? We should have met them."

I suggested that they might have gone to join her people in Honey Valley, but she shook her head.

"No, they have taken to the woods."

Even the woods above us seemed sinister, hiding, perhaps, men who watched and waited like wild beasts for the ambushing of their prey. Meona, with a last look at this deserted place, drove on towards the bridge. Should we find it broken? But the bridge had not been touched; the people had fled and left it defenceless. We looked into each other's eyes, as we drove over the bridge, and the timber echoed to the horses' hoofs and the rumbling of the wheels.

"What shall we find?" her eyes asked me.

I remember feeling my sword, to see that is was loose in the sheath, for I seemed to sense death ahead of us.

IT ALL happened so suddenly that even now it is difficult for me to describe our ambuscado. I suppose that when one is set upon by a couple of savage beasts one is fighting for one's life, the business is a wild and bloody blur, a primitive squall that does not adjust itself to the recordings of subtle details. We were about half a mile from the bridge across the Wey, and skirting a thicket of white-thorns that grew close to the track when the savages rushed out at us.

There were three of them, rough, hairy-looking brutes with bulging blue eyes. They were close on us, and I do know that my first thought was that unless I did something dramatic Meona would be at their mercy. It was not courage but a mad impulse that made me leap out of the chariot with my shield on my arm and my spear ready. The fellows were barking like wild dogs, and their cries frightened the horses. They stampeded, and though Meona told me afterwards that she tried to hold them, they galloped two hundred yards or more before she managed to get control and bring them about.

It has been said that a raw recruit is at his best in his first fight, and certainly I

was raw enough, but I was fighting-mad. I remember realizing that these Saxons were much smaller men than I was, and feeling surprised by the fact. They came at me as though they thought me easy game, and then, the tallest of the three shouted something, and the others laughed and held their rush. It was no sporting spirit, I imagine, that persuaded them to leave the settling of me to their captain, and I had no time for such delicacies.

The savage came at me like a Highlander charging with a claymore, his shield held to cover his body. He had a nasty, red, beefy face, and long yellow teeth which showed between snarling lips. I knew at once that I wanted to kill him. And my luck was in. I held my spear like a javelin, with my shield up, and as he came charging in, I jabbed at him and saw the spear head slide over the top of his big buckler and catch him in the throat. I swung all my weight into it, and gave the spear shaft a vicious twist. The whole business astonished me, the way his angry eyes suddenly grew blind, the spurting of blood, the realization that I had got my man.

He went down and my spear went with him, and the other two rushed at me like mad dogs. This was to be no sporting affair, and never on the football field have I moved more limberly, and dodged and swerved to cheat a tackler. I am pretty quick on my feet, and I had to get my sword out. One of the Saxons, a man with a pug-dog face, had two swings at me with a kind of battle axe, and one blow just brushed my shoulder. My wits were as glib now as my feet. I did what they must have thought to be a bunk, and I sprinted for fifty yards, and looking back over my shoulder, saw that the pug-faced fellow had out-run his comrade. This was my chance, and I flashed around, and caught him as he blundered into me. He had time only to get in a cramped half blow, and it bounced off my helmet and gashed my cheek, and I dug my sword into his belly. But he was not done for; he dropped his axe and clawed me, snarling like a wounded dog. And before I could throw him off, the other fellow was on me and tackling me from behind.

We went down in a three-headed maul. Pug-face was under me, and I dug for his throat, but the other fellow's arm came over my eyes, and I felt metal on my neck. I kicked and heaved to throw him off, while I finished off the man under me, but the other fellow hung on and straddled me, and was preparing, I gather, to cut my throat. We were all panting, and straining, and Pug-face was gurgling and twitching under me.

My shield was hampering my left arm, and the fellow on my back was not discouraged by an elbow-jab in the ribs. I was mad, even though I felt that my number was called, and that I should have my throat slit in two seconds. Then, something happened. I heard the man above me rip out a sharp cry; his body seemed to stiffen above me, and then squirm and relax. I heaved him off and struggled up, and saw Meona with that little dagger in her hand.

But my blood was still up. I was feeling grim, and I made sure with my sword that those two Saxons would fight no more. Then I stood and panted, and looked at Meona, and she at me. The two white horses were close to us.

This was a different Meona. She was dead white, with a blaze in her eyes, and the blood on that bodkin of hers was much more red than her lips.

"Madman, why did you leap from the chariot?"

Good God, was I to face her anger after effacing those two Saxons? The ways of women are beyond all reason!

I panted at her, for my chest was still heaving, and my heart going at a gallop.

"Well, to fight. Would you have had me run away?"

She looked at me and at those dead men and at her dagger, and then she dropped it on the grass. I can only describe what happened to her face as a kind of melting, or as though it had changed from raw fruit to a sudden bitter-sweet ripeness.

"You have blood on your face."

That must have been obvious. The gash on my cheek was not deep, but it was oozing blood over my chin, and dropping on to my breastplate. I put up my hand, touched the warm wetness, stared at my hand.

"Nothing much."

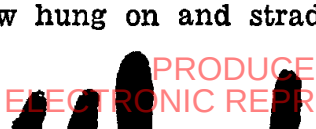
But she came to me quickly, and taking my face between her hands, looked at the wound.

"My friend, this must be seen to. We have only another mile or two to go."

Her hands, eyes and voice thrilled me, but I saw her eyes go to the woods.

"There may be others. Quick."

I was feeling reckless and exultant. I knew that the adventure was mine, and that I was its master.



"Get into the chariot, Meona. Be ready. There are some nice trophies here. Arms may be useful."

I bespoiled the dead men of their arms, shields, swords, an axe, daggers, and tumbled them into the chariot, and going back to the first man to recover my spear I found that he was alive. He had plucked the spear head out of his throat and was clutching the staff. I wrested the thing out of his hands and putting the point into his left eye, jammed the blade home into his brain. My bloody, ruthless temper astonished me. Had I reverted, or was this just life in the raw? I took his shield and sword, and returning, bundled them into the chariot at Meona's feet. Here was a mixed bag of spoil, and I exulted over it. Would they call me a coward now? I climbed in beside Meona. The horses were cropping the grass, with their heads well down, and I remember the smell of the May flower drifting to us.

Meona did not pull at once on the reins, though she knew that any loitering might be hazardous. I felt her eyes upon my face, searching eyes, deep with a questioning scrutiny.

"You have ceased to bleed."

"It is nothing much."

Her next words came in a whisper that might have been the reflection of her thoughts.

"Three men—and you alone."

I think I must have laughed, for there was a savage and monstrous joy rioting in me.

"I was fortunate. I had to run and be clever."

"But the first man."

Had she seen, looked back while she was struggling with the horses?

"Oh yes, I had a lucky thrust at him."

"Yes."

I understood that she wanted me to go on.

"My spear got caught when he went down. I had to dodge the others until I could get my sword out. I stabbed the second fellow, and then had the third on my back. You saved my life, you know."

She pulled suddenly on the reins, and spoke to the horses.

"They ran away with me."

"But you came back. That was brave."

She reached for her whip and gave the whites the lash as though protesting against my praise. Her hand must have been heavier than usual, for the horses broke into a gallop, and we went heaving and bumping along the track, and suddenly I felt dizzy and sat down on the seat.

"Did you think I would not come back?"

I put my hand to my face, for it was beginning to hurt.

"I had not much time to think about anything. It was like being attacked by three wild beasts."

Her voice rang out.

"But you fought them, and slew them."

"Two."

I think she winced. The stabbing of that man had shaken her more than she knew, and I too was feeling shaken now that the business was over. I suppose men feel like that after a rage-storm and savage slaying. My knees were knocking together.

Her sudden cry moved me.

"Oh, let us go home, let us go home."

Fear had come back to her, black, tumultuous fear. I guessed that she was dreading that there might be no home.

THE sun was well in the west and shining down the valley, and never have I seen any country look more lovely and

more peaceful. The light seemed to stroke the grassy hill-sides and leave them velvet; the young green of the beech trees was very brilliant, and the great old yews looked like puffs of black smoke. A trail of dust lay behind us, for Meona was still galloping her horses, and I could see foam flecking from their bits. Great white clouds sailed across the hills in a sky of infinite blueness, and though my head was beginning to ache, there was a great joy in me. I could have tossed my arms and sung.

I was aware of Meona leaning back and pulling on the reins, and then I saw what she had seen, the sunlight shining upon harness and weapons. There were men in the road ahead of us just by the waters of a mere. It was a breathless moment for us, and then Meona waved her whip. She had the eyes of a falcon.

"Festus."

Festus it was, with three other men who had come to scout for us and bring us in. Those three Saxons must have broken away from the main pack and gone hunting on their own. Festus was mounted, and he cantered to meet us, the footmen running at his horse's heels.

He brandished his spear, and looked at Meona, and then at my bloody face.

"You have had fighting, lady."

She had pulled the horses up. She was very calm now.

"Yes, we have had fighting, Festus."

"Where are Ferox and Marcus? Dead?"

"No, we left them at Pontes to guide those who will help us. Look in the chariot, Festus, look."

He looked, and so did the other men, and I shall never forget their blank, fuddled faces.

"Saxon's arms, lady."

"Yes."

"But there are three shields."

"Yes, three shields, Festus. It happened only a little while ago. They ambushed us, and all three are dead. That is how Pellias got his wound."

All four of them were looking at me now, and not at the trophies.

"Pellias slew the three of them?"

"He fought three and slew three."

The men gaped at me. I wanted to confess how she had saved me, but I felt her elbow pressing against my side.

Festus tossed his spear, and smiled at me.

"That is great fighting. Honour to you, brother."

We drove on, with Festus riding beside us, and the footmen trotting behind the chariot.

I could see that Festus was looking lovingly at one of those Saxon swords, and I bent down and picked up the one that had belonged to the chief. I spoke to Meona.

"Shall we give Festus this?"

"It is yours to give."

"No, not mine, Meona."

"Then—ours. Give it to him, if it pleases you."

I passed the sword to Festus just as we reached the village, but he smiled at me, and shook his head.

"That shall be a pledge between us, brother, but not yet. Let it lie there. Such trophies should cheer the hearts of the lads of the village."

At the Manor people had been watching for us, and I heard shouting, and saw men and women crowding out of the gate, though the guards on duty were trying to keep them back. Hands waved. I heard a voice cry, "Our lady is safe! Tell the master!" We drove into the courtyard through a little mob, and the gates were shut behind us. Aurelius Superbus was in the portico, sitting in his state chair. I saw the sun shining on his white head. The suspense was over for him.

Festus seemed to have appointed himself the day's herald. Meona had stepped out of the chariot and gone to embrace her father, but I remained where I was, feeling like a prize calf at a show. Festus had raised his arm, and was speaking to the crowd.

"Look into the chariot, people, and look into Pellias's bloody face."

They crowded round, peering and jostling each other. The little pile of trophies astonished them. They looked at me, at Festus, and at each other.

"Pellias's prize. Three Saxons slain and spoiled! How is that for an omen?"

I could see that they were a little incredulous, especially those men who had watched my ghost-brother turn tail in battle.

They murmured; was this a jest? And where were Ferox and Marcus?

"I am telling you, people. Pellias fought and slew three Saxons. Ask our lady, if you do not believe me. Ferox and Marcus are at Pontes, and help is coming."

The crowd murmured. Some of the men began to handle the dead Saxons' gear.

A voice said, "He must have gone mad."

I was feeling rather a fool, but Meona

came and rescued me. The people gave way before her, and she spoke to them.

"Festus speaks the truth. Three of the savages attacked us, and Pellias slew them. Come, my friend, your wound must be seen to."

But I did not get out of the chariot. I was lifted out of it by the shouting men, and carried on the shoulders of two of them to the portico steps where my lord sat waiting. His face and hair were lit up by the sun. He stretched out a hand to me, and I wondered what he must be thinking of this other Pellias, this futurist ghost.

"Thanks, my son, thanks."

I bent and put my lips to the signet on his hand, and he laid the other hand upon my head.

"Go, get your wound washed and dressed. Such men as you will be precious to us."

Festus had dismounted, and the white horses were brought to the steps of the portico so that Aurelius might see the trophies, and I was telling him that the best of the swords had been promised to Festus when Meona touched my arm.

"Go. Pollux is here to serve you. That wound must be cleansed."

Those were orders, but it was a sweet tyranny that she exercised, and I followed Pollux who was waiting for me. He took me to the bath-chamber, and in the bath-chamber was kept what one would describe as the house's first-aid cabinet. A woman brought warm water in a basin, and Pollux made me sit on a stool while he dealt with me. He was excessively affable and suave, and it was obvious that I had become a hero. He employed a swab of stuff that looked like dried sphagnum moistened in water to wash my clotted face and chin, but he used a sweet oil on the wound itself, and finished off with some unguent that smelt of herbs.

I asked him if the wound would need stitches.

"No, sir. I can draw the edges together with plaster."

His fingers were as deft as his manners, and when he had finished with me he showed me my face in a mirror, and I saw one half of my countenance decorated with criss-crosses of plaster in the shape of a star.

A servant came to us with a message.

"My lord will speak with you when Pollux has finished."

I got up from the stool, but Pollux restrained me.

"Sit awhile, until the plaster has set."

I looked at my hands. There was dried blood on them, and I had not noticed it before. Pollux washed my hands for me and anointed them with oil, and then, as though he could not do enough for me, he drew off my shoes and washed my feet.

After that I went out to the garden, and stood awhile, thinking of the strange dream I was now living through.

"PELLIAS." It was Meona.

I came out of my dream, and saw her standing below me, and again she was different to my eyes. She looked slighter, more fragile, and her eyes were dark velvet.

"What are you doing?"

"Thinking. And I should be watching."

"Let me stand there with you."

She put out her hands, and I helped her up. The platform of the look-out was no more than a yard square, and we were very close together and leaning upon the wall. She had come from the bath, and her body smelt of some sweet perfume, but in my super-sensuous mood she smelt of paradise. She put her face between her hands and gazed, and I could divine in her a melancholy the shadow of the death we had escaped, and of the dead we had on our souls.

The sun was low, and the shadow of the wooded hill crept over us. I felt her shiver.

"Do men die utterly, my friend, or do their ghosts walk?"

I said, "I think the spirit must survive?"

Her face looked wounded.

"Poor ghosts, poor shadows. I have made a ghost. And yet—"

I wanted to touch her, to comfort this other Meona who was woman.

"But for you I should have been a poor, pale ghost."

Again she shivered.

"Are men born to blood and death?"

"We slay that we may not be devoured."

"Yes, yes, but we women, who should bear children? Like throwing good bread into the sea. I am troubled, my friend, I am troubled."

I dared to touch her hand, and she did not flinch from me, and then I found myself uttering a platitude about a war to end war. How one humbugs oneself with words, or allows a Hitler to do it for one. There can be no end to war so long as man has that instinct for power, especially so when he is feeling inferior. The old Romans did not have to shout and swag-

ger and sweat in an attempt to convince the rest of the world that they were marvelous fellows. But what had this to do with Meona? She had been so innocent in her fierceness and her courage, and yet, when she had found real blood upon her hands, she had been shocked by it. She was dove as well as falcon, and my love was glad that she should be so.

The sun was below the hills, and the light was beginning to fail, and in the silence of the valley we could hear voices and the sound of horses' hoofs, and the tramp of men. We looked at each other.

"It is Robur."

"We must welcome him."

I jumped down, and put up my hands to help her, but she smiled at me in a strange way, and I knew that she did not wish to be touched. I did not feel that she had rebuffed me. Her elusiveness was far, far more subtle than that.

"More men, my friend, more strength."

We passed down the garden and through the house to the portico. Aurelius was there, leaning upon his stick. The gates were opened, and Robur rode in, and I saw in the road behind him a whole press of mounted men. The afterglow shown upon their harness. Robur brought his horse through the crowd in the courtyard, and his fierce red face was jocund. He saluted my lord.

"We have done better than I thought, sir. I have purloined thirty of Pontius's cavalry."

His white teeth flashed in his brick-red face.

"Purloin is a good word, sir, but the fellows were fed up with Master Pontius. They chose to come with me."

Aurelius smiled upon Robur.

"How many men have you, my friend?"

"Some forty horse and twenty foot."

"That is a brave succour. Why, sir, we have a small army in the making! Well, we can feed and lodge you at a pinch. And may the gods be with us."

Old Robur swung himself off his horse, and stretched his legs.

"I am a little old and stiff, my lord, but not too stiff for a fight. We have left our prize eunuch at Pontes. That is Pontius's trouble, sir, he cannot make up his mind whether he is man or woman."

We laughed. Robur was good for one's courage.

"Let us go in and eat and drink, my friend," said Aurelius, "and then we will talk. Pellias, find Festus, and bring him in with you. The fighting men shall hold council together."

CHAPTER V

THE western window of the summer-room was lit by the afterglow, and Meona went to sit in the window-seat while we men gathered round the table. Robur sat on my lord's right hand, I on his left, with Festus next to me. Gildas, my lord's secretary, came shuffling in, to stand, tablets in hand, behind Aurelius's chair. I did not like Gildas.

He had a smooth, suave, sallow face, and one of those mean little puckered-up mouths that make a man look superior and supercilious. His eyes were small, like his mouth, eyes that never seemed to move in his head, and yet gave you the impression of seeing everything, like the bright black eyes of a rat. Meat and drink were brought to us, but Meona took her meat and drink in the window-seat. A servant had set a small table by her knee, and she was like a figure in a frieze, dark and aloof against the saffron sky.

That which is most vivid to me is the memory of her lovely little head seen in profile against the afterglow. There was a new strangeness in its perfect contours, the curve of the forehead, the shadow of the brows, the haughty little nose, the soft lines of the lips and chin. The set of her head was just as lovely, and the sudden transit from the midnight of her hair to the exquisit shapeliness of her neck. I was conscious of a sudden, sharp anguish as I sat and gazed at her.

She seemed to me to be so incredibly lovely and aloof, so unattainable, so poignantly apart from me, and what was I but a ghost, and she a creature of some other world? I suppose love, tragic love, takes one in this way, but the supreme anguish and exaltation of it were new to me. I felt that death must be near, because she was so lovely, and because of the strange anguish she caused me. I could not believe, somehow, that we had ever been so close as we had been on that look-out in the garden. She seemed part of the afterglow, an immaterial, legendary creature, yet immeasurably alive. It wounded me to look at her.

But I seemed to become conscious of some other scrutiny. I might be gazing at Meona, but other eyes were upon me, and not with blind adoration. I glanced up and sideways and found Gildas watching

me. In common parlance one has heard of eyes being like gimlets, but Gildas' eyes were like corkscrews extracting my secret. I imagine that it was not a very obdurate cork. A mere touch of the thumb would have sent it to the ceiling. I saw a little disapproving, oily smirk smear itself across that sallow face. It became cold and prim and anonymous. Gildas stood with his hands folded over his tablets, gazing into space. Perhaps he had realized that I was not a safe man to be observed in that way. I was not. I was a fighting man, and pert, peering scribblers were not creatures to be humoured.

Gildas and the servants had been dismissed, and Aurelius was speaking to us. His voice seemed part of the twilight. I saw a bat go fluttering across the pale slip of sky outside the window. Meona's hair was black as jet, her face a cameo in ivory.

"My friends," he said, "has any one of you a plan?"

Robur and I looked at each other across the table, I saw his teeth white and smiling in the dusk. His tongue came out and moistened a terse, dry lip.

"Sir, let us hear what the hot blood has to say." He nodded his head at me.

"Hot blood and old head, but let the blood sing first. Then, I may put a cap on it."

Aurelius turned to me, and his hair was like a halo. A moment ago I had nothing to say, but words seemed to come into my mouth, and with them word-pictures welled up into my consciousness. I might have been inspired.

"Lord, I would not wait for the Saxons to bring war to us. I would carry it to them."

"Speak your mind, my son."

"I take it, lord, that we have no strong body of these people near us. We have to deal with raiding parties. Moreover, these savages must think that the countryside is theirs for the taking, and that there is no one to counter them. The surprise can be of our choosing. Let us go out and fall upon them."

I was looking at Meona, and I saw her head turn full face to me. Her eyes were dark hollows, but I seemed to divine a swift flash in them.

"And the women and children, my son?"

"I would send them away, lord, to safer country. We can hold this place as a rallying point, and use all our strength to strike."

I felt Festus's hand upon my shoulder.

"Good for you, brother, good for you."

Aurelius turned to Robur, and I saw old Robur's profile in the twilight, the eagle nose, the tight lips, the hard round forehead. Then, those lips parted and spoke like the lips of a shadow-head.

"Pellias is our oracle. Let us send the women and children away, and fight for this island."

There was a movement, and Meona came to stand behind her father's chair. She stood there for a moment, very still and straight, and I felt her eyes upon me.

"Pellias has spoken as a man should speak. Let the women go."

She had her hands upon her father's shoulders, and he took one of them in his, and drew it down.

"You, child, shall be in charge of the women."

I was watching her face, and thinking how mysterious one face could be. Also, I was stabbed by the thought that I had spoken words that were recoiling upon themselves. Let the women go, and Meona would go with them! Good God, did I want her to stay in this most perilous place, so that I might see her day by day, even though my looking upon her brought me anguish? God forgive me, I both wanted her to stay with us, and to go.

The room was growing dark, and her silence seemed part of the darkness. I saw her bend, and lay her cheek against her father's head. She spoke, and her voice had a whispering hollowness.

"No, I shall stay."

Aurelius smiled. He put up a hand and clasped her head.

"Oh, no, you won't, my dear. We shall want no such hostages to fate."

"I will stay," said she.

I saw the caressing movement of the old man's hand. It was as though he had to deal with a passionate and high-spirited child.

"Let the council of war decide. It is our right to choose, as men, men who have to face reality."

His eyes were on Robur, and there was no shilly-shallying about Robur. His words were dry and pertinent.

"The lady must go, sir. We shall have enough hazard without such a treasure-chest to guard."

I felt Festus make a quick movement.

"I disagree, lord. Such courage and such a presence would make any falterer brave."

Aurelius turned to me, and I heard my voice uttering words that seemed to come of themselves.

"Your daughter must go."

I felt her eyes upon me, great, tragic, mysterious eyes in a dim, white face. She seemed about to speak, but her father spoke before her.

"Two against one. And I make the third, and approve the verdict. All women must go."

I DO not know why I did the thing I did. There was a kind of madness in it, the madness of a man who should be husbanding his strength and sleeping, but whose spirit will not let him rest. We had posted our guards and made all secure for the night, and given orders for the wagons and horses to be ready at early dawn.

Our first sally was to be something of an adventure in search of supplies, for, with a hundred men to feed, stores were necessary. We were to raid the deserted homesteads, and each man was to ride home with a sheep or a sack of corn across his horse. I had taken off my harness, but I could not rest. The anguish of this sudden love was too sharp in me. I wandered out into the courtyard and made the guards open the gate for me, and my new prestige was such that they did not question my orders. I told them that I was going to climb the hills, and look north and south to see if any place had been fired by our enemies.

It was a superb night, still and sweet, and ablaze with stars. I could hear the stream running. The darkness was a gentle darkness, and when one's eyes were used to it, the earth seemed to be lit by astral light. Objects were quite plain to me. I crossed the brook by a footbridge, and climbed to that little stretch of open land, grass and arable, that ran between the woods and the water. It was like a gently sloping terrace, and in my other world, in the other Albury that I knew, this sweep of wheat and of grass hanging on the hillside between the high woods and the lush green valley, had always seemed to me particularly strange and lovely.

The path led up through an orchard, and each tree was a distinct and shadowy shape. The sky above the high woods blazed stars. There was not a sound to be heard save the fall of the water at the mill-weir down below. I have never known a night more still, with a velvety black stillness that we moderns do not understand. I suppose there may have been nature sounds that were unfamiliar to me, and so passed unregistered, the prowlings and scufflings of creatures of the night, badgers and pole-cats and weasels. Owls would be on the wing, but the night's wings were noiseless. I found a beech tree, and sitting down on a great clawed root, let my head and shoulders rest against the trunk.

I cannot have been there more than half a minute when I heard a little sound in the darkness below me, and so small and vague was it that I could not decide upon its cause. I sat and listened. The sound suggested something moving in the grass, a wild thing on the prowl, and then a certain rhythm in it became apparent. Swish-swish. There was a pause between each sibilant stroke, which, in the utter stillness of the night, was like a hand smoothing out silk. I understood. Feet were brushing through the grass. Who was it? Had I been followed? I stood up and held my breath, under the black vault of the great tree.

Then, I was able to distinguish a shape. It had moved, but now it was motionless. The swish-swish of the caressed grasses had ceased. I felt my heart beating. Even before I challenged that vague figure, a premonition stabbed me.

"Who's that?"

"Meona."

Had I not known it, somehow?

"Ye gods, you should not be here!"

I must have blurted out the words rather fiercely, and I heard her give back a little laugh that seemed to mock me.

"Are you afraid, Pellias?"

I believe that I have always been rather a fool about women, I mean, in my attitude to them, that of the dear simpleton whose directness glances off a woman's more oblique moods. I have failed to remember that a woman may be a creature of vanity, and that the love-game may be fancy-dress to her. Lucy was not like that, and I suppose that is why she married me. She was a completely sincere person, so wise and candid, and such good friends with herself that she never played tricks with you. I doubt whether it ever occurred to Lucy that a man could be a cad.

I said, "You should not be here, but inside those walls."

She countered me, "And you?"

I felt like telling her to go back by the

way she had come, and that if she did not go I would pick her up and carry her. One has heard so much in these modern days of enlightened feminism and its revolt against the male in man, but I am afraid my feeling about it is that there is an elemental sensuousness in every woman that reacts to man's strength and forcefulness. She may pretend to despise it, and to be nauseated by it, but the organic reality is there. I hesitated, and she came nearer, and stood so near that I could have touched her.

"And you, my friend, what are you doing here?"

I told her that I had felt restless.

"Is that the prerogative of man? The men at the gate told me."

Her pausing was like a challenge.

"What did they tell you?"

"That you were going up to the hills to look for any sign of fire."

I said, "And so I am. If I see any place burning in the distance, I shall know where our enemies may be found. And now, you will go back."

She answered me calmly.

"No, I am coming with you."

She may have been woman, and the child of her own colouring, a dark flower, intense, elusive, incalculable in her moods and vanities, and sometimes strangely cruel, but she was never a coward, or one who gave you a little cold moral snub when your heart was hungry. I think I was to love her for her lovely courage more than for anything else. She did not wilt, or become cold mutton, and even if she wounded you, it was a passionate stab, and not a school-marm's rap over the knuckles.

I said, "Are you mad?"

Her retort was instant. "Why should I not be as mad as any man?"

I think both of us must have been mad on that exquisite night. I told her I was unarmed, and I asked her to let me go back and buckle on my sword, but she stood and looked at the stars, and made a kind of singing murmur as women will when they are happy. I had known Lucy make just a little song to herself when we had danced together as sweethearts.

She said, "Will the wolves eat us, or the terrible savages catch us? These woods are as secret as death, and I know the way."

Her words left me voiceless. She had the strange and most rare gift of giving back in words something that had an elemental rightness, the poetry of passion. She had no little blank phrases, those conventional clichés that shock one into realizing how shallow is the feeling behind them. Had she said to me, "Well, really!" or, "Get on with it," or "Sez you," I should not have known the exquisite anguish of loving her, for, in that way she was destined to be loved.

SHE led the way along the edge of the wood until we came to a cleft in the high foliage. The path was like a narrow, winding passage between towering trees. I saw the strip of sky and the stars. It seemed even more still here, though our feet made a rustling amid last year's dead leaves. Yet the path was wide enough for us to walk side by side, and suddenly I felt her hand slip round my arm. For a second or two I went rigid. The exquisite shock of feeling that soft hand and wrist resting there seemed to make me dumb and blind.

Then I must have realized that she trusted me, and I think I was never happier in my life, though I could not find anything to say to her, nor did she say anything to me. We climbed the hill-side, linked together, through the strange gloom of the great wood, with the strip of star-lit sky above us. The silence was our silence, mysterious and immeasurably sweet.

The trees ended suddenly. There was no gradual thinning of the trunks. They ran like a great palisade along the shoulder of the hill. The downs were above us. They might have been part of the sky, save that they had no stippling of stars. The path went on, it must have been a very old trackway, for the turf was sleek and firm, and kept short by rabbits. There was rough tussock grass on either side of it, still showing grey and hoary under the stars. Scattered yews and thorns and wayfaring trees peopled the slopes, and for a moment these dim nature-shapes troubled me. I stiffened; my head went up. How was one to tell a bush from some enemy-man?

I felt Meona's hand press my arm.

"They are friends, Pellias. I know them all."

I said, "That may be so, but I am mad to let you come up here."

She gave a little laugh.

"Well, we are both mad. It is good to be mad when the stars are shining. Blood should be blood, not sour milk."

We went on up the path towards the

long brow where the Ridgeway ran as it must have run for centuries, and suddenly she asked me that question.

"Why did you give your choice against my staying?"

There was only one answer to that, and I gave it her.

"Because you are precious."

"And what if I refuse to go?"

"That would hurt some of us, your father. In a bloody business like this—"

"Do women have no share? Do men think so? How you love to feel masterful!"

"My dear, it is not only that. We fear for what we—"

The word was nearly out of my mouth, but I smothered it, which was, I suppose, foolish. So few people understand one's reticences, the things one leaves unsaid, but I think she must have known what was in my heart. Her hand remained crooked over my arm, and we stood side by side on the dark hill-side, looking over a mysterious world that seemed infinite. There were no lights anywhere, save in the sky where the stars shone. Strange streaks of mist out across the hill-tops, and some of the valleys were pocketed with vapour. Hurtwood, Hascombe, Hazlemere and Hindhead were vague outlines.

I thought of them by their modern names, and was struck by the silly reflection that they all began with H. I remembered that I must have stood near here with Lucy, looking at the same landscape, though how different was the material scene. There should be scattered lights pricking the darkness, perhaps the noise of a train running in the valley, the stridor of cars accelerating up the steep hill to Newland's Corner. But here was an almost primeval stillness. Those pools of mist might have been water, and we, two survivors of a dead world, landed from some Ark on this hill-top, while the flood still lay in the valleys.

I heard her speak to me.

"Do you see anything, Pellias?"

"Everything and nothing."

"No burning homesteads?"

"Not one."

A little, vagrant breeze blew along the ridge, and made a sudden sibilant sound of unrest in the grass and bushes. The night seemed to shiver. I wanted to put my arm round her, but did not dare to.

"Time to go back."

I felt that fear was abroad, and that the wind had been like the wings of death passing over us, and she must have felt as I did.

"Yes. The world is different, Pellias. How different! A little while ago there was no fear here."

The same impulse seemed to move us, and, as though stepping out together to the first note of some mysterious tune, we turned and went down the hill towards the fenced darkness of the woods. I was thinking of the to-morrow and of her leaving the valley with the women and children, and that I might not see her again. What if this dream passed, and I found myself back in a world where one caught the 8:55 to Town each morning, wearing tame clothes and a bowler hat? Did I want that to happen? There would be no Meona in that world, no hazards and mystery and adventure, unless that foul beast Hitler and the cold and sneering Ribbentrop let the German mad-dog loose on Europe. For the first time I realized that I wanted this dream to last. But was it a dream, or reality, and that other world the dream?

We were deep among the trees, and she must have felt the depth of my self-questioning. It occurred to me to wonder whether she had divined anything strange in me, as her father had done. Had that other Pellias—? But that was unthinkable. And yet! We came suddenly out on to the hill-side, and she paused there, and I, with her.

She did not ask me what my thoughts were. She let her hand slip from my arm, and I knew that she was going to leave me where she had found me, but she stood for a moment, looking down into the valley as though its darkened mood was hers.

"How things change! Even you, my friend."

So, I too was different, not the Pellias of a week ago, but a man who had fought for her, and who owed his life to her. Was it just that?

I said, "There are reasons why we change," and felt that I had said a silly, banal thing. Should I ever be able to tell her the truth, or would she divine it? Moreover, I might never see her again, after to-morrow. I might be snuffed out in some obscure scuffle with these savages. I wanted to tell her certain things, and I could not do so.

"Good night, my friend."

I was mute. I watched her pass down the hill, and become a dim shape that

melted into the darkness. Again I heard the sound of the grass caressing her feet. Then, there was silence, utter silence. I sat down under the great beech tree, and fell to marvelling at the blessed hour we had spent together.

If it had given me nothing else, it had given me the conviction that she trusted me.

THE morning when the women left us was perfect. The birds sang me up, and I saw the early sunlight shining upon the trees of the great wood through which Meona and I had wandered together. I felt a kind of anguish as I thought of her. I put on my harness, for I and thirty men were to convoy the women and children as far as the bridge across Wey near Guildford. Ten of our mounted men were to ride with them as far as Calleva. From Calleva they would travel on to Aurelius Ambrosius's country near Sabiodunum, and Meona carried a letter to her uncle, explaining how desperate things were with us, and asking for help.

Robur and I strolled out into the deserted village, and walked back by the stream towards Aurelius's manor. I was flung back suddenly into my own and other life. I felt desolated, miserable, once more a ghost blown passionately hither and thither in a gusty world of tragic provocations.

Robur's men were grooming their horses in the orchard, and some of them stopped to stare at me as we passed. So, the tale had spread, and I was the village hero, the slayer of dragons. I was not feeling at all heroic at the moment. We passed on in to the courtyard, and a servant standing on the portico steps came down to tell us that the morning meal was ready. I let Robur lead the way, and took cover behind him. We found Aurelius eating bread and honey, and dictating a letter to Gildas. Meona was still in the window-seat, and was being served there.

Robur saluted Aurelius and I sat down at the far end of the table, and fell upon my food like a man who had a train to catch. There was fish, and cold boiled eggs, bread, honey and small beer. I had no great stomach for the meal, but I stuffed the food away as though eating was the one and only thing that mattered. I did not look at Meona. Aurelius finished his dictation, and he and Robur began to talk about the invasion, and how the gentry of the west might be rallied to counter it. They spoke of places and people that were strange to me, and I was feeling an alien, a poor ghost cramming food that it did not desire. I kept my eyes to myself. I wanted to get this romantic business over, and go out with men to fight. I felt both savage and miserable, but fear was not in me.

I was aware of Meona rising and standing behind her father's chair. I was stuffing down bread and honey, and I made it appear that that was the only activity that interested me. I heard her say, "Give me the letter. I will go out and see that all is ready." Aurelius said something about Gildas carrying the letter in his wallet, but she would not have it so. I think Aurelius gave her the letter, and she passed behind me, and went out of the room. Her footsteps seemed soundless, not like those footsteps that had swept through the sibilant grasses.

Aurelius was asking for Festus, and I told him that Festus had taken his horse and gone up to the hills to spy out the land. Robur had his beer-mug in his hand, and was gazing down into it like an old woman conning fortunes from tea-leaves. But Robur was no old woman.

"This may help us, sir, if it has been left behind in the homesteads."

I did not get his meaning at the moment, but Aurelius was quicker than I.

"The German habit, my friend."

"Yes, sir, they can be sodden swine, and lie late, snoring when the sun is up. And that is a hint from the gods."

He looked at me.

"The earlier the deed, the better the promise. If I were friend Pellias I would get my convoy and its escort on the road while the swine may be sleeping off some orgy."

I stood up, and faced Aurelius.

"It is sound counsel, lord. Have I orders to take the road?"

"Yes, my son, but I have changed my mind as to the length of your journey. You and your men will see my daughter and the women to Calleva. They will be safe for the night within the city walls, and from Calleva they can send a message to my brother. You will lodge there for the night, and then rejoin us."

Was I glad or sorry? Emotions, like motives, are apt to be mixed.

"Then, I go at once, sir."

"Yes, my son, waste no time."

I saluted Aurelius, smiled at Robur, and with Gildas went out into the courtyard.

Meona was there, standing on the stone steps of the water-cistern, and giving orders as though she and not I was in command of the convoy. The white horses had been hitched to her chariot and the wagons were laden, and our escort ready to mount. A groom held the horse that had been assigned to me, and I'll confess that I looked at the beast a little anxiously, for as a modern I was not much of a man in the saddle. And was this body my own, or the body of brother Pellias? If it were his, and the spirit mine, then perhaps I might not fear for my horsemanship.

Meona saw me, and raised the whip she held.

"Get your men mounted, Pellias. We are ready."

So, she was giving me orders, and it did not please me, no, not at all. The wagons were at their horse's heads, and my fellows did not wait for my orders. My lady's voice had been sufficient. I walked up to my horse. He was a black beast, lean and fidgety, and with an angry, furtive eye. I thought, "I am going to have trouble with you, my lad."

I got on his back successfully, and headed him for the gate. I shouted to my men, "Half of you ride ahead with me. Half follow the wagons." I looked back for a second, and saw my troopers filing out of the gate. I had some trouble with my horse, but soon I had him under control.

WE HAD left the manor and the village far behind us. The road swung to the south-west, and I saw ahead of me a grove of old yew trees and beyond them the gleam of water. A smother of flowering thorns hid the stream, and the smell of them and the sight of those dark yews was like the sudden lifting of a curtain. Here was the place where Meona and I had had our adventure with the Saxons. We had sent out men to bury them, and I saw three brown mounds beside the road.

My horse and I were within twenty yards of the graves when I heard the sound of hoofs and the rattle of wheels behind me. I pulled up and looking back saw Meona and her white horses coming at a fast trot, and behind her rode a dozen of our mounted men. Gildas was with her in the chariot, and I was not feeling friendly towards Aurelius's secretary.

I waited for Meona and her chariot.

The wagons came up with us. There were four of them, great clumsy things like boats on wheels. We were still in wooded country, and as I rode on ahead of our convoy I realized how easy it would be for the Saxons to ambuscade us. I was trying to make up my mind as to how one should meet such an attack. Form a screen round the wagons and charge the beasts if one had time? And then I remembered that the country opened out towards the Wey, and was like parkland stippled with trees, and but for an occasional wood, cover was less threatening.

My advance-guard were riding some twenty yards behind me, and I called up the man whom I had christened to myself the Sergeant-Major. He was a little, thick, ugly fellow with a bull's throat, and arms and legs like bolsters but he was all muscle, not fat. I liked the look of his swarthy, humorous pug. His name was Ursus, and it suited him.

"Ursus," said I, "if these savages should break out of the woods on us, I mean to charge them. Let us take the fight to them, and so give the women and children a chance to scatter and hide. How does it strike you?"

Ursus grinned at me, and when he grinned his broad nose spread itsef between deep creases.

"Yes, let us ride at them Captain."

"Will your men play their part?"

"Sure, sir," said he, "if you and I show the way, they will follow."

I smiled at Ursus, and told him to go and warn his troopers that we should charge the enemy if he showed himself. I was taking my authority with great seriousness.

I pulled up and off the road, let Ursus and his men go by, and waited for the white horses of Meona. She was leading the string of wagons, sitting on the painted, leather-covered seat, and Gildas was walking beside the left-hand wheel. I was glad that she had extruded Master Gildas, for I had words to speak to my lady, words that might not please her. If I was the fighting man in charge of these people, I was going to give my orders and have them obeyed.

I saluted her as she drew level with me.

"May I speak with your ladyship?"

She gave me one of those black, straight glances, and turning her head, bade Gildas drop behind. I put my horse beside the chariot, and looking down the road, spoke to her as the trusted servant of her father. I said that I held myself responsible for her and for the women and children, and that if any marauding band of Saxons fell on us, I and my troopers were going to

charge them. Meanwhile, my orders were that she was to gallop her horses for the nearest cover, and that the women and children were to scatter and hide while we did our best to cut the throats of the Germans.

She too looked straight ahead of her down the road.

"So, you give me orders, Pellias."

"I do."

"Do you think I shall obey them?"

If we were going to quarrel I decided that it was best to be thorough.

"I am in charge, and you will obey me."

I saw her face flash round. She bent forward and gathered the spear from the basket-sheath on the splash-board.

"I shall not obey you. I shall gallop my horses at the barbarians and charge with you."

I was feeling hot about the ears, and I tried irony.

"Like a veritable Boadicea! Let me suggest that you would be a nuisance to us."

She caught me up instantly.

"As I was yonder, the other day."

In a sense, she had me, and both my wounds of face and heart were feeling raw. I glanced back to see how near Gildas was to us, and found that he had climbed up into the first wagon. Probably, he had fastidious feet!

I said, "That favour was mutual, so we may forget it. I ask you not to hinder me, but to remember how heavy a burden lies on my shoulders."

She gave me an upward look, and it seemed less fierce.

"You are growing masterful, my man."

"If I am man, would you have me otherwise? I am no tame cat like Gildas."

She did not answer me at once, but she slipped the spear back into its holder.

"I will think on it, my friend."

"Ponder the last two words," I said, and rode on to join Ursus at the head of the men.

But no mischance befell us, and it must have been about eight o'clock in the morning when we reached the bridge across the Wey.

I was feeling bitter and haughty, and taking my dignity with supreme seriousness. Almost, I was regretting that we had not clashed with the savages from over the sea, and that I had no chance to let my anger loose, and dig my spear into some German belly. One of my men was carrying my spear for me, like a medieval squire, and appeared quite proud of being my armour-bearer. He was a lean, dark lad named Morgan.

We climbed the Hog's Back, with the horses labouring at the creaking wagons, and half-way up the hill I ordered the women to get out and walk. They were quite ready to humour me, and I gathered from their cheerful chatter and the way they looked at me that they considered me some fellow. I was Pellias, Dux and Fighting Man. We did not take the road to Pontes, but followed the chalk ridge, and in retrospect, or forespect, I saw cars parked on the grass and people picnicking there. And I saw the same blue hills in the west, diaphanous and strange, and I knew that beyond them lay Calleva.

I MUST confess that I was excited by the thought of seeing this Roman town. I happened to know the Silchester of my day, the isolated church and farm, the grass-grown amphitheatre, that grey flint city-wall running its mysterious circuit and clasping those broad fields of wheat. The wall that I knew was ivy-smothered and tufted with bushes and young trees, but the wall I saw as we crossed the plateau towards the east gate, was black and clean and vivid. We had covered some twenty-five miles, and the wagon horses were very weary, and I saw Calleva against the evening sky, clear cut and strange, and moving me to inexplainable emotion.

Had I been here before? Had I any prescience that could prove it and the inward significance of this dream adventure? I saw the east gate ahead of us, battlemented and towered, and with its twin black mouths of entry. I saw the stuccoed walls of the houses coloured cream and rose and yellow, the red pantiled roofs, the green trees in the gardens. I saw the roof of the basilica shining like a great sheet of old gold, and near it a little figure posed on a column.

I cannot say why, but there flashed into my consciousness a picture of a shop that sold wine, with earthenware jars and drinking vessels, and a fat, swarthy woman filling a pannikin. Behind the shop rose a temple, with deep shadows under its portico. There were a couple of town-guards at the gate, and I saw one or two watchers on the wall. The gates were shut at sunset, but the men let us through, and we clattered and rumbled through the gate-tunnels into the town. I was riding ahead, and suddenly I saw my wine-shop, and the stone counter and the earthen-

ware jars, and behind it rose the temple. Even the plump, dark woman was there, serving out drinks to a couple of soldiers.

I was a little dazed by the strangeness of the thing. My spirit gaped. Why, of all things, should I remember this? And what significance for me had that swarthy Hebe who sold wine? Had she been my mother or my sweetheart? I think I went on riding in a state of obfuscation up East Street, but the rumbling wheels of Meona's chariot recovered me.

I pulled aside to where some lime-trees shaded a little Place. Meona was standing in her chariot, looking black-browed and tired, and pinched about the nostrils.

"Have you forgotten the way?"

How was I to remember it? Nor did I know whither we were bound? So, why should she be peevish with me?

"Whither would my lady go? To an inn?"

Almost her eyes said, "Fool, have your wits left you?" Our convoy had halted, and people stared at us. More fugitives! I was to discover that Calleva was full of those who had fled from the German terror. Gildas came running up, and his waddle made me think of the running of a woman.

"Gildas, our leader has forgotten."

Gildas gave me a sneering look. It seemed to say, "Bumpkins get lost in town."

"Your uncle's house, lady?"

"Of course."

So, Aurelius Ambrosius had a town-house in Calleva, and our objective had been so obvious that it had not been mentioned to me.

"West Street, Master Pellias," said Gildas, as though speaking to a poodle, "past the Forum and over the cross-roads."

I rode on.

Calleva fascinated me, so much so that I forgot Meona's petulance. Maybe, she was born to be passionate and petulant by turns, and there should be other obsessions in a man's life besides the lure of sex. Calleva was completely Roman in its atmosphere and lay-out, its streets, and alleys crossing each other at right angles, and plotting it into insulæ.

The roadway was paved with cobbles, and very clean. We passed shops, villas, some set in their own gardens and shut in by high walls. Most of the shops were shut at this hour. There were fewer people in the streets than I expected, and the population of this Romano-British town was more sophisticated and dressy than the countryfolk of Honey Valley. I saw young men with their heads curled, and I was reminded of some modern playboys.

We were approaching the forum and the basilica, Calleva's heart, and though we passed it on the northern side I had an oblique view through the colonnade of the crowd that filled the forum. It was a colourful crowd, in its semi-Roman dress, suggesting both British woad and Tyrian purple. Some orator appeared to be making a speech from the rostrum, though the declaiming voice came to me blurred by the grinding of our wheels and the clatter of horses' hoofs.

What was the orator's subject? Was he preaching a crusade against the invading Teuton, or delivering a Hitler howl because the city council had put a penny on the rates? But I forgot the voice and the listening crowd in seeing Gildas go scuffling ahead, holding up his skirts like a woman. We were passing the northern façade of the basilica and I saw a broadish street running towards the setting sun. It seemed to be a more sumptuous street, both in its atmosphere and its houses. Here were mansions and gardens, and I saw Gildas stop before a great gate in a high wall, and put his hand to an iron bell-pull. We had reached the town house of my lord's noble brother.

I AND my horse arrived outside the gate at the moment one leaf of it was opened, and a porter put out his head and surveyed us. We must have astonished him, for, after hearing a few words from Gildas, he disappeared like a cuckoo into a clock. Meona had walked her white horses up to the gate, and our wagons and troopers filled the roadway.

"Whither has the fool flown?"

If she was feeling tired and petulant, so was I, in a particular place. I was not hardened to the saddle, and I was feeling damned sore.

Gildas was Agag to her.

"My lord is away on his estate, but the Lady Priscilla is here. The porter has gone for her."

I saw Meona's lips tighten. My aunt! If that was her inward exclamation, it was to be justified. I heard voices in the fore-court suggestive of the pother in a chicken-run after the laying of an egg. My Lady Priscilla appeared at the gate, and instantly I christened her Medusa. She was a lean, tetchy, tall woman in the late forties, with a snake's head of hair

all crimped up and stuffed with bodkins. She had a mean mouth, a long, undulating nose, and small beady brown eyes. She threw up her hands when she saw us.

"Bless my soul, what is all this?"

I saw scorn and dislike on Meona's face. I think she said that there was war in Britain even if Aunt Priscilla had not heard of it.

My men had dismounted, and I ordered them to draw to the side of the road, and let the wagons in. Aunt Medusa had followed her niece, and I heard her shrill voice scolding and calling for servants. I was asking myself whether I should let my troopers follow the wagons into the courtyard when the question was decided for me by half a dozen menservants who came running across the court, and who banged the gates to and barred them. So, that was that! Aunt Medusa did not intend to house any soldiery. I looked at Ursus, and he grinned at me.

"Better luck elsewhere, Captain. Good wine instead of vinegar."

Ursus was a philosopher, and a sound fellow, and I agreed with him. Did he know of a good inn where we could lodge? He said there was a caravanserai near the Baths, and that if that was full he knew of another place. I told my men to mount, and with a glance at those forbidding gates, and with Ursus beside me we clattered back toward the Forum. The promise of a bath was pleasant, also, the application of some soothing unguent to my chafed backside. We turned right into South Street along the back of the Basilica, and I could hear the voice of the orator still baying the moon.

We found our inn. It was in South Street, and not far from the Temple of Mars. It had been full of refugees, whom, the City Council not being very welcoming, had passed on to other patrons in the west. I think that was part of Britain's tragedy, the selfishness of the towns, and their commercial short-sightedness. I gather that the struggle against the Saxons was carried on the shoulders of the country gentry and the peasants, while the towns peddled safety-first behind their walls, and died of gradual inanition.

The innkeeper accepted us. He said that he had had a glut of women and children, and he preferred men who were men and could drink and spend money.

Gildas had a wallet on him. It appeared that the secretary was both banker and accountant. Possibly, a gentleman was not supposed to vex himself about the settling of bills. He had become more politely familiar to me, had Gildas, but it was the suavity of the cur that would bite if it dared.

"My lord bade me settle all bills, Pellias."

A boy guided me to the Thermæ. They lay beyond the Temple of Mars, and if anything was needed to convince me how much more clean and civilized Roman Britain was than the beer and belly culture of the Anglo-Saxon period, these Baths of Calleva did so. They were neither Buxton nor Bath, nor sacred to the sick and the doting. The main building stood in a fine courtyard surrounded by a cloister, and its flint and tile walls and rust-red roof had a depth of colour that was very pleasing. There was a garden, and alleys planted with line trees, and a playing-ground, and a library and lounge. The boy left me at the porter's lodge where I was given a little bone plaque. In the courtyard two young men were boxing, with a small crowd watching them. Two girls, wandering round arm in arm, gave me challenging, jocund glances. I saw old gentlemen sitting in the sun and wagging their chins at each other.

The whole ritual of the Thermæ was revealed to me by a genial little man in a kind of white bathrobe. I was stripped, my clothes hung in a niche; I had my plunge and was sweated and scraped with a strigil; and massaged and rubbed with oil. My attendant chattered like a barber, and his conversation might have been a broadcast of the latest news. He did not appear to be worried by the fact that a pack of savages were burning and butchering less than thirty miles away. If he symbolized the insularity of a place like Calleva, his cheerful complacency was appalling. His opinion seemed to be, "Oh, these broils have happened before. Just a plague of wasps, sir. They will pass."

CHAPTER VI

THE next day was still young when we came to the bridge across the Wey, and saw the Downs sleek and peaceful in the sunlight. I had not seen Meona again, for we had started our homeward journey before sunrise.

Aurelius met us at the courtyard gate. It seemed to me that he had aged even in a night, for it must have been a night of supreme suspense for him. Festus and his riders had brought in nothing but bad

news. The whole country-side between the Weald and the Thames lay desolate, and even if the homesteads and the hamlets had not been ravaged, the people had fled from them. Aurelius leaned heavily upon his staff, and his shoulders were bowed. His old eyes had lost their peculiar brilliancy, and seemed filmed over with sleeplessness and sorrow.

Ursus had been growling out his grim story to Robur, and before we had reached the manor I had charged Ursus to keep the bad news from the old man, and I was glad that I had done so. I saluted him, and dismounted, and left my horse with Morgan.

"I am glad to see your face, my son."

I told him that all was well, and that Meona and the women were on their way to his brother's place.

"Give me your arm, Pellias. I seem to have grown feeble."

He leaned upon me as we crossed the courtyard to the house, and I saw that they had been busy in our absence. The wall had been strengthened with baulks of timber and a staging built against it for archers and spearmen. Windows had been boarded up. But the south window of the summer-room had not been obscured. The morning sunlight was streaming in upon a bowl of flowers that had been set upon the table. I saw that the curtain had been drawn across the *lararium,* and the faces of the gods were hidden, as though my lord's faith in them had failed him.

He bade me close the door, and sitting down in his oak chair, he looked at me with infinite sadness.

"How does it end, my son?"

His question scared me. Did he wish me, a ghost out of the future, to speak words that might be fatal to all hope? If so, what should I tell him? Should I pretend that a gradual blindness had effaced my knowledge of the present-past? I hesitated, and suddenly his old face grew grim.

"The truth, my son. Am I to fear it?"

He rapped on the floor with his staff. His eyes had recovered their lustre. They made me think of Meona's eyes, and I felt myself swept by a gust of compassion. Why should I tell the truth, as history recorded it? Was there not that dim, legendary period in the life of the island, concerning which learned gentlemen wrote books with the apparent purpose of proving the other fellow to be wrong? Why not assume that the Ambrosii and Arthur were to give Britain a hundred and fifty years of heroic happenings? Aurelius would be dead. Even Meona would be dust before these barbarians made of England a land of beer and belly. It would be a dirty, unwashed, oafish island until the clean Danes and the stark Normans rubbed some soap and civilization into it.

I said, "Lord, I will tell you what our legends relate."

He caught me up.

"Legends, my son? Give me more than legend."

His courage challenged me and gave me the courage to lie to him. I said that our learned men wrote of a certain Aurelius Ambrosius who gathered the fighting men of the island together, and with his sons drove the barbarians back into the sea. I did not speak of Vortigern and his sons, for, judging by legend, Vortigern had been a sinister person, an uncheerful cad. I confessed that history had it that Aurelius Ambrosius lost his life in the struggle, but that his son and a certain hero named Arturus, carried Britain to victory. My lord sat forward, leaning on his staff, his eyes fixed upon me with unflinching steadfastness, and I, with arms folded, stood to justify my rendering of the story.

"So, my son, according to your books, my brother has to die?"

I bent my head to him.

"But his son carries our cause to victory. Yes, my nephew is the true son of his father, a strong and lovely lad. But who is this Arturus of whom you speak?"

"A British dux and hero, lord, who served Ambrosius and Britain. We read that he drove the Picts and the Scots back into Caledonia, and the Saxons into the sea. A band of splendid knights followed him. So, the omens of our books are good."

He was silent for a while, his eyes still fixed upon my face.

"I wish to believe you, my son. I will believe you. And under what God does all this happen?"

"Under Christ, lord, and the sign of the Cross."

He frowned.

"Is that so? Well, what must be—must be. My gods have veiled their faces."

I was glad when we heard footsteps and the clang of harness in the corridor. The door opened and Festus and Robur came in to us. Festus was flushed and sweating, and his eyes shone, for Festus had been on one of his gallops along the Downs, and he had news, urgent news.

Festus had seen the Saxons on the march. They were following the Downs on their way back to the main body which

had remained on the Kentish borders, carrying their plunder with them in wagons taken from the Surrey homesteads. Festus believed that this was the raiding party that had put such fear into our people, and that its purpose had been to terrorize the country so that when the main body moved westwards they should find the land lying desolate and waiting to be possessed.

Festus said that the Saxons were marching with utter carelessness, straggling along the ridge with their wagons and horses strung out for a quarter of a mile. No doubt they believed that they had so swept the countryside that there was no one to give them battle. Festus, knowing all the ways, had shadowed the savages until he had seen them halt to rest their cattle and to eat. With flashing eyes he swore that the gods had given us our chance to ambuscade the raiders and put them to the slaughter. He estimated that the Saxons did not number more than a hundred men, and that we should be their equal in numbers and have the advantage of surprise.

I looked at Aurelius. His eyes were roaming darkly round the room. I looked at Robur, and saw that he was smiling. I felt my blood hot in me.

I said to Festus, "Have we time to waylay them?"

He said that we had if we marched out at once. He knew the very place for such an ambuscade, where the Ridgeway ran between thick woods.

I looked again at Aurelius.

"Let us go, lord."

"Yes, go, my friends, and the gods be with you."

Old Robur had been keeping his men ready for some such alarum, and when I went out into the courtyard and saw my men unsaddling I remembered that we had ridden twenty-five miles. Would the horses do it?

But when Ursus got the news from me, he was like a man mad with joy. He went about waving his arms and shouting to the men. We could muster about fifty horse and about the same number of footmen, and I was detailing ten men to stay behind and hold the house, when Aurelius Superbus appeared in the portico. In very truth he had become the old Roman. No longer was he bowed down, but he stood there like some white-haired Jupiter, his staff held aloft, a man exalted.

"Go, all of you, I and the gods will guard this house."

I urged him to let some men stay, but he would have none of it. He would close the gates after us, and sit in the sun, and wait, and meditate upon life's mysteries.

"No, my son, take every man you have, and the gods be with you."

We marched out, and I let Festus lead, for Festus knew the ways. The foot-soldiers hung on to our horses, and we followed the valley road eastwards for half a mile and then began to climb the hills by a bridle-track that was hidden in a smother of yew trees. It reminded me of that steep way that led up from the Silent Pool through the yews to the ridge that was above.

I have often wondered how the reactions of the civilized man and the savage differ in their relation to fear. I had heard older men describe crude physical fear and its unloveliness as they had experienced it in the trenches. You shook and shivered, but you endured. In the beastliness of modern war the imagination paints a picture of your headless corpse, or of you lying torn and disembowelled in the mud, or of you being sent back to your familiar world with only half a face.

I can understand the nausea and the horror of such fear, but in this adventure I was not conscious of fear, only of a tense excitement.

This was to be no foul gas and bomb business, but a tussle, man to man, with one's blood up, and savage beastliness to avenge. I had a feeling that most of our men felt as I did. Ursus was licking his lips, and there was a redness in his eyes. Old Robur's brick-red face wore a grim smirk. Festus was whistling.

I had been thinking out a plan of action, and I put it to Robur. We should divide our horse and foot, hiding both bodies in the woods on either side of the Ridgeway. The mounted men would be to the east, and when the Saxons were within fifty yards of us, we should dash out and charge them.

One could assume that our charge would take them by surprise, and put them in disorder. Then, our footmen, sallying out on either side, could fall on the fellows whom we had not speared.

Robur listened and agreed. He thought the plan a good one.

When we were nearing the brow, Festus left us and rode ahead. He had the eyes of a hawk, had Festus, and he knew every path and trackway. I halted our force among some beech trees on the top of the ridge, and I gave the men our plan of ac-

tion. We sat on our horses and waited, nor had we long to wait. I saw Festus coming at a gallop. He had the news we needed. The Saxons were less than half a mile away, straggling along the ridge, and obviously not suspecting danger.

I rode forward and placed our footmen under cover, with orders not to show themselves, nor to attack until our charge had got home. Robur had put our cavalry under cover in an open beech wood that was screened by yews and thorns. The May flower was still out, and whenever the smell of it reaches me now I think of those vivid moments on the chalk hills when we waited for the coming of our enemies. We were all mounted, save Festus, who was crouching among the branches of one of the yews, watching the Ridgeway.

We heard the voices of the Saxons before we saw them, and a wheel of one of their wagons needed greasing, for it was squeaking like a thing in pain. I heard laughter and then a burst of song, like some ale-house giving tongue. I would have described it as a bellyful of bawling, for these Saxons did not sing as the Welsh sing, with that strange yearning after vague beauty. I gather that they were singing of beef and beer and blood, and somehow those bawling voices enraged me. I was watching Festus, and I saw him slip back from the yews, and make a sign to us. He ran to his horse and mounted and took his spear from the man who held it.

"Now, brothers, now."

WE RODE out of the wood, swept round the yews and the thorn trees and saw our quarry. The head of the Saxon column was less than a hundred yards from us; it was made up of about twenty men, half of whom were mounted. The wagons were close behind them, loaded up with plunder. A number of the Saxons were asleep or lounging in the wagons, and I saw a crowd of them trailing behind. I remember, as I worked my horse up to a gallop, that some historical wiseacre had written that no cavalry charge was made at a gallop. So much for the expert. We went in at a gallop, because we wanted to close with the wretches while their surprise was complete. Also, I believe that we were in a fury to get at them, and perhaps, for some of us, it was the fury of fear.

In such a moment one perceives and remembers vivid details coloured by some supreme emotion. Mine was hatred, the hatred of the dark, vivid Celt for the blond and boorish Nordic, so-called. I remember the figure of their leader, a barrel of a man with a red beard and a mop of flaming hair under his steel cap. I remember the way his bulging blue eyes stared, while he bawled to his fellows, and struggled to get his sword out. His round shield was hung at his back, and he had no time to order it. Moreover his horse grew restive, and as I made for him it shied sideways so that his rider's unshielded flank was exposed to me. I drove at him and caught him in the ribs, and felt the spear-head bore its way in. My horse crashed against his, and man and beast went over, and my spear went with them.

Also, I very nearly went over my horse's head, and had to right myself and get at my sword. I might have been easy game for one of the fellows, but Robur, Festus and Ursus had charged past me, and I was hemmed in by our shouting troopers. I saw Robur pin a man through the throat, and Festus with his spear in another's belly. We crashed through their advance guard to be met by the men who were leaping helter-skelter from the wagons. We may have surprised them, but they were ready to fight for their lives. Our horses carried us on, over and through them, leaving half of them on the ground. We were past the wagons and ready to deal with their rear-guard. I turned my head for a moment, and saw our footmen pouring out of the woods to finish the business we had begun.

It was when we rode down upon their rear-guard that I realized that half of them had had more liquor than they could carry. They had been drinking hard during their midday halt, and these fuddled beasts fell to us easily. A scattered few ran for the woods, and we lost them, for I got my men about and rode back to help our footmen end the slaughter. And slaughter it was. No mercy was shown or asked for. I saw Ursus get off his horse and blaze into the scrimmage like a mad black bull. A big Saxon closed with him, but Ursus threw him, straddled the fellow, and drove his sword into his throat. I caught a long savage who was running, and stuck him between the shoulders. In five minutes it was all over. My men left no live men there, but slew the wounded as they would have slain dangerous wild beasts.

Ursus, with hands and face all red, walked around gloating and scanning the dead.

Meanwhile, the wagon-horses stood there with strange placidity, switching their tails, and some of them cropping the grass.

We stripped our enemies of their harness, took their arms, and piled them on the wagons. We had lost but three men killed, and half a dozen were wounded, and these we placed on the wagons.

Festus rode up to me, laughing.

"Hail, Captain, you led us well. Shall we bury these swine?"

"Let us bury all we can in a common grave, so the others won't know," I said.

We buried all but a few before we started back home.

Some of our footmen took charge of the wagons. We had to turn them and make for a track that would take us down into the valley. I remember the wheel of a wagon lurching over the dead body of a Saxon, and the way the body jerked up for a second as though the thing had life in it. Ursus was the last to go. He wandered around looking at the grave, and exulting.

A FEW days later the indefatigable Festus, that human centaur who had been out scouring the hill, came back with the tidings that he and his men had ridden close to the Kentish borders, and had not come in contact with any of the enemy. It seemed that our surmise was correct, and that the strong plundering party which we had destroyed in the battle of the Ridgeway had been responsible for all the terror in our Surrey valleys.

But Festus did return with a rumour that he had picked up from an old shepherd who had remained loyal to his sheep, and whom Festus had found defying fate and Nordic frenzies on the north side of the Downs. The shepherd had said that he had seen a large body of the Saxons on the march in the valley below him, as though making for the Thames. The shepherd had believed that the invaders were marching on London.

And Aurelius Superbus was proposing to ride to London! No one tried to dissuade him, for I think all of us realized that this was no time for caution. A fine recklessness might serve us better than Fabian tactics, if we were to make head against this peril. To sit at home and pull long faces, while waiting for a selfish world to sacrifice itself for distant neighbours would not set the courage of our men mounting. Tragedy might be in the air, but the tragic mask, black-eyed and hollow of mouth, can be less cheering than a face full of laughter.

My lord said, "Shall we be deterred by these savages? No, my friend, we will go to Londinium."

I am bound to confess that I was very keen to see Roman London. I told him so, and he decided to take me with him, but he gave me some wise counsel as to keeping my mouth shut. I could play the part of the simple, uneloquent soldier. His would be the task of venting his eloquence upon the mayor and the city council, to persuade them to combine in some mutual plan of action against the invaders.

We decided to cross the Thames at Pontes, and approach Londinium by the great west road. If the Saxons were across the river we should soon hear of them. Our party consisted of Aurelius, myself, and six of our best men, including Ursus, all well mounted. Our horses were fast enough to give the Saxons the slip, were we to blunder into one of their raiding parties. We should hear at Pontes whether the river was open, or whether any of the Saxon ships had been seen prowling up it recently.

My lord might be old in years, but he was a young man in the saddle, for he had been bred in a world of hunting and of horses. We saddled up soon after dawn, and were at Pontes by eight of the clock. Pontes was not the bustling place it had been on the day that Meona and I had visited it. The Place was empty, the caravanserai shut up, and there were no barges moored by the bridge. Nor was there any guard there. Pontes had the air of a place that was semi-desolate and swept by a north-east wind. It had a brittle, shivering atmosphere, though the sun shone hot on the houses. Many of them were shuttered, for their owners had fled. An old beggar was sitting on the steps of the Corn Exchange, and to him Aurelius addressed himself.

"Is my lord Pontius in residence?"

"No, master," said the beggar. "They do say that he has gone to be cured of the rheumatics at Bath."

"Ah, and of other ills, also, no doubt," said my lord with a dry laugh.

"You see, master, they all be so afeared of the Saxons."

"Have you had the Saxons here?"

"No, lord. You see, I be that lame that I'm thinking I be more comfortable sitting here than taking the road."

Aurelius tossed him a coin.

"You are a wise fellow. Are any boats passing down the river?"

"Thank-ee, lord. No, there be no boats. They do say that the Saxon ships have come up past London."

We rode on.

"Only the lame do not run," said Aurelius with irony. "My lord Pontius has set them an example. He is very brave in subduing the women."

I have always thought the flat country north of the Thames some of the ugliest in England, and this Roman road traversed it as though it was of the same opinion, and wished to pass as quickly as possible through this dreariness of gravel and of clay. A fine road, banked and ditched and paved, it made me think of a French highway, save that it had no avenues of planes or poplars. There were swampy places spreading from the river and the road became a causeway some five feet above the reeds and rushes. Shepperton and Hampton were mere names, though, as the road swung away to the north-east I could see high ground that suggested Kingston Hill and Richmond. We passed a few shabby-looking farms and market-gardens, and there were orchards about what must have been Twickenham; also, we overtook a few country folk on the road, and carts taking vegetables to London, but these people looked on us blankly when my lord questioned them about the Saxons. The panic at Pontes did not appear to have spread over this dreary, Middlesex flat. Even the peasants had flat faces, and looked too stupid to react to any stimulus other than a kick.

I was bored with this country, and no doubt my description of it might be reminiscent of the deadly modern ugliness round Walton and Chertsey. I wanted Roman London, and the strange, bitter tang that attaches even to the London of all time. Almost I expected to see the dome of St. Paul's and the towers of Westminster. We passed across a ragged heath, and saw more swamps on our right, and then I caught the sun shining on a cluster of buildings crowded together on a low hill.

A grey wall clasped the little city, and the pantiled roofs rose above it with regimented precision. Almost it suggested a modern building estate, hundreds of little cardboard villas crowded together in anonymous obscurity. I saw only one big building rising above that angular choppy sea of red and brown roofs. It might have been a modern super-cinema, or a Woolworth stores. I gathered that it was London's basilica. So, this was London, the city of merchants, and the bourn of all the ships that sailed the sea!

ROMANO-BRITISH London had its West End. I had seen the city on its hill, clasped by the casket of its wall, but outside the wall and strung along a shallow valley were villas and gardens, veritable gentleman's residences sacred to the richer merchants. I saw the river, and some single-masted ships lying moored close in to the Middlesex bank, and a wooden bridge. There was something queer about the bridge; one of the central spans seemed lacking, and I realized that this gap was artificial. Aurelius also noticed it, and I saw him smile that serene yet ironic smile.

"No Horatii in London, my friend."

Moreover, these plutocratic villas had a desolate look, shutters closed, courtyards and gardens empty. The city merchants had taken refuge within the walls, and on the walls themselves I could see armed men patrolling. We crossed a stream which I took to be the Fleet River, and came to the West Gate, Ludgate, half-way up the hill. The gates were shut, and the men up above on the two turrets looked over and down at us as though they occupied the grand-stand, and we were a gang of race-course thieves who were more welcome off the course than on it.

There was some delay in the opening of the gate, and I could see that my lord's temper was rising. The man in charge of the gate's guard was a saucy fellow, and barred us out with his spear held crosswise, while he asked for our credentials. London appeared to be a suspicious and unfriendly place, and very concerned as to its own security.

Said my lord with extreme politeness, "My name is Aurelius Superbus, and I am lord of the lands beyond the chalk hills. I have come to consult with your præfect and the city council."

The fellow let us through, but in passing him Ursus leaned sideways and chucked the gentleman under the chin.

"Feeling a little windy, brother! We are fighting men, not civvies dressed up as soldiers."

We rode up the hill, with a row of narrow-fronted houses on one side, and tall warehouses on the other. The road was paved, and there were side-walks, and these paths were crowded with people who hung about in groups and chattered like frightened monkeys. Even Romano-British London was a city of noise. Women hung out of upper windows and talked to other women across the way. Children

scurried about. No one seemed to be doing any work. There were small mobs outside the wine-shops. I saw a couple of men who looked like sailors staggering down the road, bawling, with their arms round each other. They came blundering into my horse, and I put out a foot and heaved them off, and they both fell down in the gutter. I got sulky looks from the crowd for that, and I caught Ursus grinning in his beard. Obviously, London had the wind up, and was sulky and scared, and in no temper to go out and fight the heathen.

Then, in what appeared to be a principal street, one might have called a Cheapside, we met a person of palpable importance being carried along in a litter. He was a very fat man with a fiery face, and Aurelius was known to him, for the litter stopped, and our fat friend swung two large legs to the ground, and stood fawning beside my lord's horse. I learned later that he was London's principal wine importer, and that my lord was a notable patron. His tunic was of red silk, his cloak of purple, and he wore a gold chain round his neck with some sort of badge of office dangling from it.

"My humble welcome to my lord. Is there any service Pomponius can render?"

"Pomponius" was exquisite. So was his little red beard, and his leery, greedy eyes, and the way his hands washed themselves.

"I am here to see your præfect and your council."

"They are in session, sir, in constant session, talking, talking, talking."

"Indeed! Is that so?" said my lord, and I saw that he looked upon Pomponius as having spittle in his beard, "and of what do they talk?"

"Of what, sir? Why, the Saxon peril. Two of their ships came into the Pool yesterday. We broke the bridge and manned the walls. A bold front, sir. The wretches departed. But, of course, you, my lord, in the peaceful country are not vexed by such terrors."

Aurelius disillusioned him.

"No, we too have our alarums. Farmsteads and manor have been burnt, people slaughtered. And we have fought, and not unsuccessfully with these savages. My friend Pellias, here, could tell you a story."

Pomponius gaped at me.

"Your servant, sir. Incredible. Revolting. My business is in the pot. And you come, my lord—?"

"To see if we in the country, and you in London can join forces against the Saxons."

Pomponius threw up his hands.

"I fear you reap the wind, sir. Talk, talk, talk, and nothing done. I assure you we are smothering in officialdom. I have been in the council-room since the morning, and believe me, no one would listen. They all talk, my lord, and no one listens. It is nothing but a gabble-house."

I could see that Aurelius had had enough of the wine-merchant and wished to be rid of him.

"I will go to the basilica, and see if they will listen to me. My thanks to you, Pomponius."

"Are you lodging here, sir?"

"Probably."

"May I presume to put my poor house at your service? You know it, my lord. I assure you I shall be greatly honoured."

My lord thanked him.

"I would see, first, how your council shapes to my plan. May I leave the courtesy open?"

"Assuredly, sir, assuredly. I will hasten home and warn my good Cornelia. All shall be prepared. May I ask, my lord, if you like vinegar with your oysters?"

Aurelius smiled like a god with a secret sense of humour.

"Without vinegar, I think, my friend."

"And a little Bordeaux wine? Aha, I can serve my lord with a wine that has a bouquet and a flavour that are—unique."

So, there were snobs in Roman Britain, and Pomponius did not match his wine; he was not a vintage port! My lord rode on, and Pomponius stood bowing and washing his hands beside his litter. The street brought us to the Forum and the basilica, which I had a feeling should be called the Mansion House. I expected mayoral robes and a posy of city fathers, and I was not to be disappointed.

Meanwhile, the Forum was chock-a-block with people, all waiting, I suppose, upon the deliberations of their elders. It was a smelly crowd, much less clean and more cosmopolitan than that of Calleva, nor would I have accused it of good manners. I saw strange foreign faces here, with expressions of greed and fear. Moreover, the crowd had caught Mr. Polonius's impatience, and was arguing and shouting and calling for the city fathers to come forth and make a declaration from the rostrum. This crowd craved news, as all crowds crave it, and had begun to grumble and grow

bitter and sarcastic, and frothy with rumour.

There were a dozen fellows in livery at the top of the basilica steps, keeping the crowd back with red and white staves. We had a solid mass between us and those solemn and sacred steps, and this human barrier showed no disposition to favour us. Ursus pushed his horse forward and shouted.

"Way for my Lord Aurelius."

His horse trod on somebody, and several fellows turned and cursed us.

"Here, keep your hoofs off me, my buck."

"Who the Hades is Aurelius?"

My lord showed himself capable of dealing with these roughs. He sat and smiled upon them, and raising a hand, spoke.

"Gentlemen, please permit me to pass. I have urgent business with your council. Are we not all concerned in facing this peril that threatens town and country?"

I have heard it said that a great gentleman will always remain benign even when obstructed by louts and fools, and my lord's dignity was such that these gentlemen of the market-place gave way before him, and opened us a channel to the basilica steps. Here the chief of the municipal lackeys met us, and having some experience of men of mark, was very polite to my lord. The council was in secret session, but he would convey to them my lord's message. And would my lord dismount and wait in the great hall? The notables were assembled in the council chamber.

Aurelius bade me accompany him. We passed up the steps and found ourselves in the basilica's main hall. It was a splendid chamber with two rows of pillars, a barrel roof with a coffered ceiling painted in blue and gold, and tall windows glazed with bull's-eye glass. Treillaged screens covered with gilding partly shut off the apse of the curia. A series of fine bronze doors opened from the back of the hall, and when our chief-lackey opened one of them a splurge of voices came to us and went echoing up to the hollow roof. My lord looked at me and smiled. Babel seemed loose in the city's council-chamber.

We stood on a fine mosaic floor, and my lord pointed to the figure in the centre panel. It portrayed Jupiter seated upon a cloud, a thunderbolt in one hand, and what looked like a bag of gold in the other.

"Most symbolical and apposite, my son. Thunder and lightning, or hard cash. Which will our worthies choose?"

I laughed.

"History has it, sir, that business men will always attempt to buy off the barbarians!"

"And if the barbarians possess any wisdom they will know that both gold and sheep's-heads can be had just for the taking."

THE bronze door had closed, dampening down all those civic voices, and when again it swung open the burble refilled the hall. I heard a snarling voice declaiming, "Think of the poor, think of the women and children, think of the men who labour." The angry ringing of a hand-bell suggested that the chairman was attempting to bring this orator to order. My lord gave me a shrewd and very ironic look.

"London's Cleon, no doubt. Such occasions as this are the demagogue's opportunity."

I translated Cleon into Hitler, that supernatural liar and self-constituted crony of God.

A man with a staff approached us.

"The council will hear you, my lord."

How very magnanimous of them! Aurelius beckoned me to follow him, and we ascended the steps and entered the council chamber. It was insufferably stuffy, and did not indicate that these city worthies used their baths. There were about twenty councillors seated on state chairs. Their president or præfect occupied a more decorative chair on a low dais. He had a table before him, and a secretary at his elbow. I got the impression that all these hard-faced notables were in a state of fume, flurry and heat. Faces were shining with sweat. There was sudden silence when we entered. We were stared at. The gentleman with the bell, a large, black, turgid person, glared at me.

"The audience was granted to you, sir. Who is this soldier? The tradition of our council is that—"

My lord took him up.

"Indeed! Then we will not trespass upon your civic dignity. This soldier is the captain of our forces, such as they are. I pray you, gentlemen, excuse me."

He bowed, and turned towards the door, as though to leave the council chamber, but I imagine that certain of the city fathers were glad to behold something in a shape of a fighting man, for there were sudden sharp protests. The turgid chairman with the large white kidney face

Again and again the terrified world had cried, "They are on the march!"

grabbed his bell and jerked at it angrily.

"Silence, please. These interruptions are insufferable."

A lean, sardonic man rose and lisped at him.

"May I suggest that all your tintinnabulation, sir, is equally exhausting, may I say, intolerant. I put it to the council that we wish to hear my Lord Aurelius, and we do not object to the presence of his dux."

Hands went up, and the sardonic councillor claimed a majority. The præfect put his bell away.

"You have my permission to address us, sir."

Aurelius bowed to him.

"Gentlemen, I come to propose that we of the country and you of the city should plan to join our forces against this very urgent peril. May I say that we are not without experience and that we have fought with some success. Only two days ago, my dux attacked, routed and put to the sword a raiding party of these savages. But, gentlemen, we are faced with more than mere raids. We have to confront invasion."

He paused, and I watched the faces of the city fathers, and they did not move me to great confidence.

Said a large, black and white councillor, "Doth the gentleman ask us to fight?"

Aurelius turned to him.

"I do, sir. And what is the alternative?"

Another voice said, "A little money'sh might perthwade the pirates to leave."

I wanted to shout "Rats," but the sardonic gentleman was on his feet. There was an element of courage in his thin lips and cold blue eyes. He twitted the assembly with cowardice, asserted that Londinium, with its population, had both the money and the men to wage war and successful war against the invaders. Had not the British served in the Roman legions? Londinium had a number of old soldiers who could drill and stiffen a levy of virile men. His acid eloquence was all to the point, but my impression was that these worthies would prefer to sit behind their walls and hope and wait for the storm to blow over.

When our sardonic friend had finished, babel broke out again, and I divined in my lord the sudden weariness of exasperation. He was an old man and frail, and not one of these fat and self-important fools had offered him a chair. I was losing patience, and I turned to the master of the lackeys and asked that my lord should be provided with a chair. But my lord waved it aside. The præfect was again active with that futile and busy bell, and when silence had returned, my lord was the first to speak.

"Gentlemen, I think we will leave you to your deliberations. I am an old man, and I have ridden far."

I could see that he was weary, and oppressed with a tired scorn for these babblers. The præfect rose and bowed to him.

"Perhaps it would be as well, sir. We have our own particular interests to consider. May I ask if you are remaining within the city?"

"For one night, Mr. Præfect, at the house of my friend Pomponius."

"Then, sir, we will communicate our decision to you."

We left them talking, remounted our horses, and riding through that sullen, anxious crowd, took our way to the house of Pomponius.

Said my lord to me, "That was a most illuminating experience, my son. Mark you, they have their particular interests to consider! I have no great wish to tarry in this city. These jackdaws will chatter, but they will not fight."

I felt full of compassion for him, for he was weary and disappointed.

I HAVE not much to relate concerning our night's stay in the house of Pomponius. Pomponius and his wife and daughter were all types, and thousands of them can be studied in our modern suburbs. The oysters and the wine were excellent, so was my bed. Pomponius was all for drama, even in the cracking of an egg; his wife was large and remote and blonde, and excessively stupid. The daughter fell upon me as though I were a sale's bargain. I suppose we should have called her a bright young thing, slangy and slim and flat chested, with long febrile legs.

After dinner, my lord, who was very weary, went to his bed after reading the communication that the city council sent to him by the hands of the præfect's secretary. "This is to inform your Excellency that the Council will resume its deliberations on the morrow." Aurelius showed the epistle to me with a whimsical and ironic nod of the head. We lingered at the table after he had gone. Our host ate enormously, and became sleepy. His wife had a capacity for oysters that fascinated me. I counted twenty-seven. Flammula drank

more than was good for her, and became affectionate and a little tipsy.

Her mother, complaining of *flatus*, said that she would take a doze and go to bed. Pomponius fell asleep and snored, his hands clasping his civic tummy. Flammula offered to show me the garden, and since I was rather curious to see how like the girl was to some of her modern sisters, I went with her.

Almost I could hear her saying, "How marvellous! You've fought and killed Germans. How marvellous of you!" And she invited a supporting arm. Flammula was romantic, with a tinge of red in her hair, but I could not help seeing the father in the daughter, and the likeness left me cold. The garden possessed an arbour with a couch and cushions, and Flammula posed herself. I should not have been surprised if she had asked me for the inevitable cigarette.

"Tell me all about it, you wonderful man."

But I was thinking of Meona. Well, if Flammula wanted her hero, she should have him, and I am afraid I swaggered to her and romanced, while remaining blind to other insinuations. What Pomponius's daughter thought of me I do not care and I do not know. She should have damned me as a cold and conceited egoist, a kind of Narcissus in armour talking to his own reflection in a mirror and not to a young woman who wanted to be able to say, "How terribly excited he is about me." Her father, who came yawning and belching into the garden, rescued the occasion.

As for my memory of Roman London, it remains one of suburban banality. Was the Arthur Legend compatible with this little cosmos of commercialists? There were no Welsh singers here, no green glooms, and sunsets and mysterious dawns, no fine ecstasy even in tragic things, nothing but a number of saprophytic exploiters worried about their money and their merchandise. Well, and why not? Trade is a serious business, the modern sap that circulates the products of our commercial glasshouse. Surely, the legend of the Apples of Gold had been spun by an economist. All that I know is that we left the house of Pomponius and the stereotyped streets of Londinium without regret and with no illusions. Pomponius washed his hands of us, but very politely so.

And so, we came to Pontes, and crossed the river and saw the Britain of Arthur and of Dreams, not Slough and its productive ugliness, but a poets' and a painters' and a peasants' world.

Was ever any district more appositely named than Slough? And our Industry had fastened on it as a predestined, commercial pig-sty. Yet Slough wallows on the edge of a loveliness that need never be destroyed.

There was nothing adventurous about our homeward journey. In fact it was so peaceful that the very peace had a tragic face. We rode through country that was desolate, and from which its folk had fled. Lovely it might be in its infinite and varied greenness, with the grass lushing up for hay and filling itself with the faces of flowers, but a haunted silence lay over the land. Birds were the only live things we saw and heard, and when a yaffle laughed at us, or a jay scolded I was moved to wonder what happened when such a country went back to nature. I thought of my history books, and then, divining the sadness in the heart of the old man beside me, I closed the book.

Did it help me to remember that the cities of Britain crumbled into gradual ruin and desolation; that they became ghostly places which the barbarian avoided? There would be rude, remote homesteads scattered through the woodlands. Britain would become again a wilderness of woods and swamps peopled by a slow, lazy, unimaginative folk. Then, Christ would come again to Britain, and a few devoted men would plan, and build and teach. The Danes and the Normans would chasten it, Flemings settle in the land, Huguenots teach it other things, and slowly that English breed would evolve, and Rome be forgotten. This world that haunted me would be rediscovered as fragments of brick and tile, buried mosaics, hoards of coins, worn down, toothless walls.

BUT, I must quicken my tempo, for these reflective interludes and sentimental digressions were to be like mere maidenly sighings in the world to which I was returning. We came down from the Hog's Back to the deserted hamlet and the bridge across the Wey. I saw armed men upon the bridge, and we pulled up sharply, not knowing for the moment whether they were friends or enemies. One small detail reassured me. The man who was sitting on his horse in the centre of the bridge had his arm in a white linen sling. It was Robur.

He too had recognized us, and he rode

forward to meet us. I was to see many grim faces during the days that were to follow, but I think old Robur's face was the grimmest I remember. There was no smile in his eyes, and his mouth was a thin hard line. He raised an arm and saluted my master.

"I thought it best to meet you here."

I guessed that Robur had no good news to give us, and my lord must have been equally quick in reading that stark, lean face.

"You have been attacked, Robur?"

"No, not yet, sir."

"Well, let us hear the worst."

"It is not sweet wine, sir. Festus brought it in before noon. Our friends are on the march."

"So soon?"

"Yes, it would seem that their main body which had advanced on Londinium must have found the bridge broken and the gates shut. They turned about and came south on to the Ridge. What their plan may be, I do not know, to cross the river higher up and swing back on Londinium, or to try a forced march and their luck against Calleva."

"Are they in force?"

"Hundreds of them, sir. More must have landed in Kent. At the moment they are a dozen miles from us."

"If they pass along the Ridge they may see where their dead lie buried."

Robur moistened thin lips.

"If you remember, sir, some escaped from that slaughter. They may know of it. They may know even more than that, and turn aside to try and take their vengeance."

So the citizens of Londinium, instead of helping us, had by their careful selfishness turned the torrent upon us. They could sit in comparative safety behind their walls and their closed gates, with the river and its mud between them and the Saxons, who, like many wild tribes, trusted to a first savage rush and would recoil from fortifications. They would not sit down and lay siege to Londinium when the whole country lay open to them. There would be other ways of bringing Londinium to ruin, by encircling it and cutting off its food supply, until it fell like rotten fruit from a tree starved of sap.

We three quickened up our horses and rode on together, taking counsel as we went. The manor walls were not like city walls. We had not the strength to meet the main host of the heathen in the open. If we attempted to hold Honey Valley and they poured down upon us, we might make a bloody and notable fight of it, but our extermination would not help the country. Unless we were reinforced quickly by Aurelius Ambrosius and his power, we were like a sand-castle on the edge of the sea.

What was our choice to be? To hold the manor and dare the chance of our enemies passing by? Or to abondon Honey Valley and retreat upon Calleva and the help that might be coming to us from the West? There was yet another plan, and it was Aurelius who proposed it. We might abandon the valley temporarily, withdraw to some old hill fort or strong place which could be more easily defended, and send word to my lord's brother of the peril and the place we were in.

Robur acclaimed this plan.

"We must have eyes, sir, eyes. Sunk in a valley we cannot see. Some wooded hill-top."

"And what of water?"

"Yes, a spring or dew-pond."

IT WAS my lord who thought of the temple on Farley Heath. The temple cellar itself was too small to give shelter to more than twenty men, but it would form a strong core for defence. Moreover, there was a bank about it that could be strengthened with brushwood and tree-trunks, and in the little valley on the south a spring fed a clean pool. We could hide the horses in the woods to the south of the temple, and the place would give us a spacious outlook along the Downs. Both Robur and I welcomed the idea, but there was no time to be lost if we wanted to occupy our eyrie before our enemies appeared upon the Downs. I suggested that we should fell young birch trees and pile them round the temple as camouflage. Also, our men could deepen the ditch and raise the vallum, and pile more trees and brushwood there so that our activities should be hidden by a green bank.

We galloped into Honey Valley and set our men to work, loading food on to the horses and collecting every sort of receptacle that would hold water. Every axe, spade and mattock in the village was requisitioned. Festus was sent up to the Black Down to watch the chalk hills. We knew that we should have to leave the manor-house to chance its fate, and that closed doors and shuttered windows would be useless, but we took all the food and forage we could gather. My lord was the last to leave the place, riding out through

the open courtyard gates. I saw him look back, raise an arm and salute the place, and his farewell touched me.

We had reached the brow of the Black Down, and our leading files had disappeared into the beechwood when I heard one of the men in charge of a pack-horse give a shout. He was behind and below me, and had been having trouble with his horse. I saw that he was pointing across the valley, and my first thought was that he must have sighted the enemy moving along the Ridgeway. That was the last thing we wanted, and I turned my horse and rode down the hill to where the fellow was standing.

"What are you shouting about? Did you not hear our orders?"

His arm remained outstretched, and I realized that he was pointing down into the valley and not across it to the Downs.

"Look, Captain, look!"

And then I saw what he had seen, a loop of the road in the green hollow of the valley, and moving along it two white shapes with something that shone and glittered behind them. Meona's white horses and her chariot! Good God, what madness had brought her back to us at such a moment?

I told the man to take his horse on and get under cover, and to say nothing to my lord. I glanced again at the line of the Downs across the valley, and for a second I thought I saw movement there, vague shapes threading amid the yews and thorns. As a matter of fact a herd of deer must have come browsing along through the thickets, for when we did see our enemy there was no mistaking him for deer. I went down the hill at a pace that would have sent me over my horse's head had he made one false step. What had brought Meona back? Had she found help, and driven on recklessly and impetuously to bring the news to us?

Meona did not see me, for I took the driver to be Meona. Well, if she had surprised us, her own recklessness would have its own reaction. The haze of dust raised by her horses and her wheels was still hanging in the air when I rode into the deserted courtyard. The white horses had their noses in the water-cistern. I saw Meona standing on the steps of the portico. Her back was turned to me, and I could divine her wonder and dismay at finding this silence, this emptiness.

She heard the sound of my coming and turned, and her little face had a blanched, wild loveliness. Her eyes stared at me; her mouth hung open.

"Pellias! What has happened?"

I was off my horse, and blown between love and anger.

"Don't ask me questions. Into your chariot, and go back by the way you came."

Her mouth closed. She was frowning. I suppose I must have been rather hectoring in my haste.

"Do you give me orders?"

My temper rose to hers.

"I do. The Saxons are on the hills, hundreds of them. We have abandoned this place, and are going up to the Temple. But for God's sake get into that chariot, and drive back the way you came."

She answered me with extraordinary calmness.

"Is my father well?"

"Quite well. But you can spare him this. Quick, into your chariot. You can carry back the news to those who can help us."

I remember the way she came down the portico steps, slowly and deliberately. She never took her eyes off me, and I should have known that she had never before been spoken to so abruptly. She walked to the cistern where her two horses were still holding their wet muzzles over the water. She caressed their noses.

"Why the temple, my friend?"

"Because," I said, "it is on high ground, and we can see over the country, and because it can be made more defensible than this rambling place. Every minute is precious. Now, are you going, or—?"

"My horses are tired."

"Nonsense. Get across the river and you should be safe. Make for Calleva."

She gave me another queer, oblique look, stepped up into her chariot and gathered the reins. She did not say a word to me, and I thought that I had made her see reason. She turned her horses, and I mounted mine, and watched her take her horses out of the gate. I saw her raise her whip and beat them up.

But, instead of turning to the right and towards safety, she swung her horses to the left and towards the track leading up to the Black Down. I shouted at her, but it had no effect, and when I trotted out into the lane dust was flying from her chariot wheels.

CHAPTER VII

I DO NOT know how far she had come that day, but her horses seemed less tired than Pegasus, and in spite of their having to pull her carriage they kept

their lead along the lane. The chariot rolled and bounced along the rough road, fanning up a sheet of dust, and I wondered how Meona could keep her feet, for she drove standing. I was hot on her heels now, and hot in the head, for she had both fooled and flouted me, and I felt that I had made an ass of myself. It was not until she turned her horses up the track leading to the Black Down that I began to overhaul her. The drag of the chariot told on the steepish slope, and she hauled her horses in and made them walk.

I drew up beside her. I said, "You are more merciful to your beasts than to those who would think for you."

She looked straight over her horses' heads.

"Is it necessary for you to think for me? Who gave you that privilege?"

"This is a man's affair, my lady."

"How arrogant we have become! A little authority seems to have gone to your head."

"Can you, by any chance, see a long green mound on the ridge? I think it still shows some of the raw chalk."

"I can see something. What is it?"

"A grave."

She turned her head sharply.

"A grave! Have you been fighting again?"

"Well, yes. We ambuscaded the Saxon raiding-party that had been burning and slaughtering in our valleys."

She was looking at me now with fierce black eyes.

"Ha, and you overthrew them?"

"We buried some ninety dead bodies in that grave."

"Who led our people?"

"I had that honour."

She was smiling, as though exulting over that slaughter. She shook her hair, turned, gathered up the reins, and spoke to her horses. I let her go. I drew my horse into the shade of the beeches, and sat watching the Downs. I could see the little fawn shapes of the distant deer moving among the thorns and yews, but nothing else.

I rode into the wood. Half-way through it the track opened into a little clearing, and the great trees stood about it like the pillars of a peristyle. I could remember this place, and its sudden sunlight in the midst of the green glooms, and the pool in the centre of a cup of grass where the drip and shade of the beeches did not kill all other growth. The pool was a smother of water-crowfoot and looked as though snow had fallen on it. A spear of sunlight slanted down between the tops of two trees. Meona was kneeling by the pool on a little cushion of turf, and her two horses were nosing the grass. She did not seem to hear me, but might have been some Cassandra looking in a glass darkly. The droop of her shoulders and the lovely curve of her neck filled me with sudden compassion and anguish. How was it that women could look so douce and gentle and yet be so hard?

I stopped my horse on the edge of the clearing. She appeared so remote and mysterious that I vowed I would not go blundering in again upon her aloofness to be rebuffed. I saw her dabble her hand in the water, and push aside some of the white flowers of the water-weed. I saw bubbles rise to the surface. She watched them as though they had some secret meaning for her.

I sat very still.

How long was she going to keep me loitering here when there was so much to be done?

The white horses were nibbling the grass.

Suddenly, she sat back on her heels and looked at me, her hands resting on her knees.

"Can you see ghost-pictures in water, Pellias?"

"No," I said, "I cannot."

Her face had grown soft and shadowy. She looked into the deeps of the wood where the grey and crowded trunks of the trees dwindled into a kind of twilight. I saw her lips move. Then, in one swift movement she was on her feet, and walking away from the pool towards the place where the trackway left the clearing. Was she fey, sleep-walking, obsessed by something she had seen in the water?

Had she, like some Cassandra, seen sad and tragic things in that woodland pool?

She walked through the wood, and I rode beside her two patient horses and her chariot. I, too, tried to be patient, and to follow her like those two white beasts. She might be wiser than I was, wiser than all of us, and somehow sensing that which was hidden from our mortal eyes. Not till we reached the open heathland and the sunlight did she come out of remoteness, and turn and speak to the horses as though they understood her better than I did.

She called them Castor and Pollux, and she rubbed both their noses so that there should be no jealousy between them.

We sprang a complete surprise upon our

people, for we came up through the further woods to where our people's horses had been hidden. So well hidden were they that but for men's voices we should have passed them by. The astonished face of the first man who saw Meona and her white pair was a tribute to her unexpectedness, and also to what she symbolized. He was a Honey Valley man, and he stared at her as though the Genius Loci had descended upon this sacred hill to bless and hearten its people. He ran to us and bending low, kissed the hem of her garment as she stood in the chariot. Then he began to dance about and shout, "The Lady Meona is here, the Lady Meona is here."

They must have regarded her sudden coming as a good omen, and as a manifestation of the intervention of the gods and of fate. They crowded round, and made so much noise that I raised my arm to silence them, but I must confess that they took no notice of me at all. But when Meona put up her hand they were silent.

"Greetings, my children. I am here and I bring good news. Take my horses and care for them."

It amused me to hear her address these fellows as her children, for some of them were going grey in the head, but they crowded round the horses and chariot like a lot of eager boys, all scuffling and scrambling with each other to carry out her orders.

I may have acquired some sort of reputation as a fighting-man, but to these peasants I was no more than the steward's son, when their lord's daughter swam like the moon into their sky.

I STROLLED further into the wood, for I was feeling a rather superfluous fool in this gallery of ghosts. And then I heard someone calling me.

"Dux Pellias, Dux Pellias."

Good God, how near I was to being a duke! Did my brother Pellias carry that title with him to the grave? Pellias, Duke of Britain! It sounded like Shakespeare. But I answered the call.

"Hallo."

Morgan came running on his long brown legs.

"My lord is asking for you."

"Where is my lord, Morgan?"

"At the temple."

The lad had a sensitive, vivid face, and he looked at me as though I were a hero.

"May I carry your spear, Captain?"

I tossed it to him and he caught it, flushing as if I had spoken words of praise.

I walked through the wood to the sandy road across the heath, passing an old quarry where the builders had quarried the local stone for the temple foundations. I saw the building against the sky, its portico unscreened to the south, but piled on either side of it a concealing ramp of young birch trees.

I heard voices, and I walked round the portico which had become a kind of green tunnel, to find Aurelius sitting on a pile of saddles, with Meona standing beside him. She did not look at me. She was frowning, and I gathered that words had passed between these two. One could see the Downs through the foliage of the birches. It was like standing just inside a wood and looking through a film of leaves at the landscape.

My lord turned to me.

"Pellias, my son, there are occasions when one speaks one's mind without covering the words with silk. Tell me, what would you do with a contumacious young woman who will not be advised?"

His voice was both angry and ironic, and he put me in a quandary, for Meona's face was not helpful.

"I should appeal to her good sense, sir."

At that my lord laughed.

"The philosophers have argued that the virtue has been denied to women. It would seem that you young things welcome danger. My daughter brings me news that my brother is sending strong succor to us, and that within the next few days he will join us in person. Meanwhile, we have this added challenge on our hands. What would you do with it?"

This was indeed a challenge to me! I was gazing through the green leaves at the Downs, and I saw there something that saved me from answering his question. I could see a stretch of the Ridgeway, and moving along it a thing that suggested a huge multi-colored snake. I did not even stop to answer Aurelius's question, but ran round the portico, and shouted to the men who were at work.

"Lie down, keep flat. The Saxons are on the Downs. They must not see you."

The men obeyed me, though one or two of them had a look at the distant ridge before throwing down mattock and spade. Festus, who had been in charge of the men who were felling trees for a stockade, came striding through the heather, and

I shouted to him, pointed, and signed to him to take cover. He went down in the heather, and I saw him crawl through it to the vallum, and lie there scanning the line of the chalk-hills.

I returned to the north side of the temple. Meona was leaning into the foliage of the piled trees, but my lord had not moved from his seat.

"So, they are there, Pellias. My eyes are too old for me to see them."

I went and stood by Meona, and together we watched the Saxon army crawling along the green ridge opposite. I grant it the honour of being dubbed an army, for in those days a thousand men was a formidable force in Britain. These barbarians loved colour, and the skin of that crawling snake seemed iridescent with many colours. It flashed and glistened. The head of the column was made up of horsemen, and no more than half a dozen wagons rolled along in the rear.

I was conscious of a feeling of excitement, of fierce tension, but my head was as clear as the sky. Would our enemies discover the grave where their dead were buried, and if so would they turn aside in search of vengeance? And would they discover any revealing signs of our presence upon the temple heath?

I glanced for a moment at Meona. Her arms were spread, her hands gripping the trunks of two trees. Her face looked very white and set in the greenish light. Her lips were pale and pressed together. It was not the face of one who is afraid. Her eyes were the eyes of a fierce bird ready to strike.

I heard my lord's voice.

"Are they many, Pellias?"

"I should say a thousand, sir."

I could just distinguish the long grave with its white scars in the chalk. The head of the Saxon column was drawing close to it, but a bank of thorns and yews intervened between the Ridgeway and the grave. I was praying that they would pass it by. And then I saw one or two dwarfed figures come down through the yews and thorns, and pause by that raw green bank. They knew. The secret was no secret. In fact, the march was stopped, and I saw the hill-side stippled with armed men who had come to gaze upon the place where their dead lay buried. One or two figures became active on the mound. They were digging, and suddenly I saw spears and shields raised in the air, and a faint, ominous howl came to us across the valley. The savages had made sure of their dead.

I FELT Meona shiver slightly, and my own skin tingled, for I knew what that beast-sound might mean for all of us. I remember all this very vividly, and yet I believe that my vision that day must have been supernormally acute, for I doubt whether the details I have described would have been recognizable at such a distance. The movement of a large body of men most certainly could be distinguished, and I have no doubt about the massed howl that came to us across the valley. It was like the baying and yapping of a pack of dogs, and both Meona and my lord heard it, as I did. I was reminded of a Norman description of Senlac and how the hairy English manning their breastworks and shouting "Out, out" had looked and sounded to the Normans like an army of yapping dogs.

Meona's hand touched my arm and clasped it.

"Did you hear?"

Both of us believed that that faint yet grim ululation had sounded the doom of the great house in the valley. My lord too had heard it, and his old face seemed to grow haggard.

"The wolf pack gives tongue."

Meona turned quickly, and going to her father, kneeled down by him with an arm across his knees. Meanwhile, I stood there, watching our enemies, and my lord and Meona watched me. For the moment I was their eyes, and I waited, expecting to see the Germans leave the ridge and pour down into the valley. Did they know whence that other attack had come? My mouth felt dry and my stomach knotted. Not a word passed between us. Then, hardly crediting it, I saw the great snake re-form its length and go gliding slowly along the green ridge.

I gave them the news.

"They are marching on."

Meona sprang up and joined me, and I could feel her young body tense yet vibrant.

"Yes, they are passing."

We watched the band of speckled colour moving towards the west.

It is curious how one forgets things, or fails to forecast the ultimate significance of some process while observing it in action. I do not suppose the creator of the internal combustion engine divined, as he watched its cruder functionings, the Tank and the Bombing Plane and all the beast-

liness that science has placed at the service of international Bullies. Even so, Meona and I watching those Germans, for I always thought of them as Germans in coal-scuttle steel helmets, were like two children watching a procession. My lord's old eyes might not be able to see what we were seeing, but his prescience was quicker than ours.

"Child, when did Maximus leave for Calleva?"

Meona drew her breath in deeply, as though cold water had been dashed against her body.

"Ye gods, I had forgotten! He must have left for Calleva this morning."

"Someone must be sent to warn him. Call Festus."

I went and called Festus who was still lying in the heather watching our enemies. Who was Maximus? I could suppose that Maximus was Ambrosius's son, and that he was leading those who were riding to succour us.

My lord's anxiety was obvious. If Ambrosius's people rode blindly into danger, and disaster overtook them, the blame would be ours.

My lord did not waste a moment. Had Festus a horse that was fresh? He had. And did Meona know by which road Maximus and his men would be riding? Yes, he would come by the Calleva-Pontes road, as she had done, but he would turn off short of Pontes, and follow the by-road that crossed the Hogs Back and make for the bridge across the Wey. No doubt the Saxons were heading for that same bridge, and were marching to surprise either Pontes or Calleva.

Festus had his orders. He was to ride like the devil for the bridge across the Wey and make it before our enemy could seize it. He must meet young Maximus on the road and warn him, and counsel him to retreat upon Calleva and wait until his father should join him with his forces. Meanwhile, we would lie concealed on Farley Heath, and be ready to hold it as an advanced post. Festus should wait upon Aurelius Ambrosius, hear what he proposed to do, and then return to us. If Aurelius Ambrosius felt himself sufficiently strong to give battle to the Saxons, we might plan to join them, and perhaps, if fortune favoured us, attack our enemies in the rear.

I went with Festus to see him mounted, and to urge our men on to work upon the defences.

IT WAS late on the afternoon on the second day when Meona called to me. I was sitting on the grass in the sun, staring at nothing, and thinking of nothing in particular. Indeed, I was a throbbing vessel of emotion.

"Pellias, Pellias."

I started up, and went to her, and there was mystery in her manner. My lord was asleep on his couch in the temple *cella*. Old people seem to be happy when they fall asleep.

"I have an adventure."

I felt that there was mischief in her mood, and I waited.

She said, "I have left my favourite hand-mirror in the house. I am going down there. Come with me."

My impulse was to tell her she must do nothing of the kind, and that I would not humour such a silly hazard, but she must have read my face, and she laughed at me.

"If you are afraid I will go alone."

"You will not."

"Where is the danger? This land is an empty land. And I have a desire to see the great old house. It must be so unhappy, so perplexed."

Her words moved me, as all words that have a wildness of fancy must move one. Oh, for more such words, more strangeness, more mystery! We moderns seem to think in terms of horse-power; in cams and connecting rods, voltages, calories. The fairies have been eliminated, God liquidated, oh, wonderful world beloved of the Germans, when they have put a hoof on some small nation's soul! A great, empty house in a deserted valley! A ghost place! I knew now that I should go with her, and that we were like two children setting out to explore some mysterious and magic castle. Was her mirror of silver or of bronze? What did it matter? I buckled on my sword, which was lying on the grass beside me. I was becoming quite the soldier in the wearing of a sword. I saw her eyes catch the light like crimped water. She threw back her head and laughed.

"There are no dragons in the valley, Pellias."

Almost, I wished there were such creatures, and that we might meet one, and that I could slay it for her sake.

I do not think anybody saw us go. We walked into the woods where the horses were hidden, and took the track that we had followed when we had come up from the valley. There was a little sandy plateau amid some pines where the young

bracken stood in pale and crowded crooks, and I remember a green woodpecker laughing at us and winging away into the trees. I do not think I shall ever forget the bird's laughing cry, or the way its body rose and fell like a green shuttle threading through the light. Whenever I hear that sound now a little shiver of horror runs through me.

We came over the edge of the Black Down, and saw the valley below us shimmering with sunlight. We had paused under a great beech tree, and Meona stood leaning against it, and looking down into the valley. Her face was douce and soft, her eyes tender. Somehow, the smooth trunk of the tree suggested to me that age-old lover's custom of carving the first letter of a loved one's name in the bark, with, perhaps, a heart beneath it, and another letter to mark the hand of the carver. Should I draw my sword, and with the point of it cut an M? And if I added a P? M.P. Dear God, how unromantic some associations can be! Meona and Pellias. Member of Parliament! What a puzzle for posterity!

But I was not suffered to exercise a lover's fancy. She came out of her dream, and went running down the hill like a long-legged boy.

"Come! I want my mirror."

I sprinted after her, thinking, how modern she was in her build, a greyhound creature, slight and swift and graceful. Atalanta must have been like that.

I caught her up and spoke of caution. We did not yet know what we might find down there, and I was not going to let her run into any peril.

"Pellias," said she, "what a schoolmaster art thou!"

Schoolmaster, indeed! She was a little flushed with running and her eyes were alight, and I could not keep the words from my lips.

"Were anything to happen to you I should not want to live."

I saw a sudden change come over her face, and for a moment I thought that she was angry with me. The child became lost in the woman. A lovely seriousness seemed to envelope her. She hesitated, stood still, her eyes on the valley.

"Look down, Pellias, look down. See you any danger there?"

I looked. I could see the stream and the mill, and the heather-thatched roofs of the hamlet, and the great house with its courtyard and garden, and the white pillars of its portico. It might have been very early in the morning, with the whole valley still asleep.

"I see nothing, Meona, but I must go alone to make sure."

She was smiling as at something within herself. Then, she sat down on the grassy slope, and folded her hands over her knees.

"Go then. It shall be as you wish."

"You will not venture down until I call you?"

"I promise."

I wanted to go down on my knees and kiss her hands.

In truth, I ran away from my own emotion, and from the exquisite muteness of my own self-questioning. What did this mood of hers mean for me? I had never known her like this, and I wanted to be alone for a moment with my wild hopes and fears. I am afraid I forgot all caution. I went leaping down into the valley. I felt like quicksilver. I came to a gate and a hedge, and I went over the gate like air.

I can remember reading in some Greek history of hoplites leaping in the market-place of a city, and in the haphazard way in which one's thoughts interweave themselves I wondered how a fighting-match between Greek hoplites and German savages would have ended.

I came down through an orchard. It had a hedge and a gate flanking the lane. I admit that I became more cautious here, for any recklessness of mine might involve Meona in disaster. The only live things I saw were two hens dusting themselves in a dust patch beside the road. I followed the lane past the mill, keeping on the grass and close to the hedge, and stopping every twenty yards or so to listen.

I saw a big bird floating overhead. It may have been a buzzard or an eagle, but it made me think of a scouting aeroplane. I could see the grey sweep of the courtyard wall. The silence was utter save for the voices of the birds. I slipped along the wall to the open gateway, peered round the pillar, and saw two white pigeons preening themselves upon the stone water-cistern. The great house looked just as we had left it, open-mouthed and wide-eyed, but I wanted to be sure that it hid no enemy. I reached for the chain of the porter's bell, and with one eye round the gate-pillar, set the bell pealing. Nothing happened. The great house gazed at me as though it considered my carefulness rather foolish.

I RETURNED to find Meona where I had left her. She had kept her promise to me, but she had been startled by hearing the ringing of the courtyard bell. When I told her that I had rung it to test the emptiness of the place, and to make sure that no Germans who had been taking a long siesta would come blundering out, she threw back her head and laughed.

"You are very careful of things, Pellias."

"When they are very precious, yes."

She put out her hand to me, and I bent and kissed it, and I dared to keep hold of her hand, and she let it stay in mine. Were we sweethearts? Was this but another mood of lovely childishness, or did the woman in her understand? We went down through the orchard together, and along the lane with its riotous sweet hedges rich with the richness of June. It was the lovely season of the year, and every June I think of the Albury valley as it looked and smelt on the day when Meona and I walked hand in hand along it.

When we came to the courtyard gate she let go of my hand and stood gazing at the house. Its serenity and stateliness seemed to deny the horror of its being fouled by a barbarian beastliness. I kept silent. I felt that her mood had, for the moment, become remote and visionary. The two pigeons were still on the water-cistern, and one of them was courting and cooing to the other. Oh, brave bird, good luck to you!

Meona's voice came to me in a strange, soft whisper.

"Let me go in alone, Pellias. Then I will call you."

I saw her cross to the water-cistern and speak to the birds, hold out her hands, and one pigeon settled on her wrist, the other on her shoulder. They fluttered off again when she reached the portico. I saw her pause there for a moment, watching the two white birds with a smile on her face. Was this an omen? Then she disappeared, and instantly, now that she was out of my sight, a fierce uneasiness seized me. What if that silent house did, in fact, conceal some sleeping enemy? I walked as far as the water-cistern, and stood there listening, with my hand on my sword.

No more than a few seconds seemed to have passed when I saw her figure in the dim vestibule. She was hurrying, but she paused on the portico steps where the sunlight was shining, but somehow she still seemed to be in the shadow. All the light and laughter had gone from her. Her eyes looked big with fear, her face small and blanched. For the moment I thought that she had found some horror in the house, and had fled from it. I half drew my sword as I went towards her.

She stood there looking at me with those big, black, tragic eyes of hers. Her hands hung limply.

"Pellias, I am afraid."

"My dear," said I, "what—?"

"No, no, nothing, just the emptiness and the silence and the strangeness. I felt in a house of ghosts. I could not stay alone."

I saw that she had no mirror in her hand, and I could understand the sudden fear that had possessed her. For, I, too, became conscious of a strange, vague fear, as though the place was haunted.

"You did not get your mirror?"

"No."

"I will come in with you."

She hesitated, and then smiled at me a little wanly.

"Yes, it was foolish."

I went with her into the long, dim corridor where doors stood half open, concealing imagined and nameless terrors. The place had a most strange effect on me. I felt tense, cold, ready for some unexpected and evil thing to happen. I wanted to draw my sword. Meona grasped my hand and her fingers were cold. She led me to the far end of the long gallery, paused, shivered, let go of my hand, and went swiftly to a door. She opened it almost with stealth, peered in, disappeared, to reappear a moment later with a bronze mirror clasped to her bosom. There was a kind of anguish in the way her hand pressed the thing to her body.

"Let us go. The house frightens me."

She caught my hand, and we went quickly back past all those mysterious doors to the sunlight on the steps of the portico. One of the white birds was cooing. I saw the woods on the Black Down green and serene in the June sunlight. An utter peace seemed to possess the valley.

Meona drew a deep, sharp breath.

"Why was I afraid? There is nothing. It is just the strangeness. This house has never been empty."

Suddenly, I felt her fingers tighten on mine, for a strange discord had come to us down in the valley. Meona went rigid, and so did I, for this sound seemed to rise and quiver with a sense of distant horror. We stood looking at each other, mute, questioning, challenged. I saw her blanched lips move.

"What is it, oh, what is it?"

And suddenly I understood. The sound that we heard was the distant shouting of many men joined in some desperate death-struggle.

THE wind, such as it was, blew from the south-west, and the distant, ominous clamour seemed to come from the same quarter. I felt Meona leaning against me, and I put my arm about her.

I heard her say, "It must be Maximus. They are greeting each other."

That is what she wished to think, but the wild and distant broil of voices was not that of men meeting in vociferous welcome. Maximus it might be, or Aurelius Ambrosius with all his strength in sudden battle with the barbarians. Or, it might be? Were the Saxons in retreat, or had some fresh horde of them come marching towards the west? Had they surprised our people at the temple? I did not know what to think, and for the moment the horror of that prospect paralysed me.

"Pellias."

She was looking up into my face with fear and a question in her eyes.

"It may be—"

"Oh, let us go, let us go."

A wild eagerness to see and know took possession of us both.

We left the white pigeons in possession of the courtyard, and running together along the lane, climbed through the orchard and fields to the Black Down. She was out of breath when we reached the beech wood, and once within its shade, she leaned for a moment, panting, against a tree. The pinched pallor of her lovely little face ravaged me as she stood there with mouth open and nostrils wide. I was listening, but the stillness was utter. That wild, battling clamour either had died away, or the great wood blanketed it. Her eyes watched my face.

"Can you hear anything?"

I shook my head, and she swayed away from the tree, and began to run, still holding the mirror in her hand. The air seemed heavier among these towering trees, and I could hear her panting. I ran by her side, and laid my hand gently upon her shoulder.

"Wait here, Meona, while I go on and look."

But she would have none of it.

"No, don't leave me, Pellias."

"Stay and get your breath."

"No, no."

I wanted to save her from rushing with those frightened eyes of hers upon some possible horror, but I realized that she could not bear to be left alone, and that she was wild to know what was happening. I saw the sky, and the trees thinning in front of us, and I caught her by the arm and held her back as we came toward the open heathland. I did not mean her to rush recklessly into danger, and betray herself. I do not think I had any thought of my own safety.

"Steady, my dear, steady. Make for that big tree over there."

She gave me a wounded look, but she obeyed. One big beech tree stood a little apart from its fellows, its branches sweeping the ground, and we plunged into the shelter of this great green tent, and putting our faces close to the leaves, looked out towards the temple.

The first thing that I saw stabbed me with foreboding. Three of the white portico pillars showed clearly above the dark sweep of the heath. Some of the screening birch trees had been thrown down. What did that mean? That they had been torn away by wild men storming to get at other wild men who had taken refuge round the temple?

Meona saw it as I did, but for her it had a happier meaning.

"See, they have taken trees away. Maximus must have come. There is no more danger."

She would have pushed her way through the foliage, but I held her back.

"Wait, Meona."

I could see movement, figures in the temple enclosure, little objects that caught the light, sunlight upon helmets. One or two of these figures mounted the vallum, and seemed to wave arms and weapons. I heard a faint cheer, and the jerking up and down of points of light. Those figures on the vallum were brightly coloured. I saw a round disc, a shield, like a small red flower. Those shields were round; ours were the Roman shape and curved to cover the body. And then I knew that my fear was valid. Those men were Saxons. They had stormed and captured the temple.

I looked at Meona.

"My dear, something has happened."

I put my arm round her and held her close. She was trembling, and my love trembled with her.

"What do you see, Pellias?"

"Our enemies. Those shields are not our shields."

"Oh, my friend, what has befallen our people?"

I tried to reassure her, though I guessed that some dreadful thing had happened.

"I expect they were warned in time, and hearing the strength of the others, took to the woods. Remember, they had horses."

Her young body lay heavy in my arm.

"I am afraid, Pellias, I am afraid. I must know. What shall we do?"

That question appalled me. What could we do?

"Oh, wait and watch, Meona. I expect my lord and our men have gone west towards safety."

"Would not those wretches have pursued them?"

"Maybe the Saxons have no horses. I will tell you what I think we ought to do, wait a little while and then make our way along the edge of the valley to the river. We may fall in with my lord and his people."

She closed her eyes for a moment.

"I do not believe that you believe, Pellias, that that is what has happened."

Dear God, what was I to say to her? Very gently I kissed her hair.

I MADE her lie down in the heather and fern beside me on the edge of the wood, and from there we watched the opposite hill. I was wondering what the devil to do, for, even if Aurelius and our people had escaped scatheless, Meona and I were in a pretty perilous position. We had no horses, no food, no shelter for the night, and our only chance seemed to be that we should track through the woods and get across the Wey, and make for Calleva. All the roads and trackways would be dangerous.

I lay with my chin on my fists and watched the temple and the movement about it. I am afraid that I was in a gloomy mood, and I did not believe that our people had escaped. The wild cries that had reached us in the valley had been the cries of men in combat. Again, I was puzzled by something I saw over there, little round objects bobbing up and down like coconuts stuck on sticks. Did these savages carry war-maces? It was damned unintelligent of me, but I did not divine what those objects were.

Meona was terribly restless, writhing with the anguish of suspense. Once, she got on her knees in the heather as though to see more clearly.

"I am going nearer. I must go."

I drew her down.

"Wait, my dear, wait. Do you think I am going to let you go to your death and worse? These Germans are wild beasts."

We must have been lying there for an hour when that which I had dared not hope for, happened. The barbarians were leaving the temple and its enclosure. A ragged mass of them began to stream along the hill-side, following the by-road towards the west. There must have been hundreds of them, and I suppose they were marching on to join their brothers who had come by way of the Chalk Ridge.

What tragic fools we had been! I don't think it had occurred to any of us that more of these savages might take the road that linked up Stane Street with Pontes. We lay and watched our enemies pass down towards the valley, the gaudy colours of their cloaks and shields brilliant against the dark woods. We could hear them singing. And so they vanished from our sight into the early evening sunlight, and peace was upon the earth.

Peace! Meona was on her feet, and running through the heather. I caught her up and grasped her arm.

"No, my dear, I'm going up there."

"Let me go, Pellias."

"Not on my life. There may still be danger."

"Would you leave me alone here?"

"You can come half-way and hide, while I go on."

I think she realized that I was determined that she should not go with me, and I suspect that a part of her flinched from the thing we feared. We got down into a little valley, and followed it up towards the heath, and there I made her sit down under a solitary thorn tree while I went on. I crawled up through the heather like a hunter stalking deer, stopping now and again to raise my head and look. I could see no movement up yonder, hear nothing, and the silence scared me. What should I find?

Crawling on I reached the edge of the fern and heather and saw the stretch of turf and the vallum and brushwood, and the roof and three pillars of the temple. I lay and listened. There was not a sound, and suddenly my very fear made me reckless. I wanted to get it over. I stood up, and with my sword ready, walked deliberately across the stretch of grass to the bank. I climbed it, and stood looking.

I have never known such cold horror as that which froze me. The place was a shambles, a chaos of corpses. They lay scattered, or tumbled upon each other in

all kinds of dreadful attitudes. There was blood everywhere. But that was not the worst. I saw two spears stuck in the ground, and impaled upon them two horrible heads. I seemed to know those heads, in spite of the blood in their hair and upon their faces. One head had white hair. I was looking at the severed heads of Robur and my lord Aurelius.

Even while the horror of the thing was making me feel physically sick, I was able to thank the gods that Meona had not come with me. I remember turning and glancing back to make sure that she had not followed me. Yet, something stronger than myself was telling me what I had to do, in spite of my cold nausea and my impulse to turn and run. I could not deal with all these dead, but those two poor, dreadful heads had to be rescued and hidden. Meona might yet insist upon coming up to see her dead. I got down into that bloody enclosure, and stepping delicately, approached those terrible symbols of defeat and victory. I could not bring myself to look at them. I pulled the spears out of the ground, and keeping my eyes lowered, carried first one and then the other to the ditch which our men had deepened. I laid them in the ditch, and finding a spade, flung earth over them.

The whole place stank of blood, and I felt that if I stayed I should vomit. I was sweating, and yet I shivered and was cold. I remembered our horses, and the men who were guarding them, and a hope flickered in me that they might still be lying hidden in the woods. I got out of the enclosure and walked round it on the clean turf, and then ran for the woods where I hoped to discover some living thing. It was in vain. I found the glade, and it was empty. Meona's chariot and her white horses had gone. I could only suppose that the men in charge of the horses had fled when the bloody business had started. Fugitives from the temple might have joined them. All that I know was that Meona and I were alone with the dead.

Good God, and I had to tell her!

What if she was determined to see the dead body of her father?

And where was it, a hacked, and headless thing?

A mad rage began to burn in me, the rage of impotence. I would like to have inflicted every sort of torture upon these German beasts. I would have rushed at the chance of going blood-mad against some not impossible odds, and of hacking and killing even if I was to go down in the end. Never before had I realized how flimsy are our conventional draperies, and that we can be savage beasts, and all the more so when our sensitive souls have been splashed and shocked with blood.

THE next thing I remember was Meona's face looking up at me from the heather. Why did she look at me like that? Was I horrible, a dreadful apparition? And then I realized that I must have carried on my countenance the stigmata of the horrors I had seen. There was no need for her to ask me questions.

Her face seemed to have gone very white and small, but the eyes were huge, and the mouth the mouth of one about to utter a cry, but whose spirit had been smitten with dumbness. I saw her looking at my hands, and then at my feet. I glanced at my hands. There were red smears on them, and my shoes had picked up the same dreadful stains. I saw her cover her face, and her kneeling figure was strangely and terribly still. Then, a shudder went through her. I heard her speak.

"Is my father among them?"

"All are dead."

I saw her shoulders shaking, and I wanted to comfort her, but I had a feeling that she did not want to be touched. The trembling passed. She seemed to go rigid and remote. Her hands dropped from her face, and uncovered her dry, dark eyes.

She said, "Come, I must see him."

This was the very thing I had dreaded. It was unthinkable that she should look upon all that slaughter. Thank heaven I had hidden that poor head! I could lie to her.

"You cannot see him, Meona. I have buried him."

She gave me a strange, wounded look, and rose from her knees.

"I must see him."

"No, my dear."

"You are lying to me, Pellias, out of kindness. You had not time to do all that."

I shook my head at her.

"I buried him in the ditch."

I do not know what tragic obstinacy possessed her, but she made as though to go up through the heather. The idea of her seeing all that horror terrified me. She could not go. I caught her, and gathering her in my arms, began to carry her towards the wood, but, for a moment, her passionate purpose fought against me. She struggled. She struck me in the face.

"Let me go, let me go."

I took her blows, and holding her against me, ploughed on through the heather towards the trees. Suddenly, her struggles ceased. She put her arms round my neck, and hid her face. She began to weep, and to weep most terribly.

"Forgive me, my friend."

I was scorched with tenderness by her tears.

"You are safe, Meona. That is how he would have wished it."

I carried her to the wood, and we sat down together under the great beech from which we had started. I had my back to the tree trunk, and I held her close to me with her head against my shoulder. She had ceased from weeping and her stillness was almost more tragic than her tears. Dear God, what an escape had been ours! I could not let myself think of what might have happened to her. I held her close and stroked her hands. I was trying to think of what I should do in this desperate dilemma. Here were we alone in a wilderness over-run by our enemies, without food, without shelter. I knew that my only hope was to get her to some place like Calleva, and Calleva was twenty-five miles away. Moreover, those German swine might be at the gates of Calleva.

Or, should I try to make for London? Anyhow, action was the thing, action, and food of some sort. Dared we go down again to the house in the valley and try to rummage up food for the journey? It might take us two days, or longer, to reach Calleva, for we should have to avoid all roads and find our way across country. There was the river to be forded, for we could not risk the bridge. I spoke to her at last.

"Meona, my duty is to carry you to some safe place. We shall have to go by foot."

Her head moved against my shoulder.

"Calleva, and your friends. We shall have to travel at night, and keep to the woods by day. And food?"

She said, "I am not hungry."

I let that pass.

"Have you the strength, Meona?"

She sat up and looked at me, and I saw that her spirit was rising like a new young flame.

"I shall have the strength. I have my purpose."

I understood her. She was thinking of vengeance, and so was I, for vengeance is sweet, whatever the dear old sentimental gentlemen may say. I told her that I was going down to the valley to try to find some food. Yes, she would have to eat, for we should need our strength to outwit our enemies and to carry the news to those who might wipe out in blood this savage slaughter. She shuddered at the prospect of going down again into the valley, but I told her I would leave her on the hill-side and go down alone.

I did not go alone, for when it came to the point I did not like leaving her, nor did she wish to be left.

"No, I will go with you, Pellias."

How bitter-sweet those words were to me after the ugly things I had seen! I took her hand, and with my sword drawn we went down into the valley. It was the same valley, with the sunlight shining more aslant it, peaceful and still, and yet how different for both of us! Of all those who knew it as the Honey Valley, Meona alone had survived. She was the young mistress and great lady of a dead place, and almost I was moved to think that the great house had known what was to happen, and that was why we had felt its silent, haunted terror.

In one of the orchards above the lane I became aware of the pressure of her fingers. She stood still, and I with her.

"Pellias."

"Meona."

"Swear to me one thing."

"What shall I swear?"

"That you will kill me, if needs be."

I understood her. A kind of horror of tenderness swept through me. I stood looking at her, and for the moment I was dumb.

Could fate be so ruthless, that it would compel me to slay the thing I loved? I felt that I could not do it.

"Meona, life cannot be so merciless to us."

Her pale face grew fierce and passionate.

"Swear it, Pellias. What would my lot be?"

"Meona!"

"Swear it, by the gods and by your sword."

I bent my head, and taking my sword by the blade, kissed the crossed hilt.

"I swear it."

She laid a hand upon my head.

"That comforts me, that gives me courage."

I had sworn my oath, but, dear God, should I have the courage to honour it? Yet I too would be dead, slain in a last furious Berserker fight with those who had made me use my sword upon her.

CHAPTER VIII

SO, WE did not leave each other, but like two sweethearts who have sworn a death-pact, we went down hand in hand into that dead valley. Yet, it was no more dead than we were confessed lovers, for though I loved her utterly, she was both near to me and remote. Moreover, there is such a virtue as chivalry, and to have plagued her with love talk at such a time would have been blackguardly. Nor, as I said, was the valley dead. Nature carried on. The Tillingbourne had its own soft song to sing, and the birds were beginning vespers. The lovely greenness of the year was bittersweet, and somehow, now that we had sworn our pact, crude fear had left us. We dared fate and the unknown, and walking hand in hand along the lane, came to the courtyard gate.

More white pigeons were there, which was a happy omen. It crossed my mind that we might catch a brace of those birds and roast them, but I put the thought from me. We had had enough of blood. Let the creatures live and enjoy the sunlight. I don't think it would have been in me to wring those birds' necks.

As for food, life in Roman Britain was not tinned, and there was no Sainsbury round the corner, and in June the fruits of the earth are still immature in Nature's lap. No, potatoes, no oranges, no bananas, no sardines! Meona led the way to the kitchen quarters and the cool dark dairy. We were to be more fortunate than I had hoped, for our hurried exodus had left some stores behind. Meona found a loaf of stale bread, a pot of olives, another pot of honey, and hanging from a beam were some dried fish and two smoked hams. It was the realist in me, and not the romantic, who exulted over that ham. I found a sack and stuffed both hams into it, also the bread, and Meona slipped the honey and the olives into a wallet we found hanging on the wall. Her pale, unsmiling face made this provision-business seem all the stranger, nor was there any hunger in either of us for the moment.

We left the sack and wallet in the vestibule, and Meona walked down the corridor to the summer-room. I did not know whether she wanted me to follow her, but she beckoned to me, and I went. That spacious and serene room saddened me. There was my lord's chair, and as I gazed at it I was conscious of a pang of desolation. The only creature who knew my secret or could know it, was dead. I saw Meona go to the *lararium* and draw the curtain across it. This was indeed the twilight of her gods. She also drew the curtains across the windows. I remember her passing down the corridor and closing all the doors.

"Is it the end, Pellias? Shall I ever come back here?"

"Of course you will come back."

I do not think she believed me. She bade me close the outer doors, and while I was doing it she went and shut the shutters of the summer-room. I heard birds singing, and the pigeons cooing. How little did Nature care for man's male madness! I had the sack over my shoulder, and Meona's wallet slung on the other side, and as I stood there the shadow of a cloud fell across the courtyard. Where were we to sleep? In the woods? Well, could I not find something with which to cover her?

She came back to me with silence in her eyes.

"Meona, can I find a coverlet or something?"

She looked at me vaguely.

"We shall have to sleep in the woods."

She gave me a nod of the head, and reopening the doors, went in, to return with a coverlet and a cloak. I told her to fold them and lay them over the sack. Then we walked down to the gate, with the pigeons running round our feet. Meona stretched out a hand as though blessing them.

"Good-bye, my dears."

We closed the courtyard gates behind us, and crossing the lane to a cottage garden, made our way up it and through an orchard to a hayfield below the woods. A little breeze came up the valley and made the long grass run away from our feet. The whole field seemed to be in movement with its white daisies and its sorrel and looking at Meona I saw that her hair had blown loose upon her shoulders. I had not seen her very black hair free in the wind before, nor had I seen any hair like that in my modern world of crimped curls and little baldish foreheads. Somehow, it made her look like a lovely child, but that pale and poignant face was no child's face. Those eyes had seen death and disaster, and the end of happy things.

We reached the woods and edged along them, keeping to cover, for the woods were open and without coppice. We still had two or three hours of daylight, and I wondered if we could reach the Wey before night fell, and creeping down to it in the

twilight, swim across. Could Meona swim? I asked her the question, and she shook her head, and that set me the problem of getting her across. She told me that there was a ford near the bridge, but I decided that we could dare neither bridge nor ford.

This woodland journey gave me an added sense of solitude. We might have been Adam and Eve in a primeval world, but even against this feeling was set the knowledge that at any moment we might come upon our enemies. Savages in these very English woods! I might have been playing the kind of game one played as a small boy, but this was a grim game fierce with reality. I was on the alert all the time, watching the tree trunks and the shadows and the elusive streaks of sunlight.

I don't think any place can be more eerie than a wood when its green glooms may hide fear and death. Yes, this was a jungle game, and the stake the life of the creature whom I loved. I know that when we came to the more level and open country, I got the wind up rather badly, and made Meona sit down and rest while I crawled about scouting. I could see nothing of our dear friends, and I could assume that if they were pushing on to join their other body, they would be well ahead of us, and over the Wey.

I could see the road crossing the plain. Scattered trees and bushes gave one some cover, and in the west the wild and wooded hills and valleys north of Godalming welcomed us. I should like to have loitered here till twilight, but there was the river to be crossed, and it occurred to me that I might find something for Meona to cross in. I had visions of a British coracle. I went back to Meona, and put the chances to her, and found that she was all for action.

We made haste down into the broad valley which was like parkland, and when we came to the road we dashed across it for a group of trees. As we had crossed the road its gravelly surface had suggested the passing of many feet. There was not a living creature to be seen. I asked Meona if she knew in which direction we should bear, and she stood a moment, looking under her hand, for the level sunlight was in our eyes.

She pointed.

"You see where the woods curve round, Pellias?"

"Yes."

"The river lies over there in those meadows."

We made for the line of woods toward which she had pointed. The ground shelved gently from them to the meadows, and the evening sunlight lay spread upon the grass. It was very blinding was this light, with the great yellow sun blazing at us just when I wanted to be so sure of the ground ahead of us. I thought I could see the gleam of water and the green tangle of the water-weeds along the banks, nor could I make out any sign of life. I must have been tired and irritable and over-wrought, for I cursed the sun, which was rank blasphemy.

"With this glare I cannot see."

I felt her touch my arm, and when I looked at her there was something in her eyes that moved me to self-shame.

"Wait, there is no hurry, Pellias."

There was a new and intimate quality in her voice, a little tang of tenderness.

"I feel so responsible."

"For the sun, my dear, and everything?"

"For you, and my promise."

Her fingers clasped my arm.

"Is it nothing to me that you should have to face so much for my sake? There is no hurry. Let us sit here until the sun is below those hills."

"Forgive me," I said. "Maybe, what I feel is fiercer than my patience."

"You have been very patient with me, Pellias."

Her words had for me the exquisite touch of a caress. I wanted to blurt out things to her, my love and how I would serve her in death and until death. I bent my head and kissed the hand that rested on my arm.

"Meona, I would give you anything I have, honour and strength and faith. Yes, be patient with me. We will wait here till the old sun goes down."

We sat in silence and close together under a tree until that yellow disc sank gradually behind the hills. The valley below us was brilliant with diffused light. I could see everything now, the colour, the detail against the blackening woods. There was the river, one loop of it, like a silver sickle. I could distinguish some black object projecting from the near bank like the trunk of a dead tree that had fallen into the water. Was it a tree or a boat? I stood up in my excitement and pointed it out to Meona.

"Are we in luck? What do you see there?"

She thought it was a dead tree, an old alder that had rotted and fallen into the river. There were other alders along

the bank, but I still believed that providence might have blessed us with a boat. I told her to wait there while I went down and explored. A line of willows crossed the meadows along a ditch, and I followed the cover of these trees, and coming to the bank, found a grass path along the edge of it, one of those paths where the turf has been compressed by the comings and goings of men and beasts. The water was covered with a sheet of limpid light, and I saw the dark object projecting from the water-weeds. It was not a dead tree, but a clumsy boat, flat bottomed and snub-nosed. It was tied to a post, and there was a pole in it.

I got to the place and waved to Meona. The afterglow was full upon her, and she looked like some white and purple flower growing on the edge of the woods. She raised an arm, and I pointed to the willows, and she came running down under the droop of their graceful foliage, and in a minute she was with me.

"It is no dead tree," I said. "Someone must have used this as a ferry."

I helped her in, piled our gear on the back seat, for there was half an inch of water in the bottom of the boat. I bent down with my back to her to unknot the rope, and I became aware of those stains on my hands. God, I must get rid of them! I pretended to drop the rope into the water and fumbling at the knot, managed to wash away those bloody stains.

WE MUST have crossed the Wey somewhere north of Godalming. There was a good deal of marshy ground on the other side of the river, and a narrow causeway traversed it. I did not like this causeway, for there was no cover, and in the very brilliant glare of the after-glow I knew that we could be seen by any prowling savage. I went first, carrying the sack and the coverlet, and I must have gone at a devil of a pace, and rather too fast for Meona, for, looking round, I saw distress on her face. She was growing weary.

"Sorry, Meona, this open country is dangerous."

But I slackened speed, and soon we were among meadows and willows and poplars. It was Compton country, but however lovely and peaceful it might be as the green grey dusk flowed over it, I wanted the wilder hills and woods. We bore to the left along an old track-way, and it brought us, as I had hoped it would, to the high ground on the south. We must have been near the site of Charterhouse. It was growing dark now, and I sighted some old yews on the slope of a hill, and I turned aside here, and dropped my sack on the grass.

"Shelter for the night, Meona."

She had been limping and she sat down on the grass.

"Footsore?"

She nodded, and my love felt very tender towards her. There was a beech wood higher up the hill. The weather had been dry, and I took the coverlet and filled it with dead beech leaves and brought them back and spread them under a yew. I went thrice for leaves before I had made a bed. She sat there in the half darkness, aloof and silent, and yet I felt that she was watching me. I took my sword and cut off some yew boughs from another tree, and piled them into a bower under the yew. That would give her double shelter, and what I wanted her to feel, that the little refuge was wholly hers.

"That will keep the dew from you. I'll shake down under one of these other trees."

I had spread the coverlet on the leaves.

"I'll stuff the wallet for you to make a pillow."

I saw her face as a little white streak. How silent she was! Did she trust me? I saw her reach for the wallet and empty it on the grass beside her.

"Give me the sack, Pellias."

I gave it to her, and she drew the little dagger from her girdle.

"This is my service, my friend. Sit here by me. Even heroes must eat."

I think I laughed self-consciously.

"No hero—this, but just—"

"Sit down by me. It comforts me to have you close."

Even in the midst of tragedy there can be humour, and when she drew one of those hams out of the sack, she did not know what to do with it. Her lap was no place for a ham, and her perplexity was so potent that I could have laughed had laughter been possible on such a day.

"Oh, Pellias!"

There was Cassandra pathos even in this dismay over a ham, and I took the thing from her and held it by the knuckle end while she cut slices, skewered them out with the point of her dagger and dropped them into my palm. I laid the ham on the grass beyond the yew boughs, and held out my hand for her to take her share. The bread was easier. It was in the form of a flat cake, and one just broke pieces off with one's fingers. We had begun the meal,

sitting there side by side in the darkness when I remembered that we had no water, and nothing to hold it if we had it, unless I used my helmet. Could she drink from so common a vessel? As for the honey, she soon solved that problem. She made me give her my bread and poking her dagger into the pot, skewered out honey and spread it on my bread for me.

I said, "I was a fool not to think of water."

She told me that she was not thirsty. I was, and I inferred that her need was like mine. Where could one find water on a dark and strange hill-side? Besides, she might want to wash her hands. The idea of washing reminded me that I had nothing to shave with, and that I should look a sloven until we died or reached Calleva.

She had finished her own bread and honey.

"I can find water, Pellias."

"You? How?"

"I have the feeling. What shall we put it in?"

"There is nothing but my helmet."

"Give me your helmet."

I gave it to her and she rose, and I made as though to rise too.

"No stay here. I shall not go far."

I understood, and I obeyed her, though I did not like her wandering off alone in this dim light. I sat and listened, with my sword across my knees, ready to spring up and run to her if I heard her voice. I did not think that she would find water, but find it she did. She was back with me in less than three minutes, and holding out the helmet to me in her hands.

"Drink, Pellias."

I was astonished.

"You found it?"

"Yes, a little spring. I can divine water. It comes out of the hill-side. Drink."

"You first, if you can bear such a beaker."

"I have drunk. Drink, dear friend."

Her words must have put wine into that water. I half emptied the helmet, and then I put it aside upon the grass.

"Would you wash, Meona?"

"Presently."

She sat down beside me with her arms folded over her knees, and I, with her words still in my ears, could hardly dare to look at her even in the dim light, because I loved her so.

I remember filling the wallet with leaves, and giving it to her, and telling her that I was going to play sentinel for an hour or two. I adjured her to lie down and try and sleep, for we should have a long and rough journey on the morrow. She crept into the yew-bower, but she had forgotten the coverlet, and I passed it to her, and when she had spread it, I tucked it round her feet.

"But you have nothing, Pellias."

"I have the cloak, and I can collect some leaves."

And then, I left her, so that she could feel herself safe and secure in that green niche. I went to and fro between the yew grove and the beech wood, collecting cloakfuls of leaves, and I spread them under the yew tree next to hers. I moved about very quietly, and now and again I stood listening. The night was utterly still, with not a leaf moving, and the darkness had become intense. Also, it was growing cold, damned cold, and I walked up and down on the hill-side to try and warm myself, with the cloak over my shoulders.

I must have been listening for any sound from her green tent, and presently I heard something, a sound that went through and stabbed me. She was weeping. I heard her sobs, little spasms of woe which she seemed to be trying to stifle. I could not leave her to weep like that, alone in the darkness. I crept up to her shelter, and knelt down, and spoke to her.

"Meona, would to God I could help."

Her hand came out and touched me.

"Hold my hand, Pellias."

I knelt there, holding her hand and stroking it, and presently her weeping ceased. Her breathing grew quiet. I knew that she must be very weary, and I willed her to fall asleep. She did fall asleep. Her hand grew limp. I laid it down very gently, and taking the cloak from my shoulders, spread it over her. Then, I crept away, and went to my nest of leaves, and tried to burrow into it like a hare into its form. But it was damned cold that night, and I did not sleep very much, but my heart was warm in me and happy.

I WOKE very early, just when the sky was growing grey, and the birds were beginning to sing. There seemed to be birds all round us, and the whole hill-side throbbed with their singing. I was feeling stiff and cold, and like one of the Babes in the Wood whom the robins had covered with dead leaves. I scrambled out of my nest, and saw the valley below us filmed with mist, and a pale yellow glow where the sun was rising. I took a peep at Meona and saw that she was still asleep, curled up under the cloak, her hair flung about

her. She looked like a child. But I wanted to get warm, and work the stiffness out of my limbs, and I ran to and fro along the hill-side until I felt thawed.

Then I remembered the spring of water Meona had found, and the direction she had taken, and in a little while I discovered the spring, a green cleft that dribbled clear water into a small pool. I knelt down and looked at my untidy head and smudged chin in this nature's mirror. I dashed water over my head and face, and put my hair in some sort of order. Then I took off my shoes and washed my feet. They needed it after the foot-slogging of yesterday.

I remembered that Meona had finished the day limping. What could one do for such a chafe? Would a dock leaf be of any use? But, perhaps, she would know of something. I estimated that we had at least another twenty-five miles to cover before we could make Calleva, and that it might take us two days unless we came upon some homestead that was not deserted, and could hire horses and a guide. I was a little vague about the lie of the land, but I reckoned that if we went west, and bore up to the chalk hills about Basingstoke, we should find ourselves near the road that led from Winchester to Calleva. I was still muddling up my English and Romano-British place-names.

Before lying down to sleep I had packed our food into the sack and slung it over a yew bough where it would be safe from any creature prowling on the ground. I took the sack down and got out the provisions, using the sack as a rustic tablecloth. Meona was still sleeping, and I collected my helmet and refilled it at the spring, and carrying it back, put it ready for her. I was turning away, when I heard a little sound like a moan.

"Oh, oh, the pain of waking!"

How utterly helpless one can feel when the creature whom one loves is in anguish, be the pain physical or emotional. I turned and looked into the green cleft of the yew bower. She was sitting up, leaning back with her body supported by her arms, her face upturned, her throat showing. It was as though a sudden spasm of pain had been shot through her in that moment of returning consciousness. Almost, the reawakening anguish rocked her. Her eyes had a blind brightness. Even her clouding hair was tragic.

I was groping for something to say to her.

"There is water in the helmet, Meona."

She did not seem to hear me. Her eyes were set in a dead stare.

"Have I slept? How could I sleep!"

Her tense, immobile figure came suddenly to life. She was up and out of the shelter. She put her arms above her head with a kind of writhing movement. Her eyes had a sudden, strange brightness. She looked at the misty valley where the sun was making a golden haze; she looked at my helmet of water, at the food spread on the sack, but she did not look at me.

"Lest one should forget! How much have I to remember!"

They were dark words, and she spoke them darkly and with black passion, as though this lovely world and the dawn were ugly with hate and horror and blood. It rather shocked me until I saw again those gory, severed heads, and all the distortions and beastliness of that slaughter, and was stirred to nausea and to a sense of implacable wrath. Why should she not feel like that? Her young ruthlessness seemed to become part of my love.

I found the words I wanted.

"Let us eat and drink and be strong, for we have enemies to slay."

She looked at me with a flash of the eyes as though she loved me for sharing in her fierce young ruthlessness.

While we were breaking our fast, sitting on the grass with the sack spread between us, I remembered her chafed foot, and spoke of it. Could she manage to walk? Could anything be done? She would not allow that any such chafe existed. Of course she could walk. Her face had a young, white austerity. All the softness had gone from her mood, and I felt that she would walk to the ends of the earth if she could compass her revenge and give her dead their bloody recompense. There was a swiftness in her temper. She was like a young hawk eager to be on the wing, and when we had eaten she began to pack the food into the sack. We would waste no time, even on this most lovely morning, for, on Farley Heath the dead waited to be avenged and buried.

I asked her how her foot was. Would she not let me look at it? She would not. The country here was as strange to her as it was to me, and we had to march by the sun, and the shadows it cast. Then, we struck sand and heather, and the sandy tracks we were compelled to follow were like the sea shore, and filled our shoes with grit. It was a wilderness of gorse and heather and birch trees and brambles. Sometimes a strip of turf helped us, but

my own feet were getting sore, and now and again I saw Meona wince.

"Let's rest awhile."

We sat down under the shade of a birch tree, and Meona took off her shoes and emptied the sand out of them. I saw blood on her stockings.

I said, "Can't we bandage your feet?"

Her answer was that she would not be able to get into her shoes, and I could see that her feet were swollen. How she must have missed her two white horses! I divined her impatience, her anger against the frailties of the flesh, her ruthlessness towards herself.

"It is better to go on walking."

We walked on, but much more slowly. The only satisfaction to be gained from this heathy waste was the assurance of its emptiness and the absence of plundering enemies. There was nothing here for the swine to put their snouts into. As for our likelihood of striking an isolated farmhouse in this wilderness, it did not seem probable, for it was country that Cobbett would have loved to curse. Also, it lacked water. We passed a brackish pool, and stopped to drink there, but it was so full of obvious life that, thirsty though we were, we could not bring ourselves to touch the water.

Meona had gone lame. No longer could she conceal nature's protest. Also, the sun was near the meridian, and I suggested a halt in the shade. One thing was spared us; Beelzebub had not yet got busy. We were in a small, shallow valley, shut in on every side, but the sand had given place to clay, and birch and heather to oak woods. This seemed more hopeful, and when we found a brook in the bottom of the valley, we threw ourselves down on the grass beside it.

There seemed to be no danger here, and I spread the coverlet for her under an oak tree, and stuffed the wallet with leaves and put it under her head. Then I took my sword and helmet and followed the trackway towards the ridge. It spread out into a grassy bluff, and I could see rolling hills ahead, hills that had the indefinable, silvery patina of chalk. Hardy's Stoke Barehills should lie over yonder. I had been looking into the distance, but when I turned my eyes to the ground immediately below me I saw something that made me take cover behind a furze bush. I peered over its top. I saw a chequer of fields, and in the midst of them a small homestead with flint walls and a thatched roof. A wagon and horses were standing in the yard, also, cattle and sheep. Men and women were busy loading gear, and I could distinguish a couple of children sitting on an oak hutch in the wagon. The presence of children solved the problem for me. Here were country folk who had heard that the Saxon terror was abroad, and who were preparing to flee from it.

I came out from behind my furze bush, and ran down the hill, shouting to the people below, but their first reaction was far from welcoming. I had started an alarm, and I saw a man snatch up something which I realized was a bow, and other men picked up bills and axes. A woman scrambled into the wagon and spread herself like a protecting hen over the two children. I stopped, waved my arms, and shouted to these peasants that I was a friend. Strange, that I should be hailing them in Latin; equally strange was it that they understood me.

I saw the man with the bow lower his weapon, but the arrow was still on the string. He appeared to be the farmstead's master. He shouted to me to come nearer, and I walked down the grassy slope and into the little paddock in front of the house and yard. The men watched me, with their weapons still in their hands. They were farm labourers, dressed in short, coarse smocks, their legs swathed in what appeared to be bands of undressed hide.

The farmer hailed me. He was a big, black, husky fellow.

"Halt, there. Who are you?"

I told him my name, and whence I came, and what had happened. I said that I had the daughter of Aurelius Superbus in my charge. That she was footsore and weary, and that we would pay for a seat in their wagon.

"Come nearer."

I walked down towards them, and they came to meet me, watching me carefully as though I might turn out to be a dangerous beast. I stopped when I was within five yards of them, and pointing to my sword, which was in its scabbard, smiled and asked them whether it was likely that I should venture so near them if I spelt treachery. They had the common sense of countrymen, and they believed me.

"Where is the lady?"

"Over there by the brook. I left her to sleep. She has had much to suffer."

"Go and fetch her," said the farmer, "and be quick about it, for we have no time to waste."

I asked him if the Saxons had been seen in these parts, and he pointed north.

"They are about Calleva, so we hear."

"Calleva! Then, where are you bound for?"

"Vindomis."

"And where is that?"

He told me that it was on the great road from Calleva to Sorbiodunum. He had a brother who farmed a farm near Vindomis. The news was good. We should be travelling towards the country of Aurelius Ambrosius.

I ran back over the hill, and coming down to the brook, found that Meona had fallen asleep. It seemed a shame to wake her, for sleep had passed a merciful hand over her face, and given her back all her soft youth and loveliness. It made me think of the face of a sleeping child. But my consolation lay in the good news I had for her, and I knelt down and touched her arm.

She woke, and started up on her elbow, her eyes wide and tragic, her forehead all shadows. She looked ten years older, and I made haste to reassure her.

"Good news, Meona. A farmer will take you in his wagon."

"Where?"

"To Vindomis. It lies towards your uncle's country. These people are going because of the Saxons."

I began to pack our belongings in the sack, and she helped me. I told her that the peasants had heard that the savages were all about Calleva. No doubt they were hoping to storm and sack that wealthy little town. We paddled through the brook and over the hill, and saw that the men had driven the cattle into the paddock, and that the farmer and his folk were ready to move off.

Meona was limping badly, but her face had a young fierceness.

"The poor people. Why should the gods let us suffer these things?"

I said that, in the end, good might come of it.

"Yes," she said, "when these wild beasts have been hunted down and slain."

The farmer came forward to meet us, and he saluted Meona.

"Welcome, lady, these are hard times for all of us."

She answered him with simple dignity.

"We must seek to make them harder, my friend, for those who are merciless and our enemies."

Not till we had joined the peasants, and Meona was sitting in the wagon beside the housewife and her children did I realize that this wonderful and poignant pilgrimage of ours was at an end. I had been alone with Meona for all these unforgettable hours. I had been her comrade, and almost her sweetheart.

Should I ever be alone with her again?

ANY illusions I might cherish upon my social status began to crumble when Meona took her seat in the wagon. The housewife soon discovered that my lady was the niece of the most potent prince in Britain, nor need I accuse this peasant woman of being a snob because she began to make a fuss of Meona. A pillow was found for her to sit upon; the children were ordered to be quiet and to behave themselves, and not to worry the lady. It was just human kindness. The farmer had passed on my story to his wife, and to the good woman Meona was a beautiful and tragic figure who had suffered cruelly at the hands of these German beasts.

As for myself, I soon gathered that I was regarded as a superior sort of servant. I might be footsore, but I was expected to leg it, and not to ride in the wagon. No longer was I a little Dux, Honey Valley's captain, for, as a leader of fighting men I had no men left to lead. The farmer walked beside me, and was matey and talkative, and wanting to hear all I had to tell him of my lady's tragedy. What had my job been? I told him that I was the son of my dead lord's steward, and that my father also was dead.

It was late in the day when we came to a rich deep valley with a lake in its green trough, and a great white house set on the side of a hill. There were high woods all about it, and when Meona saw the place, her face lit up. She knew it.

"That is the house of Geraint. We are safe."

Who this Geraint or Gerontius was I did not know, but one thing was certain, this valley was no valley of death. I saw tents pitched on the hill-side, and horse-lines, and sheaves of stacked spears. Between the great house and the mere were a score or more of wagons, and people camping about them, with fires lit and children playing around. A fenced paddock was packed with cattle. Obviously, this green valley had become a place of refuge for many of those who had fled from the Saxon terror, and also a rallying ground for armed men. Our farmer let out a bellow when he saw all this.

"Look, Mother! The gods be praised. Here is a safe pound for beasts and men."

We were preparing to descend into the

I heard Meona's voice. "I will love you always. I will. . . ."

valley when half a dozen horsemen came out from a clump of trees on the ridge, and challenged us. They were led by a comely, dark young man in gilded harness with an eagle on his helmet. Who were we, and what was our business? Meona answered him, and the young man swung off his horse and came to salute her.

"Is all well with your people?"

I stood there watching and listening, and feeling suddenly jealous of this comely lad who was plainly a person. Meona told him her news, and I saw his face darken. I heard her speak my name, and the young man looked at me, and then came striding towards me. He held out his hand.

"Welcome, brother."

My hand went out to him, and so did my good will, for he had one of these clear, clean, friendly faces that challenge all that is fearless and frank in one.

"I am Geraint, the son of Geraint."

"And I am Pellias."

We looked into each other's eyes and were friends.

In this great house I was to experience nothing but courtesy and kindness. My lord Geraint the elder was a very old man, ninety years or more, and though his legs had failed him, and his servants had to carry him about the gardens and estate in a kind of open sedan chair, his head was very much alive. He had a great mane of white hair, and never have I seen a more splendid-looking patriarch, nor a man with more gentle manners. It was the son who first saw to my needs, for Meona had gone straight to the women's quarters, and the younger Geraint's kindness to me made me believe that my lady had spoken of me as a man of prowess and of courage.

"What would you, my friend?"

"A shave, sir, and a bath."

I was barbered and bathed, and God knows, I needed these ministrations. and while I was being strigilled and oiled on a marble couch, young Geraint sat on a stool and talked to me. There was a naturalness about all this business that took away my shyness. I understood that in this spacious, comely world the cult of the body was as much valued as the cult of the mind. Moreover, it was a country culture, yet utterly without boorishness. My lord had travelled much, to Rome, Athens and Byzantium. He had a notable library, and a gallery of pictures. As for the younger Geraint, he had studied at some famous house in Southern Gaul, a monastic house I imagine, for these gentlemen were Christians.

I had to tell him all about the Aurelian tragedy, and of our battles with the Germans. He heard me quite calmly, though I could divine a deep blaze of horror and anger at the back of his dark eyes. I gathered that he was not a blind hater, or compounded of that urgent yet stark fierceness that goes to the making of a great captain or a fanatic. He made me think of an English public school boy, say Winchester and Balliol, to whom Hitler would remain somewhat incomprehensible. Such barbarism had to be countered, but coolly and with dignity, as one treads upon a noisome, evil thing. I believe Geraint would always have referred to Old Nasty as Herr Hitler, even though his scorn for the bragging beast was abysmal.

His father was of a different temper, even at the age of ninety. My lord Geraint had been a notable fighting man and leader of men in days of earlier confusions when the Island had been vexed by the barbarians, and Rome had helped to rescue it. When I had been barbered and washed, the son took me to the father who was seated in his carrying-chair on the terrace. This terrace might have been Elizabethan, or even St. George's Hill! It was paved with stone, and its balustrade was set with vases. There was a garden house and a little formal pool with lilies in it. The loggia, which opened upon the terrace, had vines, roses, and wild clematis climbing up its pillars. The view was superb, hill upon hill, valley upon valley. I stood before the patriarch to answer his questions, but he pointed to an oak stool, and bade me sit. The son had left us alone together.

I was to tell him everything that had happened. Very old he might be, but I divined in him a greater capacity for rich anger and for a noble disgust than existed in the son. He could say the most scathing things in a deep and gentle voice, and like my dead master his vision was spacious.

He told me that he had mustered all his tenants, and that on the morrow the Aurelii would join us with all their power. This was challenging news to me. The Germans, as my farmer friend had heard, were all about Calleva, raiding and plundering, and we were to march against them.

"How will that suit your temper, Pellias?"

"Very well, sir," I replied.

WHETHER I was over-tired or over-worried or too much in love, the fact remains that I was consumed by a burning

restlessness. My room was on the first floor, with its window opening on the terrace. I understand that the Romano-British country houses were supposed to be like glorified bungalows, but the house of Geraint was of two storeys. An older house had been burnt during one of the earlier periods of turmoil, and the present mansion had been built by Geraint some fifty years ago. I had a bed with a feather mattress and pillow, but sleep would not come near me. The night was very warm and still, and I put on my tunic and stood at the window. The camp fires were still alight, like flowers burning in the darkness, but a great silence covered the valley. I knew that our patrols were out on the hills, for two of my lord's gentlemen had left the supper-table to go on duty.

The room oppressed me. I wanted to be out under the stars, and I went barefooted along the gallery and down the stairs to the paved and pillared hall. The great door stood open like a mouth breathing softly in its sleep. A servant was curled up on a mat beside it. The man rose and challenged me, but when I gave him my name, he saluted and let me pass.

I had expected to be alone on the terrace under the stars, but someone else was there. I saw a white figure drifting to and fro on noiseless feet. There was something mothlike and restless and fluttering about this figure, and then, the lover in me seemed to divine its fated flame. It was Meona who was walking here as sleepless and as troubled as I.

I stood very still. What right had I to intrude upon her sorrow, for I could imagine that her grieving was more bitter now that she was safe and in this peaceful place. Even its spacious peace must remind her of that other house in a green valley, a ghost house, forlorn and empty. Perhaps I was too sensitive about my love, and too ready to shirk its poignant issues, for the thing can be too full of anguish when it is rebuffed and thwarted. As I said, I stood very still, wondering whether I could slip along the terrace and away into the night without her being aware of my presence, but I saw her drift towards me, and then stand still.

"Is it you, Pellias?"

"It is I."

"Can you not sleep?"

"No, Meona."

So, she had known me in the darkness even as I had known her, and a secret exulation stirred in me. Were we so sensitive to each other that some more subtle awareness linked us in a mysterious sympathy? Did my love float to her like a gentle ghost, and haunt her with the knowledge of my inevitable nearness?

"Does my presence trouble you, Meona?"

"No. Come and stand here with me, my friend."

She was looking down into the dark valley and at the camp fires burning there, and as I stood there beside her, her white figure was unreasonably still. It had lost its mothlike, vapoury quality, and made me think of white marble, rigid and brittle.

She said to me, "They come to-morrow."

"Your people."

"The avengers."

She spoke in a fierce, hard whisper.

"You see those fires, Pellias. I seen nothing but those fires, like red eyes and bloody swords, our swords. No, my friend, there is no gentleness in me. There can be no such feeling, no quiet breathing until we have made an end of the evil thing."

Her passion astonished me. It was so concentrated, so cold, so still.

"I shall go with you all."

"You, Meona?"

"Of course. My eyes are dry for the blood of those wild beasts. And what of you, my friend?"

In that moment I think I understood her and all that she expected of me. Her passionate ruthlessness smothered all gentler urges. We men were to her the winged death, the avengers, the slayers, and that might be the only use she had for us.

I said, "Geraint will be with us, and he will—"

She flashed out in the darkness with sudden scorn:

"Geraint! A pretty boy. He has not the soul of his father. Such men are not for the slaying that I ask for, for which my dead cry out. Men should be fierce, and strong and relentless at such a time. It is upon you and your like that I count."

There was a quality in her passion that both shocked and devoured me. If mine had been a mere pretty passion, I think that it ceased to be such. The elemental urge in her moved me, as some of Wagner's music has moved me. She was like one of those epic women, the Brunhilds and the Iseults, or Lear's daughters. No simpering parlour miss was she, but Nature, passionate and strange and tragic, with the wind and the thunder and the sea-lash in her soul. If ever a man was intoxicated by emotion, I was that man.

I spread my arms to her.

"Count me your avenger, Meona."

She came close, took my face between her hands, and as though consecrating me, kissed my forehead.

INDEED, though I knew it not, she was the dark and fatal goddess of my world, sending me either to Elysium or to Hades. She had involved me in her hate, consecrated me to it, bade me come to her splashed with the blood of her enemies. So, I have held that hate can be a good and lovely thing, perhaps because I loved this creature who could be so splendid in her anger, and who understood that hatred may be a sacred flame burning away the cankers and the suppurating sores of sentiment. We babble about love, and of forgiving everything that we understand; and how the dictators of this world must laugh at us! For how much do we understand? And how often may Nature be fooling us. The kiss of Judas may be more potent and natural than the blessing of Christ, and assuredly, in these later days the Judas kiss is life's sign and seal. We dear, nice, awfully decent fellows with our B.B.C. voices have lost that primeval virtue, the sacred wrath that will not rest until the evil thing is dead.

Shall I ever forget how the Aurelii and their people came to us? Six dusty horsemen rode down into the valley three hours after dawn, to herald the coming of their host. There was a clamour and a crowding in our camp. Some of our captains were going out to meet the British, and young Geraint went with them, but I stayed behind upon the terrace with Meona and my lord Geraint the elder, watching for the flash of sunlight upon spears.

They came dancing over the green hill opposite between the high barriers of two woods, a young forest of spears, of helmets and of painted shields. The horses were of all colours, black and roan, white and chestnut. Trumpets brayed. I saw a great banner of gold with a red dragon upon it, and I felt as though I had slipped back into Mallory. So, Arthur and his knights must have ridden over these British hills, splendid in their strength and splendour.

I looked at Meona, and her face was proud and exultant.

"Are they not lovely, Pellias?"

They were. This great concourse of horsemen poured down the hill like a moving garden, and the points of steel were like glittering drops of dew. Here, indeed, was the old glamour of war, the splendour of the fighting man, no anonymous scuffle in the mud with steel splinters ripping up chests and bellies. The sight fascinated me. I saw a body of "Foot" following the "Horse," and after them came archers. The whole valley was in an uproar, trumpets blowing, soldiers and refugees running to watch and welcome the avengers. Horses neighed as though smelling the coming battle. I looked at old Geraint, and saw his eyes ablaze. His face seemed to have shed twenty of its years. His hands were grasping the arms of his chair.

He spoke to the bearers who stood behind him.

"Lift me up that I may see."

They stepped between the poles, and raised their lord shoulder-high. His white head caught the sunlight, and made me remember that other white and tragic head. I saw him raise his right arm.

"Hail, pride and power of Britian! Hail, O Red Dragon!"

I looked again at Meona. She seemed to stand there remote and dreaming, smiling like a girl upon her sweetheart.

* * *

If love can be instant, I think that hate can be even more so.

I was standing with Meona beside my lord's chair when young Geraint and Aurelius Maximus came up the flight of steps leading to the terrace. A score or so of gentlemen and captains followed them, fierce, proud, stalwart men with plumes or horse-hair in their helmets. The young Geraint was a comely fellow, but when I set eyes on Maximus, Ambrosius's son, I knew him to be the handsomest male thing I had seen ever. And I loathed him.

He stood well over six feet, and wore gilded armour over a purple tunic, and high boots of red leather laced with green silk laces. He was a blond Briton, with eyes of blatant blue, and a fleece of curly hair. There was all the splendour of the perfect animal about him, a sleepy arrogance, a lion-like complacency. He came up the steps like a young god climbing Olympus. But do gods swagger? He saluted Geraint the elder, and then I saw those blatant blue eyes of his set in a stare. He was looking at Meona.

I knew at once with the intuition of my hatred, that instantly he had marked her as his. He was the sort of man whose complacency is so complete that he will pick up life's chalice and drain it, as though the gods had dedicated it to him and to him alone. He was not a man who

smiled. When emotion moved him he stared the harder. I knew what his voice would be like even before I heard it. It was throaty and rich, and could produce a kind of insolent playfulness. The whole world was a groom to him.

His manners were flamboyant. He my-lorded this old man, and bent his head over Meona's hand.

"Greetings, sweet cousin; you have grown more beautiful even since we met."

I watched Meona. Her smile had gone, and there was a little frown on her forehead.

"This country needs you, Maximus."

"The man and the hour, hey! We'll teach these savages a lesson."

Geraint's eyes seemed to have sunk back into his head.

"Your father will join us, Maximus?"

"Papa is becoming an old man, sir. I carry the Red Dragon for him. Strange, but he has great faith in me."

Egregious, super-confident beast! My feeling was that old Geraint was not pleased. Maximus might possess all the splendour of manhood, and he a virile, striding creature, a bustling Mars, but the supreme wisdom was not in him.

Meona remembered me.

"Maximus, this is Pellias, who led my father's people."

I don't think Maximus troubled to look at me.

"Ha, Pellias, my man. Yes, we have a fellow with us named Festus who spoke of you. A drake without the ducks!"

Let me swear that I had hated him before he fobbed me off with a poor joke, but I was human enough to hate him all the more for it.

"The pleasure is mutual, Max, I assure you."

This time he did give me a blue glare. Max, indeed! But ever afterwards I thought of him as Max. The name stuck to him like grease-paint.

"May we come in, sir, and drink? My gentlemen are thirsty."

Old Geraint was a courtier, but I am convinced that he liked Ambrosius's son as little as I did.

"All my house is at your service."

"Thanks, sir. Come, sweet cousin, and crush the grape for me. Look into the cup and it will be sweet."

Meona smiled upon him. After all he was a magnificent creature and the symbol of her vengeance, but I did not understand the essence of the secret self behind her smile.

I went in search of Festus. I had forgotten Festus, and the evil news I had to tell him. Poor Festus, he had lost a brother and many friends, and a good over-lord. I found him among Maximus's men, attending to his horse.

"What, you, brother!" he cried.

I was sorry to take the shine from his face. Poor Festus, his homestead might be in ashes and his whole world in ruin.

"My lord slain!"

I nodded.

"And Robur?"

"Yes, I think a few escaped."

"How many are there of these swine?"

I said that I might number them at a thousand and a half, but that I could not be sure. And how many men had Maximus brought with him?

"Seven hundred horsemen, brother, and perhaps five hundred foot-soldiers and three score bowmen."

"Geraint has mustered three hundred. The odds should be even."

Festus suddenly cried out, "Ye gods, look. The white horses!"

He was pointing towards a roadway, and I saw two white horses with a chariot behind them. Either these were Meona's pets or their ghosts.

There were two men in the chariot, and we went out to meet them. One of the men was Ursus, and I realized that these were our people who had escaped from the slaughter on Farley Heath—the men who had been in charge of the horses picketed in the woods.

They gave us a feeble cheer as they pulled up the horses. Ursus looked deathly. He had a spear thrust in his throat, but had managed to escape the slaughter and get to the horse-lines in the woods. They had traveled slowly because of their wounds.

There was not much they could tell us that we did not know, and we took them inside to be tended back to health.

CHAPTER IX

IT WAS after the midday meal that the Geraints, Maximus, and the captains held a council of war, and I was suffered to sit at the lower end of the council table. Old Geraint spoke to us of the great issue, and Festus knew that the Germans were encamped in around Calleva and it was decided that we should attack there first.

I went out after that into the great corridor.

I had not expected to see Meona. I will confess that I was suffering from one of those attacks of anguish when one fears and avoids the thing one loves.

She called to me.

"Pellias, Pellias."

Suddenly, everything was both very bright yet very dark about me. The woods were a deeper green, the sky a more brilliant blue, and yet the effect had the splendour of that moment when twilight comes. I was in a strangely vivid world in which all my senses seemed to be more quick and passionate and sensitive. I had a feeling of lightness, and Meona's voice was calling.

I was running down the steps of the terrace. I found myself in a grassy walk between a high yew hedge and a long flower border. The flowers were pansies and sweet-Williams and I remember thinking how queer it was that these old cottage plants should be growing in a Romano-British garden.

The vista ended in a great green arch of clipped yews, and here Meona was waiting for me. She was in white, and in that dark hollow she looked like a poised statue. Never had she been so vivid to me, and yet more intangible and remote. I had the feeling of experiencing a vision.

I seemed to be floating along the grass towards her. She stood very still, and her eyes had a dark blaze in them. "We march on Calleva," I told her solemnly.

"I am coming with you," she said quietly. "I have seen to my horses and they will be rested."

I was conscious of only one reaction, a passionate protest against her risking herself in so reckless a venture.

"But you cannot come with us."

"I am coming. I shall go with you, Pellias, into the battle."

This was not melodrama, but blank tragedy. We were together in all time, united in some mysterious relationship, even in the heart of history. Whether that which I did was due to lack of control, or to a supreme variant of the same virtue, I do not know, but I put my hands suddenly upon her shoulders, and looked straight into her face.

"You cannot come, Meona. You are too precious for that."

Her face was like white light to me, yet so lovely that it seemed for a moment to blur my senses. I must have been shaking with the fierceness of my feelings, for she said to me, "Do not tremble so, for me, Pellias, or I might tremble for you."

How do these things happen? I was so profoundly moved, so full of wonder, that my head went down, and I felt her hands clasp themselves about my neck, and so we stood, quite still and in silence, with that voiceless confession flooding over us like the supernatural radiance of a sacrament.

I said, "O my beloved, you must not do this thing."

She was far stronger than I was, for I was shaken by the intensity of my emotion, but she stood like some slim young tree against which my bowed head rested.

"Should a woman have less courage than a man?"

"Meona, it is not your courage, but your precious self."

"Do you fear that the Saxons might take me? I should not live for that. Besides, it is we who are going to win this battle, you and I, my dear, together. Will your arm fail you if I am at your side?"

Her greater courage wounded me. I raised my head and looked at her.

"Never, in all the world, was such a love as this!"

Steadfastly, and with a shining serenity, she gave me look for look.

"Never, Pellias, never."

* * *

What do I remember next? That I was riding over a high hill with the sun at my back, and all the splendour of the sunset flung like a great yellow cloak over the country. I was riding with Festus beside Meona's chariot, and on her dark head was set a little helmet. Young Geraint and his three hundred rode behind us, with their spears aslant, and harness jangling. I felt high above the world, and high of heart and head, for, it seemed to me that we two were part of History, Pellias and Meona!

If we were successful in entering Calleva, Maximus' forces would join us the next morning.

Infinite danger there might be, and death in the blue grey dusk, but there was a strange smoothness about all these happenings, as though they had happened before, and having worn a track in time, repeated themselves with mysterious inevitableness. When we drew nearer to Calleva, young Geraint sent out his scouts but I remained beside Meona's chariot, for nothing would have made me leave her My dark oath held.

Calleva awaited us the scouts told us; two hundred armed men were to sleep that night in the forum and the basilica and charge with us when we made our

sally at dawn. The Germans were preparing to sacrifice to their Belly God, as Festus put it, for watchers on the walls had seen them spitting oxen over their fires, and unloading barrels from a captured wagon. It would be a sluggish and a baleful dawn for them. Festus believed that our foes were feasting before storming Calleva on the morrow.

* * *

The sweet dusk in the woods, and Meona's face becoming dim. Shadows that faded and merged into a universal greyness. Great trees reaching over us. The smell and the chill of the dew-fall. Festus dismounted and guided us by a track that looped its way in a curve to the south-east, and would bring us back to the city and its eastern gate. We had warned our men to be silent. No one spoke, and scabbards were held so that they should not strike against greaves or harness.

I rode as close as I could to the chariot. I could see the heads of the white horses rocking up and down against the dark woods. Trees, trees, trees, and the smell of the woodland. Stars were out, and dusting the sky above the tree-tops. The silence was supreme, and our moving horses seemed to make no more sound than that of a river gently flowing. I could see a tawny glow in the sky towards the north. The German camp-fires. To-morrow we would charge over their ashes.

I bent down in the saddle and spoke in a whisper in Meona.

"Oh, unforgettable night! Look at the stars, beloved."

I saw her dim face upturned as though to receive the kisses of the stars.

"Are you happy, Pellias?"

"I did not know that life could hold such happiness as this."

"Nor I."

"Meona, I love you."

More light, more stars, fewer trees. We came upon two guides who had been waiting for us. I saw one of them point with his spear. Across the dark plain Calleva showed as a walled blackness with a light shining here and there, and over and beyond it the German camp-fires glowed. Oh, dark city of fate! We turned eastwards across the plain, moving silently like a long, black, stealthy snake. Calleva seemed to rise out of the earth. I could distinguish the high roof of the basilica. From the distance came the sound of singing, a faint, blatant, drunken bawling. The Germans were stuffing their bellies. To-morrow we should slit those bellies!

Nearer and nearer we came. I could see the gate looming up, black and solid. One of our guides had trotted on ahead. Those in the city were taking no chances and without the password, the gate would not open to us. I heard voices, the sound of a beam being withdrawn, the creaking of hinges. Now, we were under the shadow of the gateway. I saw its arch lit up by the glow of the fires beyond the city. Meona's chariot rumbled through. We rode in like a long file of ghost horsemen, and up the street towards the forum. Our horses' hoofs made a clattering on the cobbles, but the Germans over yonder were bawling so boisterously that I was sure that there was not much likelihood if their hearing the music of our cavalry.

A group of the city fathers came out to meet us at the gate of the forum. There were no lights save the lights in one of the rooms opening from the peristyle. Geraint and I were off our horses and saluting these solemn worthies, who, I realized, were in a devil of a panic, and mighty glad to see us. Yes, our horses could be stabled for the night in the forum, and straw had been laid for the men on the floor of the basilica. I could almost feel these city fathers quaking to the kind of terror-making tom-tom music the Germans were producing over yonder.

"I see you have a chariot with you, sir," said a bearded old gentleman who carried some sort of staff of office.

Need I explain Meona to him? She had pulled up her horses inside the forum gate, and I supposed that Meona would go to her uncle's house, and be ministered to by Aunt Medusa. I told the councillor that, for the sake of her safety, we had brought the daughter of Aurelius Superbus with us into the city.

"I can give you a bed, sir," said he.

I thanked him, and told him that I should keep watch most of the night, and that if I wanted an hour's sleep I would lie down with our men in the straw.

Moreover, so welcome were we to Calleva, that the city had prepared a meal for our men, and laid it in the great council chamber, where lamps and torches were burning. I left Geraint to see to his men, and went to speak with Meona. It was very dark out there in the street, and what surprised me was the emptiness of the place, though I discovered later that the folk of Calleva had already been told to keep to their houses.

"Meona."

She said to me in a strange, soft voice, "My horses are tired. Where can I feed and stall them?"

"Why, at your uncle's house. You can sleep there."

"I shall not sleep, Pellias."

It was as though a sudden great sadness had fallen upon her now that we had accomplished that which we had set out to do. I leaned over the wheel and touched her.

"But you must sleep, Meona."

She found my hand and held it.

"Do you crave for sleep, Pellias?"

"No. Everything in me is too live and wakeful."

"So it is with me. Come, we will put my horses in my uncle's stable. And then —" she paused, "then let us go up on to the walls. To-night—I have a feeling for the open sky and the stars."

I REMEMBER that we walked as lovers down the dark and empty street to the west gate of Calleva. The parapet of the wall cut like a black girdle across the sky.

The glow of the German fires put out the stars, and all that drunken clamour seemed so near to us that it splashed over the city wall like scud from a savage sea. What if these barbarians were exercising a characteristic cunning, and were staging an orgy before springing a surprise attack upon the city?

Such a trick would be in keeping with the German idea of strategy. Your Teuton will subscribe to any set of rules, and then break them and fool you, and think himself a deuced clever fellow for doing so. I saw that there were guards upon the walls, a dark figure showing its head and shoulders against the glow every ten yards or so, and looking like ornamental vases spaced along a terrace. But these men would be too few to deal with a sudden rush and the planting of scaling ladders against the wall. I felt worried about the danger we were in. It seemed to me that half our men should be posted on the walls, and the rest of them ready to double up and reinforce us.

A flanking stairway led us up to the battlements. No sentry challenged us, for I think they were too intent upon watching what we saw. There must have been at least a dozen great fires burning, and about each one of them our enemies were clotted in clamour and confusion. Some sprawled on the ground, others stood swaying and jolting at the hips, drinking-horns raised, the firelight flickering on their faces. The nearest fire must have been little more than a hundred yards from us, and well within bowshot, and its very nearness suggested the insolent contempt in which our enemies held Calleva.

Or was this all camouflage? Were all those fantastic and barbaric figures fooling us with their crude celebrations? I stood and watched them as one might have watched a mob of dangerous wild-beasts in a bear-pit. It made me think of the descriptions of the Saxon scene before the Battle of Senlac. Stupid, bellowing, arrogant swine! The modern Nazi may be equally arrogant, but I am convinced that he would have been more evil and dangerous in his cunning. For some minutes I watched those coloured figures posturing and surging about the fire, while trying to decide whether this was stage-effect, barbaric decor, or indubitable sottishness.

If my silence was sufficiently grim I realized that it was not so ruthless and implacable as the stillness of the girl beside me. She was standing a little apart, her hands resting on the parapet, her face pale towards the distant firelight, her eyes like two dark pits. So still and rigid did she look that she might have been in a trance, but I knew that no dream-state possessed her. It was consummate and pitiless hatred that stared out of those dark pits of consciousness at these uproarious wretches who had killed her father and brought ruin and death to the country that she loved.

I saw her lips move, and the sound that came from them was no more than a fateful whisper.

"They are ours, Pellias; they will be ours, for the slaying."

The good people tell us that hatred is an evil thing, but what of the hatred that gives the spirit wings against the powers of evil? I am afraid I have no use for the nice, tepid people, or that milk and water maiden-auntishness which primly reproves all colour and passion. How would the dear old gentlemen who write sentimental letters to *The Times* upon loving one's enemy and being gentle with him, have dealt with those violent animals over yonder? I felt that I loved Meona in her passion and her hatred. It had the loveliness of a wild sunset, a kind of splendid rightness. Why should she not hate this evil thing? Why should she not yearn to slay it?

The strangest part of it was that she

seemed utterly without fear. Here were we upon this city wall, within a hundred paces of all that potential beastliness, and she was not afraid. I think she must have been fey, and forewarned of the fate of those bawling, boisterous fighting-men, and so sure of the inevitableness of her vengeance that she could look ruthlessly and calmly upon the picture. We moderns would call it a case of precognition, but when I, who was much less confident than she was, spoke of bringing some of our men up to the wall, she forbade it.

"Let them eat and sleep, Pellias, so shall they be more ready for to-morrow's reaping."

I was astonished at her calmness.

"Are you so sure, Meona?"

"So sure."

She turned to me and put her hand in mine.

"I pray only for one thing, the dawn, when we shall hear the trumpets of my people, and that gate will open, and we shall go out to take our vengeance."

Did she mean to go with us?

I said, "You can watch from this wall."

Almost, she seemed to laugh, and to stand close and caress me. She must have known what was in my heart.

"How strong you are, Pellias, and yet how some things make you tremble."

"You will not come with us?"

"Nothing can stop me."

I stood with my arm about her, thinking how I could prevent her doing this wild thing. What if I hid her horses, or took the wheels off her chariot? Incontestably she was fey. She seemed to read my thoughts.

"No, Pellias, no cunning will serve. You and I shall go out together."

"Pellias and Meona."

"It is our fate."

I tried to persade her to go and get some sleep, but she would not be persuaded. This wall was her watch-tower and she would remain upon it until the day began to break. I knew that I should not sleep. The peril was too near to us; and the problem of our savage enemy's cunning too challenging. Meona might be fey, but I was taking no chances with that clotted mass of cruelty so near.

The captain of the guard, making his rounds, bore down on us out of the darkness like an actor entering from the wings. We might think ourselves the stars upon the stage, but this gentleman challenged us. He had a couple of spear men with him. Who were we and what were we doing upon the city wall? His peremptoriness was, I imagine, largely inspired by fright, for that florid, turbulent tableau over yonder could not be soothing to civic nerves, and the captain of the guard was a silversmith in civil life. I was about to answer him, when Meona took up his challenge.

"You should know me, Master Argenteus."

He peered at her, and then became utterly polite.

"Surely, it is the Lady Meona?"

He had served the Aurelii, sold them silver plate, girdles, pins, buckles and the like, and his suavity became the suavity of the shopman. No, assuredly, no explanations were needed. The gentry had ridden in to save the city and to disperse all this savage nastiness. What, we were remaining on the wall all night? But, surely, her ladyship would choose to rest in a comfortable bed? No? Well, was there anything that he could do, send us some food and wine? Our notable and excellent company was so reassuring! I took Mr. Argenteus aside, and spoke to him, and all the time that I was speaking I realized that he could not keep his eyes from those fires and figures. The horrid sight fascinated him.

"Certainly, sir, certainly. I will do all that you desire."

He sent a couple of his men down into the darkness, and they returned carrying a truss of straw, and I cut the band with my sword and spread the straw under the shelter of the parapet.

"If you will not leave the wall, Meona, lie down and sleep."

The night was growing cold, and though she had a cloak with her I had none. We came near to quarrelling over that cloak. She accepted her couch of straw, and I took her cloak and was for spreading it over her, when she bade me keep it. I was to put it over my shoulders while I kept watch. I told her that I should walk up and down and so keep warm, and I think we haggled for half a minute over that cloak. At last she accepted it, and as I bent down to tuck it round her, she put her arm about my head and kissed me on the forehead.

"Wake me if I sleep. I mean that I would take my turn at watching. Promise."

I promised, though I had no intention of keeping that promise very strictly. And sleep she did, as though calmed and consoled by her belief in the inevitableness of

her vengeance. She was sleeping when Mr. Argenteus's man appeared with a beaker of wine and some bread and cooked meat on a pewter salver. I assumed it to be of the baser metal, for, even in so hazardous a crisis good property has to be cherished. I drank some of the wine and ate some of the food, and then placed the beaker and the salver under the parapet, knowing that Meona might be glad of them when she woke.

I marched up and down, making my sentry-turns at a little distance from her so that she should not be disturbed, and I took the trouble to warn the nearest guards that this particular section of the wall was mine. The night air grew cold, but I had those pagan fires to warm my wits, and that boo-hoo chorus to cheer me. Assuredly, this German beer-festival was authentic. I saw some of the beasts staggering about and dancing together with clumsy, oleaginous movements. Many of them were asleep about the fires. One thing did much to reassure me. I saw a party of some dozen men detach itself from the great circle of light, and move towards the city. They halted about fifty yards from the wall, and I heard an order given. This was the night picket posted, almost contemptuously, to ensure that the doomed and frightened town should not molest the slumbers of these German swine.

IF I had promised myself that Meona would sleep the night through, I was wrong. The fires were dying down, the drunken voices becoming smothered, and I had walked softly to the place where she was lying. I was suffused with an exquisite tenderness. Here lay she whom I loved more than life, peacefully asleep, secure in her faith in me, while I watched for her. It was so dark now that I did not see that her eyes were open.

"Pellias."

"Did I wake you?"

"No. But it is my turn to watch."

She sat up, throwing back the cloak, and making a rustling in the dry straw. I remembered the wine and meat, and I picked up the pewter platter and the wine-jug, and kneeling, served her.

"Drink and eat, O my beloved."

Did a still, small voice in me complete the quotation? "For, to-morrow, we die." Death was the last thing that was in my thoughts, her death or mine. I knelt beside her while she ate and drank, and even put the beaker to my lips at her will.

"It is very silent, Pellias."

"The beasts sleep," said I, "and the fires die down."

"Was I not right?"

"Utterly right, Meona. And to-morrow, beloved—"

"They will sleep that other sleep, and you and I shall ride our horses and look upon the dead."

When she had finished she rose and stood beside me by the parapet. The fires were mere heaps of glowing ash, and the figures piled about them shrouded in a prophetic darkness. Almost, I fancied that I could hear the whole herd snoring. A great stillness lay upon the city. Not a light showed.

I looked for the pickets that had been posted to watch the western gate, and they too had scorned all possible peril. I could see them huddled together in a knot of slumber, like corpses thrown together on the ground.

Meona touched me.

"Lie down and sleep, Pellias."

"But I am not sleepy, Meona."

"Do as I bid you. It is my turn to watch."

"I will, if you will take the cloak. The night is cold."

"Do you wish it?"

"I wish you everything, O beloved."

She took the cloak and wrapped it round her, and I lay down in the straw.

I cannot say that it was a warm and comfortable bed, but my love had slept here, and it was sacred. Also, I must have been more tired than I knew, for when the strain of watching was relaxed, sleep fell upon me suddenly and profoundly. One moment I was looking at the stars, the next, all consciousness was blotted out. There was no feyness in me, no awareness of that which lay behind the mirror of the senses. It was to be my last sleep in this—But that is pulling the fruit before it is ripe to fall.

I woke to find Meona bending over me. The night was both with us and not with us, for a gradual greyness was bringing colour back into the world. I saw the stars, and Meona's face, mysterious and dim, and the clouding of her hair.

"It is time, Pellias."

I felt life leap in me. I was up and standing beside her. We held hands, and turned to look upon the German camp with the gradual dawn stealing up behind us. There was a great stillness, and then a cock crowed somewhere, and a twittering of birds began in a garden below the wall. I heard a horse neigh ex-

ultantly, and to me it was like the sound of a trumpet. I could see no movement anywhere about the dead camp-fires. Our enemies were still asleep, and I felt that God had delivered them into our hands.

THE belly of a cloud caught the upward light and took fire as we hastened to the Forum. I could feel the city stirring, and in the Forum we found our men armed and harnessing their horses. The levies of Calleva had gathered in the street west of the basilica, and I could hear a deep and restless murmur coming from them. Young Geraint and Festus were standing together by the base of the great column.

Said Geraint, "We had lost you, Pellias."

I told him that I had spent the night upon the wall, watching our enemies, and that the swine were still sodden with sleep.

Geraint was full of young impatience. Would Maximus keep his word, and should we hear his trumpets sounding as the sun came up? Festus had offered to ride out and make contact with Maximus, and we were still debating the point when we heard the galloping of horses in the street. We turned to the forum gate, and then it was that I missed Meona, and I guessed that she had gone back to her uncle's house for her white horses and her chariot.

I was conscious of acute suspense like a tight belt about my loins. What did the sound of those galloping horses presage? News? And would it be good or bad? The light was spreading, and outside the forum gate we saw three warriors dismounting. One of them was a fellow I had dubbed old Red Beard, and when I recognized his grim, boar's face and huge frame, I seemed to know that all was well.

He came striding in to us.

"The stage is set, gentlemen."

Young Geraint started forward and embraced him.

"Maximus is there?"

"Most surely there, my lord. We thought it wise that you should be warned and ready. When the sun rises above the city wall you will hear Maximus's trumpets."

"And we charge," said I.

Red Beard smiled at me.

"No. Hold your hot blood in for a space. Let our enemies scramble into action, and rush to meet Maximus. He will be on them before they can get into good order. Someone must be on the wall, watching, and all your men should be ready at the gate. Then, when these swine have their snouts stuck against British spears, charge out and take them in the rear."

There was no time to be lost, for the gilded roof of the basilica was brightening to the dawn. As for the watch upon the wall, I thought Red Beard was the man for it, for he was of a cool and ruthless temper, and would not launch our sally either prematurely or too late. Moreover, I wanted to find Meona. I took Geraint aside and told him of her purpose, and instead of looking shocked, his eyes blazed.

"Ye gods, she shall be our eagle."

Meanwhile, Geraint's horsemen were filing out into the street, and we mounted and joined them. At the crossroads the captains of the Calleva town-levy were waiting for us, with their spearmen packed in the roadway. It may have been the effect of the dawn-light, but I thought these fellows' faces looked as white as paper, and I wondered how they would shape in the bloody business that was before us. I glanced at Geraint, and I saw him frowning and looking fierce. These townsmen impressed him no more favourably than they did me.

"White as a lot of girls."

I said that many men went that colour before an attack, and that, at all events, they would be behind us, and might give a good account of themselves if our charge went home.

"Yes," said Geraint, "I guess they will wait to see how the wind blows, and when the business is over no one will boast more valiantly than they."

We were passing down West Street when I saw Meona, and my heart seemed to drop a beat. She had brought her horses out into the roadway, and was standing up in the chariot like a slim statue of Bellona. If any creature could be said to be inspired and exalted it was she. Her hair streamed down from under her little helmet; she had a shield on her arm, and a spear in her right hand. She raised her spear and saluted us as we walked our horses up the street.

I rode forward, and she turned her horses towards the gate. I said, "You cannot go out alone in that chariot, Meona," and she gave me a steadfast look and smiled. Yes, her exaltation would not be reasoned with or be put down. She spoke to her horses, and they broke into a trot, and then I realized what her purpose was. The West Gate loomed up over us. There were men stationed there to drop the bar and fling open the gates, and Meona drove

her horses into the tunnel of the gateway so that we could not pass her. She had made herself, as it were, the white spearhead of our sally, and I had a feeling that she was the winged genius of our Fortune.

I managed to edge my horse in beside her chariot.

"Must you be so splendidly mad, O my beloved?"

Her face was radiant and serene. Never had I seen a more happy face.

"I am victory, Pellias."

The inevitableness of her courage was beyond dispute.

But I backed my horse out of the gateway and spoke to young Geraint. I said that Meona was god-inspired and that no words of ours would stay her. All that we could do would be to ride on either side of her chariot with a score of picked men about us to form a human ploughshare, a wedge of fighting men to spear a way around her. Geraint took up the challenge. I gather that he had got his best men in the van, and he turned his horse and spoke to the leading files. They were to mass round the chariot, follow it and envelope it, and guard it as though it held a sacred standard.

OLD Red Beard was up on the wall, and we were to wait upon his signal, but my impatience was such that I could not leave the business to other eyes. The sun was up, and shining almost horizontally upon the cobbles of the street and making them look like silver. Colour had come back into the world, and the eyes of the morning were growing blue. I dismounted, and leaving my horse with one of Geraint's men, I ran up the stone steps leading to the battlements. Old Red Beard was there, his jowl stuck over the wall like the snout of a boar, and there was a grim grin on his face.

"Ha, Pellias, the hot blood is restless! Take a look at our German friends."

I looked, and I gathered that his grim smirk was justified. The Saxon camp was oozing into sluggish life. Men were yawning and stretching themselves. Others still lay sleeping. Some of the fires were being relit, and two fellows were slinging a cauldron over one of them. I saw one large, barbaric person in a sky blue tunic sitting astride a saddle and combing his golden locks. So, the Spartans combed their hair before Thermopylæ, but this would be a less heroic business.

Old Red Beard chortled.

"Observe the gentleman combing his hair! A rather superfluous task, sir. Those locks will soon be bloody."

He sniffed and bit at his beard, and looking at the rising sun, said gruffly that it was time for me to return down yonder, and wait for the sound of Maximus's trumpets. I'll confess that I was a little loath to go, for, as the Americans might have put it, I should have been tickled to death watching the confusion in that camp when the trumpets sounded, and a thousand horse and foot came charging out of the woods. How those swine would grunt and gallop, and scramble for their weapons! There was an exultant ruthlessness in me that was more prophetic than I knew, the cold and implacable rage that was to inspire Britain against Nazi Germany.

I returned to the street, remounted my horse, and edged him in beside Meona's chariot.

I said, "The sun is up, and many of the beasts are still sleeping."

Her pale face seemed to have the sharpness of a new moon.

"I wait for the trumpets, Pellias. I wait, I wait!"

There in the old cliché that minutes can lengthen into hours, and if Time too is relative, our waiting there in the darkness of the gate was to be a memory that remains for me symbolical. I was a man in a dream, and then the trumpets would sound and the wounded dawn cry out to us, and we should stream out—to what? Struggle, slaughter, victory, the illusion of peace! Was that to be the eternal sequence in man's little world—struggle, peace, stagnation, boredom, struggle? Would some new and supersensuous revelation rescue us from the sense-scramble? I looked at Meona, and even her loveliness had a bleak, sharp edge. And if she loved me it was because I was a combative creature, not a tame sentimentalist spewing out vapid verses.

"Listen!"

The trumpets! I heard their sudden, brazen scream, distant yet significantly near in their challenge. So, that great, blond swaggerer Maximus had kept his word. Meona was pointing her spear at the gate and calling to the men to take down the bar. It was a huge oak beam, and two men were needed to slide it from its slots.

"Wait!"

My voice echoed sharply in that tunnel. I pushed my horse forward and turned

him across the noses of Meona's beasts.

"Wait! Red Beard will give us the signal."

For one moment her impatience blazed at me, and then she smiled, for I think she knew that my love was both wiser and more cunning than her hate.

Uproar! The German camp seemed to boil up like a cauldron and spill itself into a crackle of steam and noise. I could picture those savages grabbing their weapons and trying to hustle into some sort of order. It was like a kennel of hounds giving tongue. Our horses began to fidget, for there was elemental fear and fury in that animal uproar, and above it I could hear the trumpets screaming. Moreover, I fancied that I could sense the thunder of hoofs, and feel their hammer-beats vibrating through the earth. My horse had his ears cocked forward, and he began to paw the stones.

A shout came from the wall.

"Out, out!"

I pointed to the bar with my spear, and the men drew the bar from its slots and slid back the bolts. As the gates swung in I had to edge my horse back against the noses of Meona's whites, but that was a part of the plan. The arch framed the scene for us, all that sound and scud and frenzy. I saw a line of spears, helmets and horses' heads coming like a wave across the field, and moving to meet it a ragged cloud of men, confused, trailing out shreds of scattered colour, howling, cursing. I turned and rode out of the gate, keeping my horse in front of Meona's chariot. Then Geraint and his chosen men came round us in a boss of steel. I looked back for a moment at Meona's face. It had a fierce ecstasy. She was lashing her horses. Her mouth was open, but the cry that came from it was no more than a little, shrilling thread in the tumult and trampling of our charge.

Geraint had given orders to his three hundred to open out to the flanks so that the impetus of our charge should not be wasted, and we went forward in the form of a broad arrow or wedge. I could see a vast confusion ahead of us. Maximus's charge had got home and our enemies had not had time to form and close their ranks. The Germans had rushed blindly into battle, just like mad beasts whose first impulse was to charge.

There had been hell's own uproar to begin with, but it struck me that this mass of humanity had become significantly silent. Killing can be silent, an affair of set teeth, and deep hard breathing. Maximus's men had ridden down and speared the first of their enemies, and now they seemed to be interlocked with the main mass. It was thrust against thrust, and the Germans were like a stubborn, sticky mass that held together and clogged the British spears. I realized that we had the crisis in our hands. Our enemies had neither heard nor seen the dreadful diversion we were providing. I think we must have been within thirty yards of their struggling, fuming rear, when I saw one or two hairy faces turned, faces stupid with fear and fury, open mouthed, shouting. "About! About!"

But it was too late. Geraint and I had drawn together in front of Meona's horses, and with our picked men round us, we crashed in. I had expected some shock of impact, but we seemed to cleave like the ram of a ship into a soft, gelatinous substance. I remember spearing two men, and then my spear stuck in the belly of a third. I struggled to get my sword out, and a savage rushed at me with an axe. I saw a spear shoot out from somewhere and catch the German in the throat just as he was on me. Then, we were cutting, thrusting, bullocking our way forward. Once I looked over my shoulder to see that Meona's chariot was safely in the thick of our iron phalanx. I saw her face. It was smiling. It seemed to dream.

Then, with a curious abruptness, the human mass caught between the weight and pressure of the double attack appeared to burst like a vast bladder. Its contents squirted right and left in splodges of confusion. We were going forward and so were the Aurelii who were hacking their ways towards us. The Germans seemd to be squeezed out and to ooze away like butter between two boards.

WE HAD smashed them, and like the two leaves of a door our bodies of cavalry swung opposite ways, sweeping the broken bodies of the German host before them. But that was only the beginning of the slaughter. Maximus's infantry had followed up the charge, and the men of Calleva, greatly bold now that the battle was going in our favour, came in behind us, and as we rode down the savages and broke them up into little knots of ferocity and despair, our footmen slew them. I'll give the beasts the credit of their courage. They stood and fought in little groups, in

twos and threes, and when we saw a knot that still held out, we charged it, smashed it, and so let our footmen in.

I remember Meona turning her chariot upon one of those cores of cohesion on the last fringe of the fight. I shouted to her, and called some of our men round me. There were bodies everywhere, blood, and a litter of weapons. I saw one wheel of her chariot bump over a corpse, and for a second I thought is was going to overturn, but she steadied herself and her horses, and drove straight for that little group of desperate men. I suppose there were about a dozen of us galloping hard after her. That was one of my last memories—fear, a kind of furious anger with her that she should risk so much when the day was so utterly ours.

I managed to push my horse level with her chariot, and our men were close behind us. I think my idea was to get hold of the reins and turn her horses aside, but when we were about twenty yards from that little group of Saxons, they broke and ran. They had had enough and could not face our charging horses. They scattered and legged it for the woods, and I thought the danger over.

"Let them go, Meona."

She did not look at me, but lashed her horses, and her face was the face of young Winged Victory.

"None must escape, none!"

A ride opened through the wood, and along it the rising sun was shining. I saw the Saxons plunge into this green way. We should lose them amid the trees, and again I called to Meona, and tried to stop her horses, but she was like a mad thing, and even threatened me with her spear. She drove straight for the opening in the wood. Our enemies had disappeared among the trees, and I knew that these wild beasts could be dangerous. They might turn on us, and have us at a disadvantage.

And so, it happened. I saw several of the Germans leap back into the ride, and one of them was the large and splendid person whom I had seen combing his hair. He had his shield up and his spear poised. There was a snarl on his face, and his blue eyes were fixed in a glare upon the white horses and the chariot. I pricked my horse with my sword, and managed to get him forward. One of the last things I remember was my swinging in front of Meona's horses, that poised spear, and those two blue, furious eyes.

* * *

Everything was growing dim, the sky, the trees. I was lying on my back with something in my throat. I was choking, smothering.

Meona was bending over me. Her face seemed to float above me, dim and pale. How very pale she was, with eyes—

I heard a voice.

"I will love you always. Can you hear me? I will—"

And that was all.

* * *

I still am a very sick man, sick more, perhaps, in spirit than in body.

I cannot work yet, though my job is being kept for me, and both I and Lucy have a little capital. I am allowed to potter about in our garden, while aeroplanes fly overhead, the winged chivalry of our last crusade. My car has been repaired, but Lucy will not let me drive it. My wife is very sad these days, for they are sad days for women. Sometimes I catch her loking at me with a questioning strangeness. What is she thinking, hoping? That I may never be fit to be involved in this chaotic war?

It is not a question of compulsion. I am burning to be in it, against the same enemy, the same savagery, the same faithlessness and arrogance.

* * *

A passionate restlessness consumes me. I, who so yearned with a feeling of desolation to be back in my own world, now yearn for that other world. I am always hearing, seeing, speaking to Meona. Will she grow dim to me? It is as though she had died, not I, and that I am clutching at a ghost, and pleading with it not to fade and leave me.

* * *

Our petrol is to be rationed! Can anything be an anti-climax in this world of ordered mendacity? I suppose that I should be considered a veritable Goebbels in romance. How could any man dream as I had dreamed, so consecutively, so vividly, so rationally, and at such length. In metapsychology my experience would be labelled as an extreme case of retrocognition, trick of time elaborated and exploited by a sentimental liar!

How could a whole page of history come to life and manifest itself in the person of one man? It might be said that I had dreamed a dream and spun it into an extended day-dream; that my conscious self-control had been weakened, and that my subliminal self had seized the chance to take the stage and produce a play. How can one explain the unexplainable? How

little do we know, save that our sensuous world is a world of appearances, and that we are fooled into accepting our sense-impressions as ultimate realities. We have to plant poor Common Sense in the saddle and let him ride the donkey, but maybe the donkey, like Balaam's ass, may see more than his master.

* * *

Lucy has gone to town by train, complete with gas-mask. We have to save petrol. But an uncontrollable impulse takes possession of me. I remove the switch-key from its hook and sneak down to the garage, open the doors, and slip into the car. Three gallons of petrol in the tank. Good! I expect I shall receive a wounded scolding from Lucy when she looks at that dial and the speedometer, if she does so look. Poor Lucy! Have I been so grossly disloyal to her in my dream? Hardly so. I was another man in that dream, and even though its bitter-sweet perfume remains with me, I know that Lucy is the one creature in this other world who matters to me.

Shall I ever tell her of my other world? Perhaps.

* * *

I press the self-starter, and back the car out into the lane. As I drive up the Heath Road I remember that morning when I came to the brow of this wild heath and stood like a scared and bewildered ghost trying to slip back into a warm and familiar world. I pass Vickers, a super-Vickers with its cars splurging everywhere, and that vast sandpit which is now being camouflaged. The Portsmouth Road.

A feeling of suspense grips me as the car climbs the Downland road, and all that poignant country begins to shape itself. Newland's Corner. I park the car on the verge, get out, stroll across to the grass glacis of the Downs.

I can pick out Farley Heath, with the woods at the back of it, and its slopes of bracken and heather. I feel something stab me. There is no temple, no Meona.

I drive on. I do not turn into Albury village. I shall go there later. I take the Black Heath road past Albury Park, cross the railway line and down into the dip, and up and along the narrow, winding road. Somebody sells eggs here. I pass the green whose name I always forget, and take the heath road. Its heather slides up towards the sky, and I feel an acute pang of excitement stab me. If I lie in the heather and go to sleep, shall I wake up again in Meona's world?

* * *

I park the car on the stretch of grass by the wood. I have the place to myself. I notice that the familiar thorn tree has gone. Good lord, someone has been busy here! Archæologists? The bracken has been shaved away. There are sandy scars in the soil. Fragments of Roman tile lie scattered about. I find myself looking at a neat, new foundation plan laid out in the natural stone. Here stood the temple.

I sit down close to it and stare at the horizon.

But that is not sufficient. I find a patch of heather and lie down in it, and close my eyes. Meona. Those last words of hers seem in my ears. Bitter Sweet!. Had I picked the words out of Noel Coward's play? "I will love you always." What sort of trick had my subliminal self been playing?

What had happened to Meona? Where did she lie buried? I should not find my dead beloved's tombstone like the hero in *Berkeley Square*.

I keep my eyes closed and try to fall asleep, but sleep will not come to me. Why all this foolishness? Undoubtedly, my physician would tell me that I had cracked my skull, and just wallowed in unconsciousness for a matter of three weeks? I wonder? Where was I during those three weeks? My physical self may have rested like a corpse on a mortuary table, but my spirit self had broken out and escaped and found itself part of some strange old pattern. Why not? What is sleep? Our essential self daily seems to die, and after hours of absence glides back into the body.

I give up trying to sleep, and lie and stare at the sky. I have a strange feeling that the sense veil is very thin, like gossamer or rice-paper spread over the sensuous world. The mystery of the mirror! We look into a mirror, and sometimes we seem to know that it is but a mirror, a sheet of silvered glass. When man dreams does he pass through the mirror? Is ecstasy a passing through the mirror into otherness? Have those many visionaries shed the senses, and floated into a world of other dimensions, poets and seers, those who make music? Words, words! But I have a feeling that I have been on the other side of the mirror.

A sudden understanding of life comes to me. What a filthy mess man is making of things, and why? Because he cannot see beyond the mirror; he piles in front of it masses of raw flesh, and blood, and mechanical beastliness. Man is becoming standardized and mechanized. Where have these Totalitarians gone wrong?

I think I begin to understand. I do not belong to the Eugenic Society, but on the rare occasions when I have read their journal, it has seemed to me tainted with priggery. *Mens sana in corpore sano,* oh, certainly. Has not man through thousands of years struggled upwards with suffering and bloody sweat to refine and temper and liberate individual man? Has it not all been a progress in personality, a trying out of temperaments, a development of differences, even as Nature loves her differences? I am a rather simple person, but it seems to me that the whole life structure, the ultimate significance of a community, rests upon individual values.

Why talk about the sanctity of the State, its right to regard each individual as no more than an obedient brick built into the structure? What nonsense! A community should be a live entity, not a city of baked mud ruled by some Assyrian bull-tyrant. If we enslave the individuals we build a slave state, a debased beastliness, a horror of dead materialism. Man should be the symbol; free, restless, questioning, articulate man, waving his little torch in the mysterious darkness, yet somehow glimpsing the sheen of other mysteries about the mountain top.

Yes, man is to be cherished, not the State, man the poet, man the maker of music, man the craftsman, man the farmer. What is the State if those who toil and explore and sing are mere dumb and purblind beasts, crushed into a dreadful docility, with all the free questioning of children bludgeoned out of consciousness? Man is not steel and concrete and baked mud. We have taken away from him the mysterious mirror in which it should be his fate to gaze, and divine the glimmer of angel's wings.

The September sun is warm on my face and body, and with it a new inspiration seems to soak into my soul. I sit up and remember that strange and frightening moment when I had discovered those unfamiliar shoes upon my feet. But no longer am I afraid. I turn and look at the place where the temple stood. Yes, I had seen it, of that I am sure, just as sure as I am of the other realities, the face of my other world beloved. I have been behind the mirror, and no longer am I afraid.

I go and stand in the centre of that foundation pattern, and gaze upon the familiar hills, England in all its green tranquillity. Yet, I think of it as Meona's country. And war is with us as it was with her, blatant, bombastic war, a barbaric beastliness, a challenge to the free soul of man.

Yes, if the fates are kind to me I will fight in this war as I fought in that other war, for freedom, for the beauty and mystery and loveliness of things.

This is a crusade, and I would be part of its winged chivalry.

MASTERS OF FANTASY

Robert William Chambers—"Maker of Moons"—1865-1933.

Chambers' first ambition was to be an artist, and a painting of his was in fact exhibited by the Paris Salon. Then he discovered he could paint with the pen even more effectively than the brush. "The King in Yellow," his second book, was an instant sensation. Chambers was probably about 28 at the time he created this collectors' classic.

Carcosa was the name he gave to the weird lost world sung of by the lovely Cassilda of his brain's creation. His poignant "Demoiselle d'Ys" and horrifying "Yellow Sign" have been acclaimed in earlier F.F.Ms. Every book collector of the baroque hopes to include on his shelves such compelling Chambers volumes as "Slayer of Souls," "Maker of Moons" and "Tracer of Lost Persons." Fourteen years ago this word weaver of warm charms and fearful visions went at last himself "In Search of Unknown." It is recorded that, when the time drew near for the greatest adventure, his death was encompassed with supreme fortitude.

ATLANTIS' EXILE

"You are fortunate and at peace who have never seen these mermaidens flashing like silver javelins through the clear water. . . ."

By Cyril Hume

The isle of strange delight which lives in all men's dreams was his for a while, before he was banished from the silvery gates, forever remembering—forever damned. . . .

"I HAVE been down there," the traveler said, "in the blue dusk of the abyss under the ocean." His flesh was bleached ivory like the flesh of one who has for long been confined away from the sun. "The wise melancholy people of the city put me to work with some other captives hewing the dark sea-growths away from their flaggings and cornices. I tell you it was strange at first to see the fish move by, gay and unafraid in their companies. . . ."

"How did you reach the place?" I asked.

"It was when we came to The Gates of the Sea," he answered. "Suddenly the waters opened, casting up a mist of spray over the masthead. Our ship sank down as though upon a steep slow river until it came to rest at last lightly upon the ocean floor. I remember how we all looked up amazed to see those porticos rising around us. Then the pale people came with chains in their hands and surrounded us. Me they put to hewing the beautiful sea-growths which spring like weeds in the streets."

"I do not understand," I said, "—those gates. . . ."

"Understand? Ah, no. . . . Ah, no," he answered. "One understands only that they are beautiful, The Gates of the Sea. The beauty of them when they opened to receive us made me forget even to be afraid. Their waters are like bronze overwrought with fishes and wonders of the deep. They are like glass," he said.

"But how—"

"I cannot tell you how. I can tell you only that we sailed into the place unknowing and unsuspecting, and that those marvelous gates swung hugely open to receive us. They were like green bronze in the spume. . . . No, there is no way to come to them. When it is time, they open. That is all. It may happen once in a century. You hear at home that a certain ship has been lost, leaving no clew of oil or wreckage on the water. Perhaps she had been sighted the day before, luffing with slapping tackle through the flaws of a calm. Then —vanished! It is that those happy and melancholy people below have had need of servants in their city." He mused for a long time. Then suddenly he cried out in a voice of pain, "Atlantis! Atlantis!" His face was twisted. I saw that he was old.

"You did not drown!" I said.

He shook his head impatiently. "No, no, no! It is not like that. One breathes still. Not air, no. But there is an element injected into the waters of the city. I have received it into my lungs with ease and delight. Newcomers are made dull and drowsy at first, but after a month even the pleasure of it is ordinary. Respiration becomes very slow. One breathes perhaps once in an hour. It is all because of that element which the people of the city release into the water twice, perhaps three times a year.

"I have frequently watched them do it. They carry out one of the huge shell-crusted jars and break the seal, wearing masks, and employing many rituals. Then that sweet ichor pours abroad like molten

amber and refreshes the water. In some far future there will be an end of those jars. Then death will filter down like sea ooze upon the roofs of Atlantis. But that will not happen for centuries. I have been in the cave where the jars are stored, and have seen myriads and myriads of them, each one with its little luminous creature. . . ."

"But," I began, "the pressure—"

He looked at me blankly. "I have often wondered over that myself," he said.

I PUT further questions and he answered me: "No, they are not beautiful, the people of Atlantis. To human eyes they are hideous, for their faces are very pale and very old like the faces of worn ancient statues. And most of them besides are diseased about the nose and lips with cankerous sea parasites. To them conversely our human beauty is ugliness. . . . I could never understand. I was like a child among those people. It used to puzzle me that sometimes I found their hideousness beautiful.

"But there are things which are beautiful even to human eyes in that wonderful city. Fishes, erect and agile and flower-colored, slant along the bluish twilight. Pale-tentacled plants wave and posture with iris-tinted life. And there are slow squat creatures whose bodies are glorious lights. . . . Oh, the dim dear streets of my lost city! I must weep when I remember them. There never yet was in the world such a city for delight and beauty. And I shall not ever see it again! . . .

"They have a place there which they call 'The House of Horrors.' But there are things in it would ravish your eyes. It is like a prison and like a museum. I could never be sure I understood the motives of the Atlantins, but I suspect they keep this place as a warning against what they consider ugliness. There are long galleries filled with the gear and relics of men which have rained down gently upon Atlantis since the beginning. Things beautiful and precious and strange. I remember a certain cup made of emeralds which were fitted together without metal. And there was the golden sword of a crusader king. And a Greek statue of a girl, all blurred and bored by little sea creatures. . . . In a great barred cavern beyond, they prison their wanton little mermaidens. You are fortunate and at peace who have never seen these, flashing like silver javelins through the clear water; who have never pored upon their white delicious bodies lying at ease under sea ferns upon the sand; who have never yearned toward them, combing their long hair with scarlet combs of coral.

"A mermaid's hair is lovelier than the hair of any woman. Each little head is like a sea anemone, tawney or jade or the color of pale blood. They look up wistfully into your face and beckon you. They seem so tender and so lonely in their cavern. . . . These caverns are guarded by armed women of Atlantis, for the bodies of the mermaidens have power sometimes to allure even the calm sea people. And to the captive men, they are frenzy and madness. . . . I remember the sea captain, a bull-chested hairy man with a black beard. When he looked first into that cavern I saw him shout like a madman."

"Saw—?"

"There is no sound in Atlantis. . . . And when the women guardians held him back he wounded himself cruelly with the knife he had. . . . The people of Atlantis often tried to teach their prisoners. Or perhaps it was a mockery. I cannot be sure. But once a year the prisoners were led in chains to the entrance of the mermaid cavern, and one of their number, a man, the strongest and youngest of them all, was thrust inside. I have seen many men advance into that cavern, laughing, with closed eyes and outstretched arms. The little mermaids dart and flit toward him through the water, clustering about him like silver butterflies, and they give him the dreadful death which is their custom. We captives all saw this ceremony more than once, but every year the new chosen victim was like a king among us. The sea people watched us with melancholy.

"There were other things also in that House of Horrors, beautiful things and horrible. Squids, mermen, enormous bulks of living jelly—purple and brown, sharks, tritons, octopi, sea urchins tall as a man, gray worms with teeth, electric creatures, and blotched things like scabs of corruption which fed on bones. There was one monster particularly which always fascinated and sickened me. A great body like a sack, soft jointed legs, clusters of dull eyes, and an elaborate mouth which flickered and stirred continually like a lobster's. The horror was that it was not one but seven monsters, all perfectly adapted and fitted together for living as a colony. Each part was distorted to its purpose like the head of a sole or like the crudely molded body of a hermit crab. The mouth was a single creature, the body another, the clustered restless eyes a third.

Once I looked close and distinguished the separate creatures, each monstrously developed in certain parts, but retaining still traces of other atrophied organs.

"The sack-like paunch for instance had eight little octopus tentacles growing upon it like an ornamental fringe. Sometimes—for what reason I could never determine—the thing would separate into its component parts, and each creature would writhe feebly with individual life. (Only the curiously joined legs were horribly active among the rest like a spider.) At such times the areas of cleavage were visible, covered with a white oozing membrane which pulsed and gave off iridescent reflections. Presently the thing would reassemble itself with loathesome intelligence. Heaving, settling, shifting. . . .

"In the same house the Atlantins kept their snake to which they seemed to attach some religious significance. It was like a small transparent conger eel with blind blue eyes. They would feed him with little squids, and anxiously watch the processes of digestion through the transparent walls of his body. He seemed to be in some way their oracle, though I may have misunderstood everything.

"IF I could make you see the beauty of Atlantis!" he said. "Those dim still streets receding into the blue veils of a twilight which was colored eternally like a clear winter sky at the time when the first star appears. And along the streets the white people moving in calm and melancholy. Oh, I would be better dead than away from Atlantis!"

For a time he pondered sorrowfully. Then at last he spoke again.

"I am sure they were very wise, those people of Atlantis. A man is like a child compared to them. I think, if they desired, they could rise up from their waters and overthrow our world, for their science is beyond our understanding. I saw The Gates of the Sea a hundred times, but I never had an inkling about the mechanics of them. Then there were other devices too, so marvelous they seemed half to shrink away from visibility. . . . But the white people do not give themselves very much to science. Occasionally I even suspected them of pitying an active member of their own race.

"They watched and guarded their scientists as we watch feeble-minded people. I remember once a scientist did something which displeased them. He grew too active and practical perhaps. Certainly he went too far in some way I could not comprehend. So they executed him in their strange fashion. I watched the business. . . . After incomprehensible and wordless formalities he was led between two of them, unbound and unprotesting, to an enormous open bivalve like a giant clam. He shrank a little, but finally laid himself upon the yellow tongue of flesh inside the shell. There was a pause. Then the great shell closed very softly. For days afterward the water near the hinge boiled with little jots of green and rust color. When the shell opened again the man was gone. There remained upon the yellow flesh inside only a flake of chalk like the bone of a big cuttlefish. This they carried away solemnly with ritual gestures. . . .

"But for the most part those white people gave themselves over to thinking. I have often come upon one of them standing in contemplation of a sea flower. His white eroded face would seem almost beautiful with abstraction. Occasionally, as I stood unnoticed watching him, the water around his head would begin to shiver with concentric rays, as of heat. It would beat with vibrations. A message of some sort it must have been, for soon other white people would come one by one in quiet haste to join him. They would stand around in the shimmer of rays, drinking his thought. Presently the water about another and another head would beat like an aureole, until the whole group was cloaked in dazzlement and awe. The sea flower would stir gently as though in a slight current. At such times those hideous people were beautiful to me beyond words. Their blotched lips were clothed with light.

"Escape? Never that. My heart more than my body was prisoner to the white folk. Now I am an exile of Atlantis, thrust out forever from The Gates of the Sea. That was my punishment. . . . It happened shortly after I had watched the bearded sea captain meet his end in the cavern of the mermaids. I remembered only the laughing rapturous face of the victim surrounded by the heavy-haunched small river bodies. So I went to the warders and begged for the death the sea captain had suffered. But they drove me away sternly and sadly. I bit my hands and wrists until the water around me was a pink haze of blood, and I thought, 'I will revenge myself upon these cold white people.'

"An opportunity came soon. I crept into the vast cave where the shell-crusted jars

(Continued on page 130)

THE HORROR OF THE HEIGHTS

(Which includes the 1913 manuscript known as the Joyce-Armstrong fragment.)

By A. Conan Doyle

"There are jungles in the upper air, and there are worse things than tigers which inhabit them. . . ."

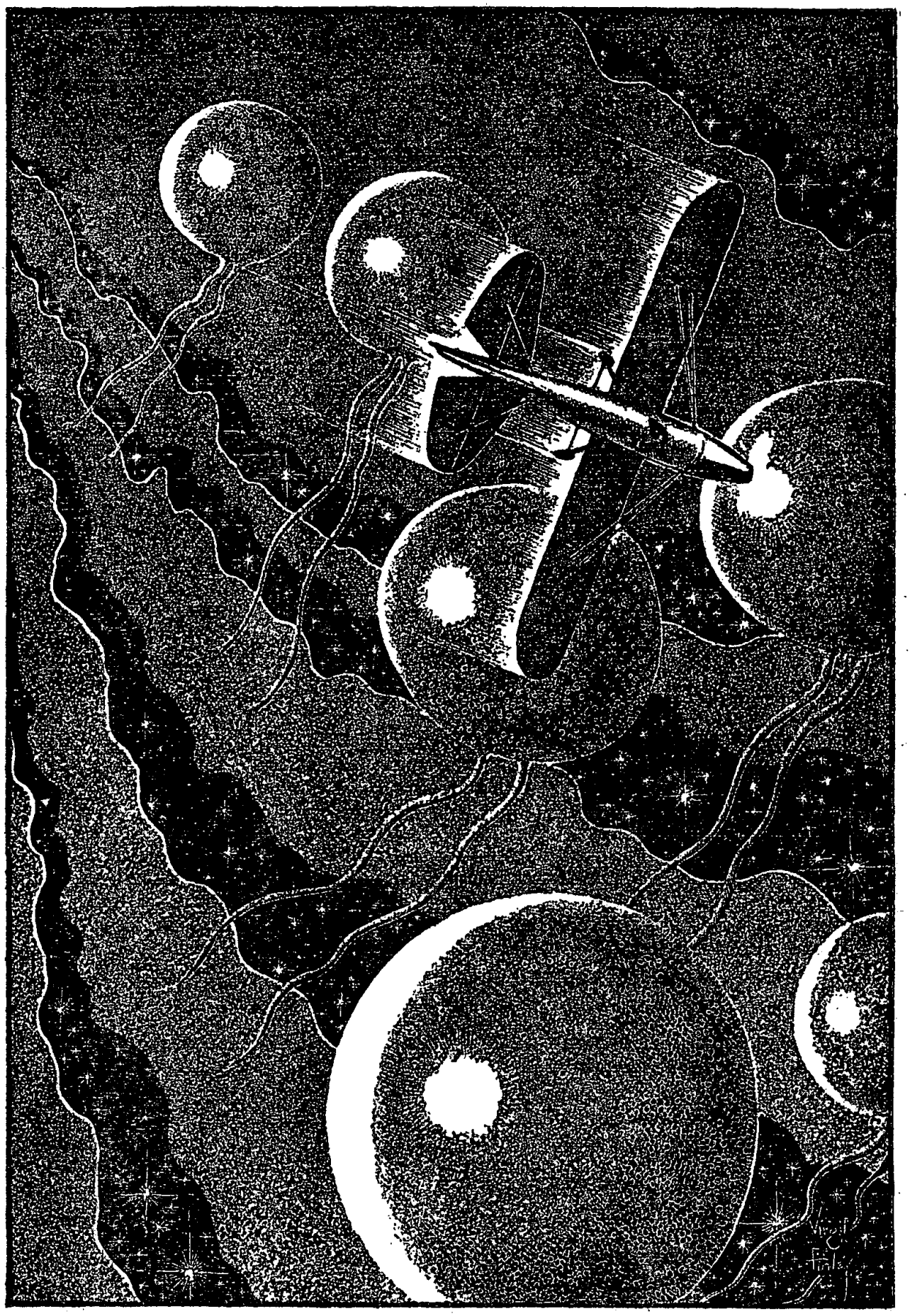
THE idea that the extraordinary narrative which has been called the Joyce-Armstrong Fragment is an elaborate practical joke evolved by some unknown person, cursed by a perverted and sinister sense of humour, has now been abandoned by all who have examined the matter. The most *macabre* and imaginative of plotters would hesitate before linking his morbid fancies with the unquestioned and tragic facts which reinforced the statement. Though the assertations contained in it are amazing and even monstrous, it is none the less forcing itself upon the general intelligence that they are true, and that we must readjust our ideas to the new situation.

This world of ours appears to be separated by a slight and precarious margin of safety from a most singular and unexpected danger. I will endeavour in this narrative, which reproduces the original document in its necessarily somewhat fragmentary form, to lay before the reader the whole of the facts up to date, prefacing my statement by saying that, if there be any who doubt the narrative of Joyce-Armstrong, there can be no question at all as to the facts concerning Lieutenant Myrtle, R.N., and Mr. Hay Connor, who undoubtedly met their end in the manner described.

The Joyce-Armstrong Fragment was found in the field which is called Lower Haycock, lying one mile to the westward of the village of Withyham, upon the Kent and Sussex border. It was on the fifteenth of September last that an agricultural labourer, James Flynn, in the employment of Mathew Dodd, farmer, of the Chauntry Farm, Withyham, perceived a briar pipe lying near the footpath which skirts the hedge in Lower Haycock.

A few paces farther on he picked up a pair of broken binocular glasses. Finally, among some nettles in the ditch, he caught sight of a flat, canvas-backed book, which proved to be a note-book with detachable leaves, some of which had come loose and were fluttering along the base of the hedge. These he collected, but some, including the first, were never recovered, and leave a deplorable hiatus in this all-important statement. The note-book was taken by the labourer to his master, who in turn showed it to Dr. J. H. Atherton, of Hartfield. This gentleman at once recognised the need for an expert examination, and the manuscript was forwarded to the Aero Club in London, where it now lies.

The first two pages of the manuscript are missing. There is also one torn away at the end of the narrative, though none of these affect the general coherence of the story. It is conjectured that the missing opening is concerned with the record of Mr. Joyce-Armstrong's qualifications as an aeronaut, which can be gathered from other sources and are admitted to be unsurpassed among the air pilots of England.



"I found myself in a perfect fleet of these beautifully colored creatures."

For many years he has been looked upon as among the most daring and the most intellectual of flying men, a combination which has enabled him to both invent and test several new devices, including the common gyroscopic attachment which is known by his name. The main body of the manuscript is written neatly in ink, but the last few lines are in pencil and are so ragged as to be hardly legible—exactly, in fact, as they might be expected to appear if they were scribbled off hurriedly from the seat of a moving plane.

There are, it may be added, several stains, both on the last page and on the inside cover which have been pronounced by the home office experts to be blood—probably human and certainly mammalian. The fact that something closely resembling the organism of malaria was discovered in this blood, and that Joyce-Armstrong is known to have suffered from intermittent fever, is a remarkable example of the new weapons which modern science has placed in the hands of our detectives.

And now a word as to the personality of the author of this epoch-making statement. Joyce-Armstrong, according to the few friends who really knew something of the man, was a poet and a dreamer, as well as a mechanic and an inventor. He was a man of considerable wealth, much of which he had spent in the pursuit of his aeronautical hobby. He had four private aeroplanes in his hangars near Devizes, and is said to have made no fewer than one hundred and seventy ascents in the course of last year.

He was a retiring man with dark moods, in which he would avoid the society of his fellows. Captain Dangerfield, who knew him better than anyone, says that there were times when his eccentricity threatened to develop into something more serious. His habit of carrying a shot-gun with him in his aeroplane was one manifestation of it.

Another was the morbid effect which the fall of Lieutenant Myrtle had upon his mind. Myrtle, who was attempting the height record, fell from an altitude of something over thirty thousand feet. Horrible to narrate, his head was entirely obliterated, though his body and limbs preserved their configuration. At every gathering of airmen Joyce-Armstrong, according to Dangerfield, would ask, with an enigmatic smile: "And where, pray, is Myrtle's head?"

On another occasion after dinner, at the mess of the flying School on Salisbury Plain, he started a debate as to what will be the most permanent danger which airman will have to encounter. Having listened to successive opinions as to air-pockets, faulty construction, and over-banking, he ended by shrugging his shoulders and refusing to put forward his own views, though he gave the impression that they differed from any advanced by his companions.

It is worth remarking that after his own complete disappearance it was found that his private affairs were arranged with a precision which may show that he had a strong premonition of disaster. With these essential explanations I will now give the narrative exactly as it stands, beginning at page three of the blood-soaked note-book:—

"NEVERTHELESS, when I dined at Rheims with Coselli and Gustave Raymond I found that neither of them was aware of any particular danger in the higher layers of the atmosphere. I did not actually say what was in my thoughts, but I got so near to it that if they had any corresponding idea they could not have failed to express it. But then they are two empty, vainglorious fellows with no thought beyond seeing their silly names in the newspaper. It is interesting to note that neither of them had ever been much beyond the twenty-thousand-foot level. Of course, men have been higher than this both in balloons and in the ascent of mountains. It must be well above that point that the aeroplane enters the danger zone—always presuming that my premonitions are really correct.

"Aeroplaning has been with us now for more than twenty years, and one might well ask: Why should this peril be only revealing itself in our day? The answer is obvious. In the old days of weak engines, when a hundred horse-power Gnome or Green was considered ample for every need, the flights were very restricted. Now that three hundred horse-power is the rule rather than the exception, visits to the upper layers have become easier and more common. Some of us can remember how, in our youth, Garros made a world-wide reputation by attaining nineteen thousand feet, and it was considered a remarkable achievement to fly over the Alps. Our standard now has been im-

measurably raised, and there are twenty high flights for one in former years. Many of them have been undertaken with impunity. The thirty-thousand-foot level has been reached time after time with no discomfort beyond cold and asthma.

"What does this prove? A visitor might descend upon this planet a thousand times and never see a tiger. Yet tigers exist, and if he chanced to come down into a jungle he might be devoured. There are jungles of the upper air, and there are worse things than tigers which inhabit them. I believe in time they will map these jungles accurately out. Even at the present moment I could name two of them. One of them lies over the Pau-Biarritz district of France. Another is just over my head as I write here in my house in Wiltshire. I rather think there is a third in the Homburg-Wiesbaden district.

"It was the disappearance of the airmen that first set me thinking. Of course, everyone said that they had fallen into the sea, but that did not satisfy me at all. First there was Verrier in France; his machine was found near Bayonne, but they never got his body. There was the case of Baxter also, who vanished, though his engine and some of the iron fixings were found in a wood in Leicestershire. In that case, Dr. Middleton, of Amesbury, who was just watching the flight with a telescope, declares that just before the clouds obscured the view he saw the machine, which had an enormous height, suddenly rise perpendicularly upwards in a succession of jerks in a manner that he would have thought to be impossible. That was the last seen of Baxter. There was a correspondence in the papers, but it never led to anything.

"There were several other similar cases, and there was the death of Hay Connor. What a cackle there was about an unsolved mystery of the air, and what columns in the half-penny papers, and yet how little was done to get to the bottom of the business! He came down in a tremendous volplane from an unknown height. He never got off his machine and died in his pilot's seat. Died of what? 'Heart disease,' said the doctors. Rubbish! Hay Connor's heart was as sound as mine is. What did Venables say? Venables was the only man who was at his side when he died. He said that he was shivering and looked like a man who had been badly scared. 'Died of fright,' said Venables, who could not imagine what he was frightened about. Only said one word to Venables, which sounded like 'Monstrous.' They could make nothing of that at the inquest. But I could make something of it. Monsters! That was the last word of poor Harry Hay Connor. And he did die of fright, just as Venables thought.

"And then there was Myrtle's head. Do you really believe—does anybody really believe—that a man's head could be driven clean into his body by the force of a fall? Well, perhaps it may be possible, but I, for one, have never believed it was so with Myrtle. And the grease upon his clothes—'all slimy with grease,' said somebody at the inquest. Queer that nobody got thinking after that! I did—but, then, I had been thinking for a good long time.

"I've made three ascents—how Dangerfield used to chaff me about my shot-gun—but I've never been high enough. Now, with this light Paul Veroner machine and its one hundred and seventy-five Robur, I should easily touch the thirty thousand tomorrow. I'll have a shot at the record. Maybe I shall have a shot at something else as well. Of course, it's dangerous. If a fellow wants to avoid danger he had best keep out of flying altogether and subside finally into flannel slippers and a dressing-gown. But I'll visit the air-jungle tomorrow—and if there's anything there I shall know it. If I return, I'll find myself a bit of a celebrity. If I don't, this note-book may explain what I am trying to do, and how I lost my life in doing it. But no drivel about accidents or mysteries, if *you* please.

"I chose my Paul Veroner monoplane for the job. There's nothing like a monoplane when real work is to be done. Beaumont found that out in very early days. For one thing, it doesn't mind damp, and the weather looks as if it should be in the clouds all the time. It's a bonny little model and answers my hand like a tender-mouthed horse. The engine is a ten-cylinder rotary Robur working up to one hundred and seventy-five. It has all the modern improvements—enclosed fuselage, high-curved landing skids, brakes, gyroscopic steadiers, and three speeds, worked by an alteration of the angle of the planes upon the Venetian Blind principle. I took a shot-gun with me and a dozen cartridges filled with buck-shot.

"You should have seen the face of Perkins, my old mechanic, when I directed him to put them in. I was dressed like an Arctic explorer, with two jerseys under my overalls, thick socks inside my padded

boots, a storm cap with flaps, and my talc goggles. It was stifling outside the hangars, but I was going for the summit of the Himalayas, and had to dress for the part. Perkins knew there was something on and implored me to take him with me. Perhaps I should if I were using a biplane, but a monoplane is a one-man show—if you want to get the last foot of lift out of it. Of course, I took an oxygen bag; the man who goes for the altitude record without one will either be frozen or smothered—or both.

"I had a good look at the planes, the rudder-bar, and the elevating lever before I got in. Everything was in order so far as I could see. Then I switched on my engine and found that she was running sweetly. When they let her go she rose almost at once upon the lowest speed. I circled my home field once or twice just to warm her up, and then, with a wave to Perkins and the others, I flattened out my planes and put her on her highest. She skimmed like a swallow down wind for eight or ten miles until I turned her nose up a little and she began to climb in a great spiral for the cloud bank above me. It's all-important to rise slowly and adapt yourself to the pressure as you go.

"IT WAS a close, warm day for an English September, and there was the hush and heaviness of impending rain. Now and then there came sudden puffs of wind from the south-west—one of them so gusty and unexpected that it caught me napping and turned me half-round for an instant. I remember the time when gusts and whirls and air-pockets used to be things of danger—before we learned to put an over-mastering power into our engines. Just as I reached the cloud banks, with the altimeter marking three thousand, down came the rain. My word, how it poured! It drummed upon my wings and lashed against my face, blurring my glasses so that I could hardly see. I got down on to a low speed, for it was painful to travel against it. As I got higher it became hail, and I had to turn tail to it. One of my cylinders was out of action—a dirty plug, I should imagine, but still I was rising steadily with plenty of power. After a bit the trouble passed, whatever it was, and I heard the full deep-throated purr—the ten singing as one. That's where the beauty of our modern silencers come in. We can at last control our engines by ear. How they squeal and squeak and sob when they are in trouble! All those cries for help were wasted in the old days, when every sound was swallowed up by the monstrous racket of the machine. If only the earlier aviators could come back and see the beauty and perfection of the mechanism which had been brought at the cost of their lives!

"About nine-thirty I was nearing the clouds. Down below me, all blurred and shadowed with rain, lay the vast expanse of Salisbury Plain. Half-a-dozen flying machines were doing hack-work at the thousand-foot level, looking like little black swallows against the green background. I dare say they were wondering what I was doing up in cloud-land. Suddenly a grey curtain drew across beneath me and the wet folds of vapor were swirling round my face. I was clammily cold and miserable. But I was above the hail-storm, and that was something gained. The cloud was as dark and thick as a London fog. In my anxiety to get clear, I cocked her nose up until the automatic alarm-bell rang, and I actually began to slide backwards.

"My sopped, dripping wings made me heavier than I thought, but presently I was in higher clouds, and soon had cleared the first layer. There was a second—opal-colored and fleecy—at a great height above my head, a white unbroken ceiling above, and a dark unbroken floor below, with the monoplane labouring upwards upon a vast spiral between them. It is deadly lonely in these cloud-spaces. Once a great flight of some small water-birds went past me, flying very fast to the westwards. The quick whirr of their wings and their musical cry were cheery to my ear. I fancy that they were teal, but I am a wretched zoologist. Now that we humans have become birds we must really learn to know our brethren by sight.

"The wind down beneath me whirled and swayed the broad cloud-plain. Once a great eddy formed in it, a whirlpool of vapour, and through it, as down a funnel, I caught sight of the distant world. A large white biplane was passing at a vast depth beneath me. I fancy it was the morning mail service betwixt Bristol and London. Then the drift swirled inwards again and the great solitude was unbroken.

"Just after ten I touched the lower edge of the upper cloud-stratum. It consisted of fine diaphanous vapour drifting swiftly from the westward. The wind had been

steadily rising all this time and it was now blowing a sharp breeze—twenty-eight an hour by my gauge. Already it was very cold, though my altimeter only marked nine thousand. The engines were working beautifully, and we went droning steadily upwards. The cloud-bank was thicker than I had expected, but at last it thinned out to a golden mist before me, and then in an instant I had shot out from it, and there was an unclouded sky and a brilliant sun above my head—all blue and gold above, all shining silver below, one vast glimmering plain as far as my eyes could reach.

"It was a quarter past ten o'clock. The barograph needle pointed to twelve thousand eight hundred. Up I went and up, my ears concentrated upon the deep purring of my motor, my eyes busy always with the watch, the revolution indicator, the petrol lever, and the oil pump. No wonder aviators are said to be a fearless race. With so many things to think of there is no time to trouble about oneself. About this time I noted how unreliable is the compass when above a certain height from earth. At fifteen thousand feet mine was pointing east and a point south. The sun and the wind gave me my true bearings.

"I had hoped to reach an eternal stillness in these high altitudes, but with every thousand feet of ascent the gale grew stronger. My machine groaned and trembled in every joint and rivet as she faced it, and swept away like a sheet of paper when I banked her on the turn, skimming down at a greater pace, perhaps, than ever mortal man has moved. Yet I had always to turn again and tack up in the wind's eye, for it was not merely a height record that I was after. By all my calculations it was above little Wiltshire that my air-jungle lay and all my labour might be lost if I struck the outer layers at some farther point.

"When I reached the nineteen-thousand-foot level, which was about midday, the wind was so severe that I looked with some anxiety to the stays of my wings, expecting momentarily to see them snap or slacken. I even cast loose the parachute behind me, and fastened its hook into the ring of my leathern belt, so as to be ready for the worst. Now was the time when a bit of scamped work by the mechanic is paid for by the life of the aeronaut. But she held together bravely. Every cord and strut was humming and vibrating like so many harpstrings, but it was glorious to see how, for all the beating and the buffeting, she was still the conqueror of Nature and the mistress of the sky.

"There is surely something divine in man himself that he should rise so superior to the limitations which Creation seemed to impose—rise, too, by such unselfish, heroic devotion as this air-conquest has shown. Talk of human degeneration! When has such a story as this been written in the annals of our race?

"These were the thoughts in my head as I climbed that monstrous inclined plane with the wind sometimes beating in my face and sometimes whistling behind my ears, while the cloud-land beneath me fell away to such a distance that the folds and hummocks of silver had all smoothed out into one flat, shining plain. But suddenly I had a horrible and unprecedented experience. I have known before what it is to be in what our neighbors have called a *tourbillon*, but never on such a scale as this. That huge, sweeping river of wind of which I had spoken had, as it appears, whirlpools within it which were as monstrous as itself. Without a moment's warning I was dragged suddenly into the heart of one. I spun around for a minute or two with such velocity that I almost lost my senses, and then fell suddenly, left wing foremost, down the vacuum funnel in the centre. I dropped like a stone, and lost nearly a thousand feet.

"It was only my belt that kept me in my seat, and the shock and breathlessness left me hanging half insensible over the side of the fuselage. But I am always capable of a supreme effort—it is my one great merit as an aviator. I was conscious that the descent was slower. The whirlpool was a cone rather than a funnel, and I had come to the apex. With a terrific wrench, throwing my weight all to one side, I levelled my planes and brought her head away from the wind. In an instant I had shot out from the eddies and was skimming down the sky. Then, shaken but victorious, I turned her nose up and began once more my steady grind on the upward spiral. I took a large sweep to avoid the dangerspot of the whirlpool, and soon I was safely above it. Just after one o'clock I was twenty-one thousand feet above the sea-level. To my great joy I had topped the gale, and with every hundred feet of ascent the air grew stiller. On the other hand, it was very cold, and I was conscious of the peculiar nausea which goes with rarefication of the air. For the first time

I unscrewed the mouth of my oxyen bag and took an occasional whiff of the glorious gas. I could feel it running like a cordial through my veins, and I was exhilarated almost to the point of drunkenness. I shouted and sang as I roared upwards into the cold, still outer world.

"IT IS very clear to me that the insensibility which came upon Glaisher, and in a lesser degree upon Coxwell, when, in 1862, they ascended in a balloon to the height of thirty thousand feet, was due to the extreme speed with which a perpendicular ascent is made. Doing it at an easy gradient and accustoming oneself to the lessened barometric pressure by slow degrees, there are no such dreadful symptoms. At the same great height I found that even without my oxygen inhaler I could breathe without undue distress. It was bitterly cold, however, and my thermometer was at zero, Fahrenheit.

"At one-thirty I was nearly seven miles above the earth, and still ascending steadily. I found, however, that the rarefied air was giving markedly less support to my wings, and that my angle of ascent had to be considerably lowered in consequence. It was already clear that even with my light weight and strong engine-power there was a point in front of me where I should be held. To make matters worse, one of my sparking-plugs was in trouble again and there was intermittent misfiring in the engine. My heart was heavy with the fear of failure.

"It was about that time that I had a most extraordinary experience. Something wizzed past me in a trail of smoke and exploded with a loud, hissing sound, sending forth a cloud of steam. For the instant I could not imagine what had happened. Then I remembered that the earth is forever being bombarded by meteor stones, and would be hardly inhabitable were they not in nearly every case turned to vapour in the outer layers of the atmosphere. Here is a new danger for the high-altitude man, for two others passed me when I was nearing the forty-thousand-foot mark. I cannot doubt that at the edge of the earth's envelope the risk would be a very real one.

"My barograph needle marked forty-one thousand three hundred when I became aware that I could go no further. Physically, the strain was not as yet greater than I could bear, but my machine had reached its limit. The attentuated air gave no firm support to the wings, and the least tilt developed into side-slip, while she seemed sluggish on her controls. Possibly, had the engine been at its best, another thousand feet might have been within our capacity, but it was still misfiring, and two out of the ten cylinders appeared to be out of action.

"If I'd not already reached the zone for which I was searching then I should never see it upon this journey. But was it not possible that I had attained it? Soaring into circles like a monstrous hawk upon the forty-thousand-foot level I let the monoplane guide herself, and with my Mannheim glass I made a careful observation of my surroundings. The heavens were perfectly clear; there was no indication of those dangers I had imagined.

"I have said that I was soaring in circles. It struck me suddenly that I would do well to take a wider sweep and open up a new air-tract. If the hunter entered an earth-jungle he would drive through it if he wished to find his game. My reasoning had led me to believe that the air-jungle which I had imagined lay somewhere over Wiltshire. This should be to the south and west of me. I took my bearings from the sun, for the compass was hopeless and no trace of earth was to be seen—nothing but the distant silver cloud-plain. However, I got my direction as best I might and kept her head straight to the mark. I reckoned that my petrol supply would not last for another hour or so, but I could afford to use it to the last drop, since a single magnificent vol-plane could at any time take me to the earth.

"Suddenly I was aware of something new. The air in front of me had lost its crystal clearness. It was full of long, ragged wisps of something which I can only compare to fine cigarette smoke. It hung about in wreaths and coils, turning and twisting slowly in the sunlight. As the monoplane shot through it, I was aware of a faint taste of oil on my lips, and there was a greasy scum upon the woodwork of the machine. Some infinitely fine organic matter appeared to be suspended in the atmosphere. There was no life there. It was inchoate and diffuse, extending for many square acres and then fringing off into the void. No, it was not life. But might it not be the remains of life? Above all, might it not be the food of life, of monstrous life, even as the humble grease of the ocean is the food for the mighty whale? The thought was in my mind

when my eyes looked upwards and I saw the most wonderful vision that man has even seen. Can I hope to convey it to you even as I saw it myself last Thursday?

"Conceive a jelly-fish such as sails our summer seas, bell-shaped and of enormous size—far larger, I should judge, than the dome of St. Paul's. It was of a light pink colour veined with a delicate green, but the whole huge fabric so tenuous that it was but a fairy outline against the dark blue sky. It pulsated with a delicate and regular rhythm. From it there depended two long, dripping green tentacles, which swayed slowly backwards and forwards. This gorgeous vision passed gently with noiseless dignity over my head, as light and fragile as a soap-bubble, and drifted upon its stately way.

"I had half turned my monoplane, that I might look after this beautiful creature, when, in a moment, I found myself amidst a perfect fleet of them, of all sizes, but none so large as the first. Some were quite small, but the majority about as big as an average balloon, and with much the same curvature at the top. There was in them a delicacy of texture and colouring which reminded me of the finest Venetian glass. Pale shades of pink and green were the prevailing tints, but all had a lovely irridescence where the sun shimmered through their dainty forms. Some hundreds of them drifted past me, a wonderful fairy squadron of strange, unknown argosies of the sky—creatures whose forms and substance were so attuned to these pure heights that one could not conceive anything so delicate within actual sight or sound of earth.

"But soon my attention was drawn to a new phenomenon—the serpents of the outer air. These were long, thin, fantastic coils of vapour-like material, which turned and twisted with great speed, flying round and round at such a pace that the eyes could hardly follow them. Some of these ghost-like creatures were twenty or thirty feet long, but it was difficult to tell their girth, for their outline was so hazy that it seemed to fade away into the air around them.

"These air-snakes were of a very light grey or smoke colour, with some darker lines within, which gave the impression of a definite organism. One of them whisked past my very face, and I was conscious of a cold, clammy contact, but their composition was so unsubstantial that I could not connect them with any thought of physical danger, any more than the beautiful bell-like creatures which had preceded them. There was no more solidity in their frames than in the floating spume from a broken wave.

"BUT a more terrible experience was in store for me. Floating downwards from a great height there came a purplish patch of vapour, small as I saw it first, but rapidly enlarging as it approached me, until it appeared to be hundreds of square feet in size. Though fashioned of some transparent, jelly-like substance, it was none the less of much more definite outline and solid consistence than anything which I had seen before. There were more traces, too, of a physical organization, especially two vast shadowy, circular plates upon either side, which may have been eyes, and a perfectly solid white projection between them which was as curved and cruel as the beak of a vulture.

"The whole aspect of this monster was formidable and threatening, and it kept changing its colour from a very light mauve to a dark, angry purple so thick that it cast a shadow as it drifted between my monoplane and the sun. On the upper curve of its huge body there were three great projections which I can only describe as enormous bubbles and I was convinced as I looked at them that they were charged with some extremely light gas which served to buoy up the misshapen and semi-solid mass in the rarefied air. The creature moved swiftly along, keeping pace easily with the monoplane, and for twenty miles or more it formed my horrible escort, hovering over me like a bird of grey which was waiting to pounce.

"Its method of progression—done so swiftly that it was not easy to follow—was to throw out a long, glutinous streamer in front of it, which in turn seemed to draw forward the rest of the writhing body. So elastic and gelatinous was it that never for two successive minutes was it the same shape, and yet each change made it more threatening and loathsome than the last.

"I knew that it meant mischief. Every purple flush of its hideous body told me so. The vague, goggling eyes which were turned always upon me were cold and merciless in their viscid hatred. I dipped the nose of my monoplane downwards to escape it. As I did so, as quick as a flash there shot out a long tentacle from this mass of floating blubber, and it fell as light

and sinuous as a whip-lash across the front of my machine. There was a loud hiss as it lay for a moment across the hot engine, and it whisked itself into the air again, while the huge flat body drew itself together as if in sudden pain. I dipped to a volpiqué, but again a tentacle fell over the monoplane and was shorn off by the propeller as easily as it might have cut through a smoke wreath. A long, gliding, sticky, serpent-like coil came from behind and caught me round the waist, dragging me out of the fuselage. I tore at it, my fingers sinking into the smooth, glue-like surface, and for an instant I disingaged myself, but only to be caught around the boot by another coil, which gave me a jerk that tilted me almost on my back.

"As I fell over I blazed both barrels of my gun, though, indeed, it was like attacking an elephant with a pea-shooter to imagine that any human weapon could cripple that bulk. And yet I aimed better than I knew, for, with a loud report, one of the great blisters upon the creature's back exploded with the puncture of the buck-shot. It was very clear that my conjecture was right, and that these vast clear bladders were distended with some lifting gas, for in an instant the huge cloud-like body turned sideways, writhing desperately to find its balance, while the white beak snapped and gaped in horrible fury. But already I had shot away on the steepest glide that I dared attempt, my engine was on full, the flying propeller and the force of gravity shooting me downwards like an aerolite. Far behind me I saw a dull, purplish smudge growing swiftly smaller and merging into the blue sky behind it. I was safe out of the deadly jungle of the outer air.

"Once out of danger I throttled my engine, for nothing tears a machine to pieces quicker than running on full power from a height. It was a glorious spiral volplane from nearly eight miles of altitude—first, to the level of the silver cloud-bank, then to that of the storm-cloud beneath it, and finally, in beating rain, to the surface of the earth. I saw the Bristol Channel beneath me, as I broke from the clouds, but, having still some petrol in my tanks, I got twenty miles inland before I found myself stranded in a field half a mile from Ashcombe. There I got three tins of petrol from a passing motor-car, and at ten minutes past six that evening I alighted gently in my own home meadow at Devizes, after such a journey as no mortal on earth has ever yet taken and lived to tell the tale. I have seen the beauty and I have seen the horror of the heights—and greater beauty or greater horror than that is not within the ken of man.

"And now it is my plan to go once again before I give my results to the world. My reason for this is that I must surely have something to show by way of proof before I lay such a tale before my fellow-men. It is true that others will soon follow and confirm what I have said, and yet I should wish to carry conviction from the first. Those lovely iridescent bubbles of the air should not be hard to capture. They drift slowly upon their way, and the swift monoplane could intercept their leisurely course. It is likely enough that they would dissolve in the heavier layers of the atmosphere, and that some small heap of amorphous jelly might be all that I should bring to earth with me. And yet something there would surely be by which I could substantiate my story. Yes, I will go, even if I run a risk by doing so. These purple horrors would not seem to be numerous. It is probable that I shall not see one. If I do I shall dive at once. At the worst there is always the shot-gun and my knowledge of. . . ."

Here a page of manuscript is unfortunately missing. On the next page is written, in large, straggling writing:—

> Forty-three thousand feet. I shall never see earth again. They are beneath me, three of them. God help me; it is a dreadful death to die!

Such in its entirety is the Joyce-Armstrong Statement. Of the man nothing has since been seen. Pieces of his shattered monoplane have been picked up in the preserves of Mr. Budd-Lushington, upon the boarders of Kent and Sussex, within a few miles of the spot where the notebook was discovered. If the unfortunate aviator's theory is correct that this air-jungle, as he called it, existed only over the south-west of England, then it would seem that he had fled from it at the full speed of his monoplane, but had been overtaken and devoured by these horrible creatures in some spot in the outer atmosphere above the place where the grim relics were found.

There are many, I am aware, who still jeer at the facts which I have here set down, but even they must admit that Joyce-Armstrong has oddly disappeared.

The Readers' Viewpoint

Address comments to the Letter Editor, Famous Fantastic Mysteries, All-Fiction Field, Inc., 205 East 42nd St., New York 17, New York

MARVELL STORY SUSPENSEFUL

The August issue arrived today, and after reading it from cover to cover, I can truthfully say that it is the best for some time. You are to be commended on the grand job you are doing, giving us the famous fantasy novels of yesteryear. Your magazine is rapidly coming to the fore, and when I wish to relax and get away from the strict confines of my science-fiction, I can always depend on having complete satisfaction in reading an issue of F.F.M.

In the August issue "Minimum Man" takes first place by far. It kept me in a state of suspense from the first page to the last. The illustrations for it were excellent, as was the cover by Finlay.

I was indeed pleased to see an illustration by Bok, who has always been one of my favorites. And the "Masters of Fantasy" page was quite interesting to a fan who has just crashed the pros. More from Mr. Austin.

"Boomerang" by Chandler was passable, though nothing outstanding. It is rather hard to judge a short story after reading a full-length novel; even though the short may be of exceptional quality, it seems more or less like a "puff in the wind," as one of my friends once remarked, compared to the novel. However, "Boomerang" was interesting. If your short stories never fall below this level, I shall be quite satisfied.

REX E. WARD.

428 Main St.,
El Segundo, Cal.

AUGUST ISSUE FINE

I am very happy to see with the August issue that F.F.M. is regaining its versatility. The last few issues have given us an excellent selection of fantastic stories with different themes. And the next issue certainly sounds wonderful—like the old fantasy tales of lost civilizations, and so forth.

The last two Finlay covers have been real beauties, especially the one for Shanks' yarn. The Lawrence pics continue to be artistically excellent, marvels of pen-work. Especially the one on page 41. This one was definitely cute, much as I hate the word.

And now to the main story. I was very surprised by this story. It was so un-English—the style of writing, I mean. Fast moving conversation, light descriptions, a knack at saying a lot in a few words—all so very different from the usual English novel. It was written in the way that a reporter would compose a novel. Marvell must be a journalist.

The plot was very enjoyable. So was the light satire. The theme reminded me somewhat of Merritt's "Metal Monster" in the thought of a new race replacing the present ruling race of the world, as the mammal replaced the reptile. Merritt's picture was, of course, much more imaginative, his supplanting beings drawn as the metal people.

The short was boring. When do we get another tale from C. L. Moore? Maybe a novel next time?

The Readers' Viewpoint was enjoyable, as usual. In fact the whole mag is usually enjoyable. It travels along on a pretty even keel, with only minor falls, and plenty of rises.

VERNON D. HODGES.

c/o Santa Fe R.R. Station,
Hanford, Calif.

"BOOMERANG" IMPRESSIVE

Before my older brother went off to war he left me specific instructions to buy any and all F.F.M.s, and some other fantasy books. Since I must collect them, I figured I may as well read them. Now it is I who haunt the magazine stands looking for the latest output!

Having just at the moment finished the August issue of F.F.M., I thought I'd write and tell how much I enjoyed it. 1. The cover is very good, I could barely wait to get home and see what it's all about! 2. "Minimum Man," by Andrew Marvell. Couldn't put it down until I finished it. 3. "Boomerang," by George Whitley. Impressive. Makes you wonder about the future.

So there you have it. My brother is safely back from the wars, has caught up on his reading and now has no fear of ever missing an issue of F.F.M. (Sigh!) They just can't print them fast enough for me. Thank you so much, and keep up the good work.

M. E. STYGAR.

619 S. Grant St.,
South Bend, Ind.

THAT CLEVER MR. MARVELL

The facts that the August F.F.M. arrived as scheduled and the lead novel therein was superlative were exceedingly gratifying, as was the return of Hannes Bok to the fold.

"Minimum Man" was a pleasant tale in spite of itself. The hard objective thought trends of the miniatures and their off-hand attitude toward the killings they perpetrated rather revolted one at first. But long before I turned the last page, like the story's main character, I was with them to the extreme. Undoubtedly, I

am an unnatural human, or the author stirred a violent melange of syllables quite effectively. After all, it is no mean feat to turn the reader's interest and sympathies toward the successors of that reader's species. Of course the mutation theme is no longer uncomomn, but seldom is one developed so thoroughly as in Andrew Marvell's novel.

The most distinguishing feature of "Boomerang" was its illustration. Whitley has yet to present a story of fantasy that is of the high quality that he frequently presents to the science-fiction world.

The situation, and I know that you were aware of it from the beginning, is that because of Popular's "no magazine reprint" policy, the variety of fantasy you can publish is decidedly restricted. Of book fantasy, immediately we must draw a line through light, airy, and often whimsical stories, such as those of Robert Nathan, because F.F.M. as a pulp must adhere to certain adventure standards. We have remaining, then, three main divisions from which to choose (1) the prehistoric, subman string of events, (2) the Atlantis or lost world chronical, and (3) the degeneration or destruction of existing civilization tragedy. These are the infamous three, bookdom's mainstays of fantasy.

There are two other lesser categories to be heard from. First the supernatural, which being not strictly fantasy, in the narrow sense, can only be relied upon once in a great while. The last division can be defined by the word "variant." The elusive "variant" fantasy is that for which the editors must strain their eyes and typewriters to locate. It's the story that cannot be placed under any of the foregoing categories. The story which invariably receives the greatest reader applause. "The Man who was Thursday," "The Star Rover," "The Boats of the 'Glen Carrig,'" "Before the Dawn," "The Iron Star," "Minimum Man" are just a few of many that have appeared in F.F.M. Considering the scarcity of these truly different stories, the editors can not but be congratulated for their diligent industry in ferreting, and at last putting these gems before the grateful reader.

It is obvious, as many readers have pointed out so tersely, that in deleting magazine material you lose freshness and much of the sensational element. To some extent I agree, but you nevertheless gain by this policy a product of far finer literary merit, a more thoughtful study, and more often than not, a capacity plot development.

Call these last two paragraphs a vindication or what you will but it needed saying and it's said.

I wish to beseech you again to reinstate the long lost and lamented "Editor's Page." The type of note you inserted in the "Readers Viewpoint" concerning George Whitley belongs separate, certainly.

Your reserved efforts to answer some of the queries in the "Viewpoint" were admirable and the practice should be enlarged upon.

Having now, through your help, a full collection of this magazine and its deceased companion, I am desirous of obtaining back issues of other fantasy and science-fiction publications, more particularly *Unknown (Worlds)*, and *Astounding*. Would appreciate all assistance from readers.

I'll pause now in the fervent hope that you haven't found this long drink too dry.

R. I. MARTINI.

310 W. 66th St.,
K. C. (5) Mo.

TO "SERVICE" FANS

After reading your readers' column, I was hit by an idea that is doubtles as old as the hills. I shall state it, however.

There are probably thousands of fans, both male and otherwise, who are now, or have been, in the service. The Armed Forces, I should say, referring to all branches. Now why don't these fans band together, via the U. S. mails and form a world-wide organization, a fan club on an enormous scale?

I am slanting this letter to Garvin Berry. He is a fan of long standing and would be the ideal man for putting over this gigantic enterprise. What about it, Garvin?

I am interested in receiving letters from all fans.

PVT. EDWIN R. CORLEY, 14257423,

Squadron BN-3 Flight 2053,
Lackland Air Base,
San Antonio, Texas.

WANTED: CHECK LIST OF FANTASY

I am an enthusiastic reader of *Famous Fantastic Mysteries*, and in a small way I am a collector of fantasy books. I wonder if anyone can tell me where I can get a bibliography of fantasy—a sort of check list of the literature in the field, so that I can tell what I should buy for my library? I have not seen any such book, but I have heard that there is one in preparation, or it may even be on the market.

Thanks for a fine magazine.

BILL STOVER.

Editor's Note: You can try Erle Korshak of Shasta Publishers, 1713 E. 55 St., Chicago 15, Illinois, for this. He has a wealth of personal information on rare fantasy, and if such a book is listed, he will know about it.

CORRECTION BY AUGUST DERLETH

The October F.F.M. gives publicity to an error in regard to the late H. P. Lovecraft in the printing of Arthur Cox's statement that Blackwood's "The Willows" was Lovecraft's "favorite piece of fantasy." This is contrary to fact. Lovecraft had no such "favorite." The error gained currency perhaps through wishful thinking. In 1929 Lovecraft set down a list of "the best" in the field of the weird short story. These stories were 11 in number: "The Novel

of the White Powder," "The Novel of the Black Seal," "The White People," all by Arthur Machen; "The Willows," by Algernon Blackwood; "The Yellow Sign," by Robert W. Chambers; "Count Magnus," by M. R. James; "The House of Sounds," by M. P. Shiel; "Seaton's Aunt," by Walter de la Mare; "The Fall of the House of Usher," by Poe; "The Death of Halpin Frayers" and "The Suitable Surroundings," by Ambrose Bierce. In 1930, compiling a similar list, he omitted "The Suitable Surroundings" and "Seaton's Aunt," and included the original novelette version of A. Merritt's "The Moon Pool." Despite some disagreement, I was sufficiently in agreement with Lovecraft's selections to include "The Yellow Sign," "The House of Sounds," and "Count Magnus" in "Sleep No More," and "Seaton's Aunt" in "The Night Side." Had not others been in print in other anthologies, I would have used these also. The facts about Lovecraft's selections of "best" tales were set down in 1945 in my biography, "H. P. L.: A Memoir."

AUGUST DERLETH.

Arkham House: Publishers,
Sauk City, Wisconsin.

WANTS A VAMPIRE YARN

Although perhaps this issue of F.F.M. was not quite so good as the first two of the year, it was an answer to a scientifictionist's prayer.

Just think—*Two* science fiction stories!! One mutant and one interplanetary! And both excellent. It came as a surprise to me, as I thought the feature yarn was to be a straight fantasy and that, naturally, the short would be a "classical" weird.

And am I happy! "Minimum Man" was a choice selection. It is a rare piece for one thing, and you deserve much thanks for selecting it. The idea of a "vest-pocket," shall we say, mutant, is an original one indeed, and all the other mutant stories I have read (they're unavoidable) are *away* below the literary level of this. Even the much more widely known "classics" such as "Slan" and "Odd John" cannot be compared to this tale. For Van Vogt's tale tends, after a while, to read like a Buck Rogers epic, and the depressed mood of "Odd John" wears on the reader.

Whitley, if not always original, knows how to write, and is capable of presenting his stories and ideas well. This short is uncomfortably reminiscent of another by the same author, but is still a magazine semi-classic and is much more powerful than his vampire short a few issues back. (Dec.)

Speaking of vampires, how about a novel of the sort in F.F.M.? Vampire yarns are probably the most spine-tingling of weirds, along with werewolve tales, and since you *did* print a werewolf tale already, it's only fair to give us one on the "undead" theme. Maybe even *Dracula* himself. "Dracula" *is* a classic, and as such, is always pleasant re-reading. I cannot think of a better place to read it in than F.F.M.

Tell artist Lawrence to take it easy on those drawings. His latest offerings, even if not symbolic, seem hastily done and crude. (Witness pgs. 21, 65.) Quite different to be sure from his illustrations for "The Lost Continent" and the others of '45 and '46.

More suggestions; return of *Astonishing* and *Super Science* and monthly F.F.M. Also return of F.N.

B. DE REVERE.

356 St. Paul's Ave.,
Stapleton 4,
Staten Island, N. Y.

F.F.M. UP TO PAR

Though I usually don't have very much to say, something of interest prompts me to write this time. But first I want to mention that I enjoyed reading "Minimum Man" by Marvell. There is no denying that this is Science Fiction as SF should be. Your last few issues have all been up to par, with stories that consistently ring the bell. A. Marvell had two other books published along the lines of "Minimum Man" though not necessarily the same subject matter. I've been advised of them through English correspondents. Their titles being "Congratulate the Devil" and "Three Make a World"—possibly a survey of the fans might bring copies of this to light.

The matter first mentioned is this; I've been hearing of rumours that Dr. David Keller's famous book "The Sign of the Burning Hart" is to be reprinted in this country. I've been tracking down this story and the results are negligible. Could some kind person volunteer this information? I could have bought this before but the prices at auction were too high for me.

I understand that it is a rarity.

Hoping for your continued success with F.F.M., I remain,

JOHN C. NITKA.

Editor's Note: The man to get in touch with for this is K. Martin Carlson of Moorhead, Minnesota, who is an authority on such new fantasy publications.

AUGUST ISSUE "REET"

Hey there, where have you been hiding this Andrew Marvell (who by the way really lives up to his name!!) ? ? ? His "Minimum Man" is really on the beam. I've been a long and avid reader of F.F.M. and can therefore truthfully say that this is one of the best I've seen in a long time. His plot, though hack, is treated in an exciting manner. His philosophical remarks are also worthwhile re-reading—(as is the entire story).

The only complaints I can voice are directed toward you editors. (Forgive please). They are . . . 1) Your subheads, which I felt did not precis the story correctly and 2) Your cover, which though was excellent, did not live up to the story. If I remember correctly (and I should, seeing I have F.F.M. at my elbow) Napoleon and his little chumlets used open

razors and blow pipes. Not daggers as illus. The illus., though, throughout, were up to standards which have always been high. Thankie for listening.

As for "Boomerang," if I might use coarse slang, it was *sockeroo*. In other words reet. Very easy reading but any glory it might have reaped was done away with by the memory of "Minimum Man."

How about a little more of what you've just given us (the public) and I shall bless you until my dying day. Maybe even a little more about Solomon and his horde. Hmm???

DAVID E. CRESPI.

515 Avenue I,
Brooklyn 30, N. Y.

READS EVERY F.F.M.

Here's hoping you'll find room in your column for my letter. I'm a seventeen year old, avid but amateur fan of F.F.M. magazine.

The April issue was my introduction to F.F.M., and after reading "Allan and the Ice-Gods" I'm devoted both to Mr. Haggard and F.F.M. for life. I enjoyed "The People of the Ruins," but I think "Minimum Man" surpasses it. I intend to read every issue I can get my hands on, and if any of the readers have any back issues they'd like to dispose of, I'd really appreciate it if they'd send them to me or get in touch with me. I'm sure that other readers of F.F.M. can understand my desire to obtain as many copies as possible. Other mysteries or weird tales would also be gratefully accepted. Continued luck and success to you and F.F.M.

JOSEPHINE SURETTE.

P. O. Box 248,
Sydney, N. S.

ORCHIDS TO SOME READERS

The Readers' Viewpoint is one of the best letter departments in stf and so I think that I will concentrate this letter on the many interesting letters in it in the Aug. issue. As is only right most of your correspondence concerns the magazine, but I think you will agree that fan-to-fan contact through TRV is a good thing and enhances the interest of the section.

Probably the biggest news in TRV was that Bob Furlong was right in his guess that "The Star Rover" had a basis in fact. Right up there, too, was the astounding revelation that George Whitley and A. Bertram Chandler are one and the same person. I am still not sure which, if either, is the author's real name, but I think it probably is A. Bertram Chandler. Of the two I consider George Whitley to be the best, although this name is newer to stf. I agree absolutely with Thyril L. Ladd about the wonderful Lawrence cover for "Allan and the Ice-Gods," but disagree on his calling the story a fantasy. Theodore Engel gave out some very interesting information when he mentioned the publishing of "IPC" and "Legion." J. P. Guinon rightly praises F.F.M.'s record, but he is too pessimistic about the durability of your paper supply. It will last, not "a few years," but over a lifetime. I have personally seen some that has. Also I don't think readers should criticize a mere coincidence such as the many "skull" covers you have had. They were swell covers and we are lucky to have such a discerning art director. I, too, am in favour of not having stories continued in the back of the magazine, but it is a small point. As to Mr. Guinon's statement about "decidedly no" to stf in F.F.M., all I can say is what I stressed in my last letter—you will please the greatest number by giving variety.

I think Mr. Guinon is the overly fearful type, as he then goes on to say that he wouldn't want F.F.M. to go monthly if "quality of content and illustration can not be maintained." Of course, they can! There is a vast field of old and new literature begging for publication and such artists as you have now are quite capable of doing more work of the same quality. A monthly F.F.M. would simply mean that we would get *more* good reading. In 4SJ Ackerman's letter, I don't see how he can connect Robert W. Chambers' fine story "The Mask" with "The King in Yellow" in any way and probably he should re-read it. In his list of authors that he is going to search out in England you of F.F.M. might find some hints—Olaf Stapledon, S. Fowler Wright, H. G. Wells are names I would like to see on your contents page again or, in some cases, for the first time. Philip Gray's "10 Best" letter invites another and, although I have not been reading F.F.M. as long as he has, here it is: "Before the Dawn" by John Taine, "The Twenty-Fifth Hour" by Herbert Best, "The Island of Dr. Moreau" by H. G. Wells, "The People of the Ruins" by Edward Shanks, "Prisoner in Time" by V. E. Thiessen. I know it isn't ten, but I haven't been reading F.F.M. as long as he has. I might add "The House of the Secret" by Claude Farrère, but it is definitely below the standard of the others as is "The Island of Dr. Moreau."

Ted Treadwell gained for us all some important information about Trover Hall and it looks like a great thing and will certainly be appreciated. Sam Morris and I certainly agree on F.F.M.'s stories, his nominations for the "Special" class—"The Island of Dr. Moreau," "The Twenty-Fifth Hour" and "Before the Dawn" being among my favourites, too. And please heed his plea for more Taine; it's mine, too. He is quite right, too, when he says that F.F.M. has the best art of all—it is so consistently good that it puts you right at the top. Bill Nolan, Robert R. Patrick, John B. Warren, S. W. McCoy, A. G. Jarret, Jr., were also fine.

R. R. ANGER.

520 Highland Ave.,
Ottawa, Ontario, Canada.

AUGUST ISSUE A HIT

With the publication of "Minimum Man" by Andrew Marvell in your August issue, F. F. M.

has hit a new high for 1947. This yarn, which in some respects reminds me of Olaf Stapledon's "Odd John," is easily the best novel you have presented this year and compares favorably with anything seen in F.F.M. since the last Merrittale saw print.

"Minimum Man" was far more interesting than "Odd John" and my only point of comparison is the similar attitudes of Solomon in the former story and John in the latter tale, towards mankind in general.

As far as the rest of the '47 novels go, "The Star Rover" by London was well written but appeared out of place in F.F.M.; "Allan and the Ice-Gods" was up to par for Haggard, but why continue to publish Haggard novels when they are so easily obtained in book form for, in many cases, less than the cost of your magazine? "The People of the Ruins" was the big disappointment of the year and did not deserve publication in F.F.M.

For illustrations, Finlay and Lawrence continue to lead the field. Finlay, however, has yet to duplicate the outstanding work he did for Merritt's works.

GERRY DE LA REE.

9 Bogert Place
Westwood, N. J.

Editors' Note: We have been informed by many readers that Haggard's books are sometimes very hard to find, even in public libraries, especially the older ones.

LIKES "MASTERS OF FANTASY"

The publication of Andrew Marvell's "Minimum Man" was a decided relief after a couple of rather poor attempts at semi-science fiction to be found in recent issues of F.F.M. Marvell's Super Man story involved the rare qualities of humor, character, plot and action in a thoroughly fascinating story. However, it would be nice to see some straight fantasy once in a while rather than the prevailing adventure-fantasy.

Whitley's story was well written, but would have been more in place between the covers of a stf magazine. If the practice of publishing "new" stories, such as this one, is to be cultivated, how about using something by either Henry Kuttner or Ray Bradbury? Both of these gentlemen can certainly write excellent fantasy material.

The illustrations this time were even better than usual which is quite a remarkable statement considering your excellent reputation. Lawrence's wonderful, well-executed style was shown to best advantage on pages 41 and 87. It was nice to see a Hannes Bok pic too. The cover was, as usual, very good. One of the distinctive features of your cover paintings is the dark background whereas all other pulps invariably feature garish ones.

The new *Masters of Fantasy* section was extremely interesting. Perhaps it would be still better if more were told of the author's life, and less of his accomplishments. Hope this portends a new and long series by Mr. Austin.

I suppose it may seem rather inappropriate to ask for more Haggard after the very recent publication of "Allan and the Ice-Gods". However, judging from the favourable "Viewpoint" reaction, I shouldn't imagine such a move would be heralded with overmuch disappointment. Henry Rider Haggard has authored many fine adventure-fantasies suitable for publication in the pages of F.F.M. His immortal "She" is likely too widely read for your purposes, but the other two stories concerning She-Who-Must-Be-Obeyed, "Ayesha" and "Wisdom's Daughter" are very hard to find anywhere. The latter is particularly suitable for F.F.M. as it is very scarce and indeed one of Haggard's greatest works. In it, the author uses a beautiful style that is not to be found in many fantasies of this nature. Incidentally, I have this and other good books which I would like to trade for any F.F.M.s in good condition, previous to February, 1946.

Yours for continued reading pleasure.

DON HUTCHISON.

7 Tacoma Ave.,
Toronto 5, Ontario, Canada.

REJECTS MARVELL'S CONCLUSIONS

Famous Fantastic Mysteries is unique! No other magazine exists that so combines appeal for both the fantasy fan and the casual reader. Here's to your circulation—long may it rise.

This August issue was a pleasant package as far as entertainment goes. "Minimum Man" impressed me as being a fine yarn, but I must reject its conclusion; a typical, sappy, Wellsian-socialist conclusion. The author, Andrew Marvell, evidently subscribes to Wells' peculiar theory that the human race is going down the drain—so he invents a super race to put in the plug. Thusly in the August novel we have the spectacle of an English society dominated by a fascist government; the United Kingdom, says Marvell, is just lousy with spiritual decay as a result. So we have a picture of human society in its worst stages, and by implication, things will get no better until the little people with the blowguns come along.

In the story they show up, assassinate a few head men, comes the revolution and the return to normalcy. As the story ends, though, we are supposed to believe that the day of minimum man is here—hero-narrator Swan believes it—and the rest of us are not long for this world. Now all this sort of thing was a favorite theme of Herbert George: one of his last works was devoted to the decadence of humanity as a whole. And the idea seems to have spread—witness Mr. Marvell's variation. Presented as fantasy, however, it doesn't quite come off. It is sloppy thinking, and good fantasy requires good, clear thinking and an understanding of reality above all else.

Understand that I do not criticise a good, readable story for the fantasy contained—I read F.F.M. for imagination's sake—but I do object to the implications inherent in the master race idea.

George Whitley's "Boomerang" is an amusing

trifle. I was glad to see the Bok illustration; I prefer Bok to any other artist currently appearing in the field. Lawrence, of course, is excellent.

In the departments "Masters of Fantasy" adds to the atmosphere; the note on Jack London's yarn in the letter section—very good. I hope you can give us more interesting background material such as this. Letters as a whole show how the fantasy devotees have gathered 'round.

People writing in general suggest stories suitable for reprinting. I would like to see Elinor Wylie's lovely fable, "The Venetian Glass Nephew" in F.F.M., also "The Circus of Doctor Lao," by an author whose name I don't recall; 'twas originally illustrated by Artzybasheff. And how about "Man's Mortality" by Michael Arlen? And, finally, let us have more stuff by Chesterton.

GEORGE EBEY.

4766 Reinhardt Dr.,
Oakland 2, Calif.

NO SKELETONS, PLEASE

I discovered your magazine about one year ago; have devoutly read each issue since, and now feel qualified to lay away the garments of the F.F.M. Neophyte and assume full dignity of the illuminati; expound sage comments on the literary merit of its fiction, the artistic value of its pictures, the quality of its paper, and the strength of the glue in the binding. Am I taking liberties?

Firstly, the stories. I believe the most skillfully effective piece I've read so far was "The Willows" by Algernon Blackwood. Of the longer novels, give "Star Rover" four bells. "The Island of Dr. Moreau" shows a great deal of creative imagination and the characters are fairly credible. "Minimum Man" also held my interest. "Island of Captain Sparrow"—not so hot. "Unthinkable"—exactly. Unthinkable that you should publish it or that anyone could read it to the end.

Then we have the pictures. When they are good, they are very, very good, etc. All those skeletons and little gremlins with big eyes and corpses and stuff—tell your artists we all feel like that once in a while, but let the *American Medical Journal* exhibit its skeletons and cadavers without competition. And then again that voluptuous babe on page 87 makes me lose track of the story, too, being just back from duty in the Pacific. In spite of all this griping, you've got me hooked. I'm a confirmed F.F.M. addict, and it's just as well, what with the price of opium and everything these days.

Now for the commercial. For H. R. Haggard fans I have for barter a nicely bound, matched set of eighteen volumes of that author. These include: "Pearl, Maiden", "The People of the Mist", "Heart of the World", "The Wanderer's Necklace", "Eric Brighteyes", "Lysbeth", "Marie", "The Spirit of Bambatse", "Morning Star", "Swallow", "Nada the Lily", "Child of Storm", "Jess", "She", "Elissa", "Black Heart and White", "Cleopatra", "Montezuma's Daughter", and "Margaret". I am willing to trade the set for any books on occultism, oriental philosophy, anything on mysticism. I am especially interested in a good translation of the "Upanishads".

Anyone desiring to correspond with a provincial, reasonably literate homo-sapient may do so by simply dropping a note to yours truly. No box tops or anything.

RAYMOND A. KNAPP.

Box No. 2,
Marquette, Iowa.

"MINIMUM MAN" ONE OF THE BEST

After three days of fruitless search, I finally discovered the current issue of F.F.M. this morning. I got home as fast as possible, and, after looking over the readers' section as usual, I turned to "Minimum Man". That was at ten this morning; it's five-thirty now, and I've just finished the novel, having paused only long enough to grab a hasty bite at noon. I very rarely read a story without any pauses (the last was "Dracula"); that should give you some idea how much I liked this, the first Marvell story I've seen.

Naturally, I have a few criticisms, and I might as well air them now.

1) "Minimum Man" was a mutantale, a type of story which is very common right now; I'd rather see some fresh variants than a plot which can be had in any stf. mag.

2) The last ten or so pages were given over almost entirely to philosophical observations on the futility of man. Now, if a story *must* have a moral, I'd prefer it injected less conspicuously, not forced down the throat of the reader.

3) The story is incomplete. If ever a story demanded a sequel, this one does. Surely the counter-revolutionists, having labored so valiantly to unseat the dictatorship, would not be satisfied with a mere change of dictators. The whole thing is just too illogical.

And that just about ends my list of criticisms. The story was, on the whole, an excellent one, and ranks as one of the best of Volume 8.

I have read and enjoyed F.F.M. for a year now; my only desires are that you switch to monthly issues, print more Haggard and Lovecraft, and a story or two by Burroughs.

If anyone is interested in trading old F.F.M.'s for "Dracula" (mint), "The Turn of the Screw" (mint), or "The Beast With Five Fingers" (20 tales by W. F. Harvey, Excellent), please get in contact with me. I'd prefer mags in fine to excellent condition, starting at Vol. 8, No. 1 exclusive, and working backward.

Here are a few suggestions: Go easy on the science-fiction; it is easily obtainable, while good fantasy is to be had mainly in book form, oftentimes out of print and too costly for the average fan.

Publish Haggard's "Ayesha: the Return of She"; Lovecraft's "Shadow over Innsmouth"; More Stoker stories (such as "The Judge's House"); make the letter column a little longer; revive the Editor's Page; keep up the good work in the illustrations—yours are unquestionably the finest of *any* magazine published.

In closing, let me thank you for the fine work

you are doing in reviving hard-to-get fantasy classics. Keep up the good work!

D. J. MULCAHY.

4170 Utah St.,
St. Louis, Mo.

BOK ADMIRER

"Minimum Man" is your best lead novel in quite some time. The illustrations were a perfect foil for the timelessness of the story. Marvell's style is very lucid and easy to read, compared especially to most stories told in the first person. He reminds me somewhat of Wells at his best (H. G., that is).

I do not think that Whitley developed "Boomerang" as fully and as skillfully as he is usually able to do. I think the story could have been improved much by being told in plain English by a more observant and erudite protagonist, thereby intensifying the horror and producing a more surprising climax. It was a very good story, though.

I hope that you will continue the series *Masters of Fantasy* which you started in this issue. I think Merritt should follow next. The illustration for the first one was very fitting, especially the upper lefthand corner where the awesome *eyes* hang suspended in the black gulfs of space. The portrait is more effective than a photograph could be. Hang on to that artist!

Please don't let Bok get away from you. He can equal or better *any* illustrator in the field.

JULIAN WILLIAMSON.

Box 190,
Talladega, Ala.

LIKED LOVECRAFT FEATURE

Many, many thanks for printing the fine portrait of H. P. Lovecraft in the August issue. It was rather nice of you to publish this memorial, since very few photographs exist of the master story-teller. Have any of his tales appeared in F.F.M. at any time? I'm quite certain a great majority of your readers would welcome them to the pages of your magazine, and illustrated by Lawrence or Finlay they would be tops.

ROBERT BOYER.

243 Rowe St.,
Tamaqua, Penna.

Editor's Note: We published H. P. L's "The Colour Out of Space" before we changed our policy on stories which have been in magazines.

WELCOME, BOK!

Now that most of the other magazines are going monthly again I will be looking forward to F.F.M. doing the same. And don't you think it is about time for the reappearance of the *Fantastic Novels*?

I am glad to see a Bok illustration in your magazine and would like very much to see a lot more of this talented artist's excellent work. By all means keep Bok.

If any of your readers are interested in a copy of the Burroughs Bulletin fanzine I would be glad to send them a copy.

Did you say you will soon publish a Burroughs story?

VERNELL CORIELL.

Box 78,
Manito, Ill.

WANTS WITCHCRAFT BOOKS

Your magazine has the happy faculty of preserving interest consistently: whether one may or may not like a certain story, at least there are no half measures. By no means least is *The Readers' Viewpoint*. In the August, 1947, issue the letter about Ed Morrell "The Star-Rover" took my eye at once, for almost half my life has been spent around penitentiaries, first as the son of an official and presently as an officer in the Federal Prison System. Numerous methods of escape born of desperation have come to my attention and it is amazing as well as sometimes dangerous to see the lengths to which a man may go as an escapist, either physically or mentally. Without going into the history of modern penology, I am happy to say that modern prison administration no longer indulges or tolerates the brutalities described in London's "The Star-Rover".

"Minimum Man" in the August issue was good although somewhat of a present imperfect Chestertonian or Wellsian touch. With the inevitable social fluctuations following the second Great War, I foresee an epidemic of "revolutionary" fiction.

Always an ardent H. Rider Haggard fan, I wish to thank you very much for those stories of his which have appeared in your magazine. Specializing in his "Allan Quatermain" stories, I need "Marie", "Finished", and "King Solomon's Mines" particularly. I have ten different Haggard novels to sell or trade. Also I would appreciate communications from any one having books on authentic witchcraft. By that I do not mean the hocus pocus type but serious scholastic works such as Lea's "Materials . . ."

Please add my voice to that of Mr. Guinon in suggesting more artistry of covers and non-interference of advertising with the stories. Further, in the realm of artistry I have often wished to see Mr. Finlay illustrate one page each issue with his conception of various quatrains of Omar Khayyam's "Rubaiyat". What a splendid gift offer folio those would make.

One more suggestion then to a close. Have you ever considered Haggard's short story "Only A Dream" published in the volume "Smith And The Pharoahs" as a filler? It builds up one of the most terrifying atmospheres I have read for a long time.

Thank you for your attention and best wishes for many more eventful issues.

RICHARD N. GOOKINS.

Box 250,
Steilacoom, Wash.

FOR ADMIRERS OF HAGGARD

I have just read your August number and enjoyed it very much. As a number of readers of your magazines are Haggard readers, I am passing on this information.

Mr. L. E. S. Cott has notified me his book "H. R. Haggard's Biography" has been published, a life of Haggard containing a complete list of all his works, his articles in newspapers, magazines, comments on each book.

RICHARD TORN.

North Baltimore, Ohio.

PRAISING OUR "SWAP" SERVICE

Famous Fantastic Mysteries is, with one exception, the only grown-up magazine in pulp fantasy literature. I mention the quality of stories, the Readers' Viewpoint, and the publication of letters offering available back issues of F.F.M. and other sci-fantasy mags. Through these letters I have contacted several readers and am in high hopes of obtaining those back issues.

Another adult quality of F.F.M. is the non-deleting of other pro stf mag names. The majority of other stf pulps make tiresome statements about "giving competitive magazines free plugs or editorial sponsorings." F.F.M. gives the readers the opportunity to see what the back issue trading post can supply, and to me that is a favor to the fans rather than plugs or sponsoring to other mags. Countless fans have enlarged their collections through these letters, and to F.F.M. all the credit goes for these letters seeing the light of publication.

Can F.F.M. publish Haggard's "A. and the Holy Flower"? I have "The Ancient A". and "A. and the Ice-Gods"; and have read "A. Q." and "Solomon's Mines". Another tale also needed is "She and Allan".

Looking forward to the future.

C. STEWART METCHETTE.

3551 King St.,
Windsor, Ont., Canada.

CAN'T CRITICIZE F.F.M.

Although I have been a constant reader of fantastic and science-fiction stories for the last twenty-five years, and follow with interest readers' letters to the editors, I rarely get time to write. So, having a few spare moments, here goes.

I particularly admire your choice of letters for "The Readers' Viewpoint", since they are nearly all interesting and well written, and are published regardless of whether they praise or criticize the magazine and its authors. Some of your critics are either lacking in the literary ability to honestly criticize an author's works, or else are just plain cranks with axes to grind.

Personally, I admire *Famous Fantastic Mysteries* so much that I find it difficult to find anything in its pages that requires much adverse criticism. It is certainly head and shoulders above most of the other magazines of the same type, and covering the same field of literature.

I have quite a stock of old back numbers of fantastic magazines and if any of your readers wish to acquire some or all of the same, I would be glad if they would write me. I would also like to obtain copies of *Weird Tales* for the years 1929 to 1933, inc. If you have old copies of *Unknown, Strange,* and *Uncanny,* and other such magazines, I would like to receive lists of them.

Good luck.

CHARLES L. AVERY.

351 Church St.,
Toronto, Ont., Canada.

CAN YOU TELL HIM?

I wonder if you could help me out with a little information?

A short while ago I was pleasantly surprised to stumble, in an old bookshop, upon a copy of "Actions and Reactions", by Kipling. It included "With the Night Mail—A Story of 2000 A.D.", and "The Mother Hive". I would like to know if Kipling wrote any more in this vein besides these two. If so, could anyone tell me what they were, and where to get them? If you could, you would have my undying gratitude.

JOHN C. BUFORD.

504 Dunlap St.,
Paris, Tenn.

NEEDS HAGGARD BOOKS

Though I have read and enjoyed F.F.M. for many months, this is my first letter to you. I write it in the hope that it can appear in Readers' Viewpoint and thereby put me in contact with any fans interested in trading.

As I am a fan of H. R. Haggard, I was pleased at the large number of letters you printed about his "Ancient Allan" and "Allan and the Ice-Gods", but I noticed that most fans are unaware of the large number of books he wrote. He has at least 66 to his credit. Though I have a great many of these I still need about 13. If anyone wishes to part with any of his books I will be glad to send a list of the titles I want. There are also a few back numbers of F.F.M. and *Fantastic Novels* which I would like very much to get.

If anyone would like to trade, I can offer the following: Large number of *Amazing Stories, Thrilling Wonder Stories, Fantastic Adventures,* and *Planet Stories;* few back F.F.M.'s, *Startling Stories, Astonishing Stories, Astounding Science Fiction, Marvel Stories,* and *Unknown Stories;* also a few Edgar Rice Burroughs and Haggard books. I will answer all inquiries promptly.

In closing let me add my vote for a monthly issue, and wish F.F.M. the best of luck.

ROBERT K. SNYDER.

2015 Penrose Ave.,
Baltimore 23, Maryland.

SWAP OFFER

I did not get around to writing it at the time but I wish to congratulate you on how good Jack London's "Star Rover" is. I wish you would print some more of his work.

I have a very large collection of Science Fiction and Fantasy mags of all types, both new and old, which is getting too big for me to handle, so I am only going to keep the stories I like best, and my books.

Anyone who would like a list of the mags I can offer to trade, write me and enclose a three-cent stamp.

MARTIN PRIMUCH.

118 N. Shamokin St.,
Shamokin, Pa.

CRITIC

In support of Philip Gray's request that your magazine publish the Mark Twain masterpiece, "The Mysterious Stranger", I herewith chime in, for the sake of relief, from the grisly horror of such past reigns of terror as "The 25th Hour" and other monstrosities which hold out the firecracker lure of "rejoicing in calamities."

Indeed there is cruelty and sadism in the Twain tale, but something soars out of it that is beautiful, while in the general run of your magazine's stories one feels with Poe when he wrote: "And my soul from out that shadow that lies floating on the floor shall be lifted—nevermore."

Several times I have tried your magazine in a vain hope of finding winged thoughts soaring from the macabre, but ever and anon I found the mysteries to be infamous.

I have a friend who chides me when I buy any fantastic magazine because her sense is sound as a dollar and she pities the fool who squanders his money and envies the seller who rings up the quarter. But she thinks enough of the Twain fantasy to painstakingly copy the last chapter when she borrowed the book. If you publish "The Mysterious Stranger" I am certain she will purchase a copy of your magazine.

DOUGLAS HUGH.

P. O. Box 6273,
Metropolitan Station,
Los Angeles 55, Calif.

ENJOYED SHANKS' STORY

Herewith please find check for $1.50 for another year's subscription to your splendid magazine. I have read every issue to date and have yet to be disappointed, although some of your selections were old favorites.

Next, I wish to thank the many fans who helped me collect my complete set of F.F.M. and F.N. It was a long and fairly expensive chore, but well worthwhile.

I greatly enjoyed Shanks' "People of the Ruins". The theme was similar to "Twenty-fifth Hour" and "Unthinkable", but the treatment and bleak conclusion were somehow more satisfying.

Now for the usual suggestions for publication: Taine—"Gold Tooth", "Green Fire", etc.; Wright—"Dawn", "World Below"; Shiel—"Xeluchi or Other Short Stories"; White, E. L.—any short stories.

Incidentally, I'm a Shiel collector, and would appreciate hearing from any fan who has such items to dispose of. Somehow, Shiel has never made an appearance in F.F.M.

To conclude, my only serious suggestion for F.F.M. improvement is—make it a monthly.

A. F. GERMESHAUSEN.

3118 W. Ninth St.,
Los Angeles 6, Calif.

ADMIRES F.F.M. ART

Since this is the first time I have ever written to any magazine, I hope you'll excuse any disunity in expression or lack of originality.

I first discovered F.F.M. in a second hand news shop. I bought it in place of another Fantasy mag which was unavailable. I'm not sorry. I think you have one of the best books of this type on the market.

I have no criticism to offer except perhaps to request more short stories and occasional science fiction stories, especially by Taine.

By the way, how does one obtain these folios of illustrations by Finlay and Lawrence. I can find no information about it although I would like to obtain them. I forgot to mention that I very much admire your art work.

If there are any mag fans in Dallas, I would enjoy discussing both fantasy and science fiction with them. That goes for Atlanta, Georgia, fans also. I shall return there within a period of months and would like to meet other imagination exercisers like myself.

GEORGE WALLIS.

1709 Forest Ave.,
Dallas, Texas.

Editor's Note: There are no more Portfolios available.

NEEDS BACK ISSUES

Having only ten issues of F.F.M., I am going to make an attempt to obtain some. Most of all of the back numbers which I don't have.

I want any issues of F.N. and any issues of F.F.M. before August, 1946, except the following: September, 1943, September, 1945, February, 1946.

Let's have more stories that measure up to the caliber of "Minimum Man". I don't see that it has anything to do with "terror unseen", but it is still excellent. Definitely one of the best you have published.

The plot of "Boomerang" did not strike me as being too outstanding. Nevertheless, Whitley's style is good and the story on the whole is much better than most of the short stories you have published recently.

JOHN R. TISDALE.

1730 Third Ave., SE.,
Cedar Rapids, Iowa.

NO NEW STORIES, PLEASE

The majority of your readers seem to want more Haggard, and I agree with them. Also would like to see a Cummings novel, if you could find one up to Popular specifications.

Thanks for Finlay on the cover and the inside illustrations by Bok. Where've you been hiding him?

"Minimum Man" looks good but I haven't had time to read it. Please, no new stories. How can a story be "famous" if it's never been printed?

Our esteemed ed. seems to have a mania for Atlantis novels.

Can't you dig up some more like the "Undying Monster"?

J. T. Oliver.

712 - 32 St.,
Columbus, Ga.

AUGUST ISSUE GOOD

I have just finished reading the August issue of F.F.M. "Minimum Man" is good. This was the first issue I've read since "The Ancient Allan". I really think F.F.M. is the best of its kind. Keep up the good work.

I would like to get in touch with anyone who has any issues of F.F.M. with stories by A. Merritt, and would part with them. His work is the best I have ever read or ever hope to read.

Virgil Blackard.

Route 2,
Pontotoc, Miss.

HAS EXTRA COPIES OF F.F.M.

I have been reading F.F.M. ever since its start back in '39 and to say the least have enjoyed them to their fullest. It is a wonderful magazine for the fantasy fan, actually the best on the market and my hope is that it runs forever. Your selection of stories leaves only one thing to be desired, a little more variety in theme and I shall say no more. Thanks for many years of pleasant reading. For those newer fans who need older copies of F.F.M. I have extra copies of January, February and April, 1940, and an extra March, 1944.

Raymond Isadore.

1907A S. 14th St.,
Milwaukee 4, Wisc.

BACK ISSUES WANTED

I enjoyed "Minimum Man" very much but the inside illustrations for the August issue were punk.

The only decent picture was for "Boomerang" on page 115.

This issue's novel was sort of a let-down compared to "The People of the Ruins" in your last issue. Nevertheless, I am eagerly looking forward to "City of Wonder". The title sounds good.

If any of you fans have any back issues of F.F.M. to dispose of get in touch with me. I'd be glad to hear from you.

James W. Ayers.

609 1st St.,
Atlalla, Ala.

A BRAVE MAN

Apparently F.F.M. is a sort of trading po for back issues of stf. and fantasy magazines.

The magazines I wish to dispose of are a almost complete set of *Science Wonder, Wor der,* and *Thrilling Wonder Stories* from th first issue through the middle of 1938, as we as a complete set of the Quarterlies. Furth information will be sent to anyone who interested.

Response to my letter which you publishe in the June issue (in which I asked or offere nothing) was so astonishing that I scarcel dare to think what the result of printing th letter might be, but I would appreciate it ver much if you would, anyhow.

D. C. King.

Cragmoor,
Colorado Springs, Colo.

APOLOGY

As this letter is an apology to quite a numbe of your regular readers I hope you see fit t print same.

A few months ago I sent a letter to F.F.M stating that I had a number of fantasy mag available. The response nearly floored me fo good—and as of now I have disposed of prac tically all the mags (except F.F.M.) and sti have a tremendous amount of unanswered re quests—so please help a reader out and let m state for all the unfortunates that have not y received answers, that except for a few miscel laneous copies my entire collection was take over by a local fan. What few I had left wer to those who wrote first.

I realize I made a big error in having F.F.M print my letter—I had no idea that so man new fans had become ardent admirers of Fan tasy. The response I received sure points to bright future for all types of Fantasy.

As for F.F.M., it's still tops.

Acree E. Brown.

213 W. Indiana St.,
Evansville 8, Ind.

GOT ANY OF THESE?

I need fantastic books and magazines, partic ularly the following: *Weird Tales, Famou Fantastic, Super Science, Astonishing, Un known, Marvel, Strange Stories,* etc.; and "Th New Adam", "Someone in the Dark" by Der leth, and "The Outsider and Others". Anyon having any of these of which they wish to dis pose, may do so by getting in touch with m

Cordell Mahaney.

1252 Magazine St.,
Vallejo, Calif.

THE READERS' VIEWPOINT

SOME COMPLAINTS

First off, I'd better explain that I'm not, strictly speaking, one of your fans. I read all other prozines, but not F.F.M.

I can't exactly say, why, either . . . you have Finlay, Bok, Clyne and Lawrence—four of the best artists in the pulps; you have a nice readable format; and I like the idea of reprinting stf books. Perhaps it's because of your letter column—which is about the worst one in any fantasy pulp. It could be cured, though—answer each letter fully, instead of the brief, curt notes you have scattered here and there every four or five letters.

Also, I don't think your choice of books is so hot. Now and then you print a good book, but the prevalent type are stinkers like "The Twenty-Fifth Hour" and "Unthinkable".

Now, I don't mean to say F.F.M. is lousy, or anything else like that. Your short stories (and dept's like the "Masters of Fantasy") are quite good as are your covers—it's your choice of novels that smells it up for me.

Lately though, you've been coming out of your rut and getting into the groove with stories like the Haggard yarns and Wells' "Island of Dr. Moreau", and, recently that thought-provoking "Minimum Man". Your letters have improved, somewhat.

I hope you keep it up. Who knows, perhaps I may become an ardent fan?

LIN CARTER.

865 20th Ave., South,
St. Petersburg 6, Fla.

REQUEST

I am anxious to complete my files of *Famous Fantastic Mysteries* and *Astounding Stories*. I will appreciate it if anyone with back copies of these magazines available will get in touch with me.

WM. E. HAMILTON.

2060 Victory Drive, West,
Mobile, Ala.

OFFER TO NEW YORKERS

I have been collecting science-fiction magazines and books for a number of years. During this time the stuff just piled up. I will be glad to send a list of what I have to dispose of, to readers who send me a stamped envelope.

I'd prefer to trade off the mags by whole years and those desiring the mags please see me at my house. Kindly write for an appointment. There will be no F.F.M.'s in my list. I am collecting them myself and don't have any to send away.

I wish F.F.M. great success in the future, and keep up the good quality that you've maintained so far.

MILTON REICH.

2139 Grand Ave.,
New York 53, N. Y.

FAMOUS FANTASTIC MYSTERIES WANTS LONDON ITEMS

I have been long an ardent fan of your grea magazine F.F.M. I have every issue since i beginning. I have some extra issues. Woul anyone care to trade on these terms? I am onl interested in stories by Jack London. Here ar the dates of the issues: December 1941, Marc 1943, August 1942, July 1940, October 194 February 1941, February 1946, June 1941, Sep tember 1939, October 1939.

Anyone having any Jack London stories fc trade, please answer me. Thanks again for great magazine.

EDWARD F. DAZY.
1313 - 58th St.,
Kenosha, Wisc.

"ISHTAR" NOVEL NEEDED

I am rather a devotee of fantastic fiction an thus have been a consistent reader of you magazine for a little better than a year nov To me, any tale that takes a reader's imagina tion up and away from the commonplace ca be listed as fantastic. Some of your storie have been better than others, but in each on I found some thought or idea (or flight o fantasy) propounded, that was wholly fres and new.

When one reads a fantastic story, one mus have the mood and the surroundings to g with it.

A person cannot appreciate a fantastic tal with a radio program blaring in his ear, o small children pestering with their own fan tastic questions.

The reader must choose a time when every one else sleeps, or has gone out, and he is alone for the proper environment.

And most important of all, the mood fo fantasy must be there for the story to registe its proper degree.

But all this is not the real purpose of m letter.

I am most anxious to obtain, preferably i book form, A. Merritt's immortal and super novel "The Ship of Ishtar".

If you can help me in this matter, procure ment of the book or information as to wher I can obtain it, I will be deeply grateful.

Karl Buerchner.
5120 N. St. Louis Ave.,
Chicago 25, Ill.

INFORMATION WANTED

In reading October issue of F.F.M. Reader Viewpoint I see there is quite a demand fo H. Haggard books. Can you or some of th readers tell me if there is any value to thes two books? "Frozen Pirate"; "King Solomon' Mines"—Franklin edition.

Both were published in 1889 by Worthingto Company, New York; I believe both of thes books are original first editions. Thank you.

Glen Olsen.
719 Lake St.,
Orville, Ohio.

THE READERS' VIEWPOINT

"STAR" ROVER APPROVED

have had many hours of relaxation in the
ges of your magazine.
This is a short note to show my appreciation
l solid support of your policy.
There are odd chaps who gripe and groan
out your standards. For example, one claimed
t the "Star Rover" shouldn't have been pub-
ned under your banner. Technically his rea-
ns are 90% right, but if you hadn't published
ndon's novel it would have been a sad day
the majority of your readers most of them
m to agree with me.
The results show in your Readers' Viewpoint,
ne didn't like the "Star Rover" (very few,
o very few in some of the fan mags I receive)
l some emphatically praised it. (The ma-
ity thought it was the usual very high
ndard.)
When you can stimulate people into writing
ters it shows you are doing an excellent job
bringing a lot of interesting people out of
ir shells.
n closing I would like to put in a vote for a
ry by H. G. Wells, "The Country of the
nd" would be an excellent added attraction
the back pages of your magazine. Please
k it up.
missed your publication for three years
ile in the service, so it's possible that you
ght have printed it. If so, ignore this; if not,
sider it.
uck for the future and all best wishes for
nonthly. William D. Grant.

Burton Road,
onto, Ontario, Canada.

. S. Don't ever let Virgil Finlay get away
n you. . . .

(Continued from page 107)

were stored in their myriads. When I e tered the place I was afraid, for the lit luminous creatures were like wise frig eyes in the piled dark. But a memory the mermaids tormented me still, and began breaking the precious jars. T amber ichor flooded out of them into t dark water, faintly lambent, delightful a dream of wine. I had broken nine befc a group of the white people came runni with masks over their faces, and restrain me. But my mischief was done. The swe poison had gone abroad through the whc city. When they breathed it, my fell prisoners went mad and broke their chai and raved destructively through t streets of Atlantis. Many of the me maidens dashed themselves to dea against the bars of their cavern. Many the white people died too, and lay abo the streets gaping with dark mouths. T white transparent snake died also. 'Nc they will kill me,' I said.

"But instead they brought me to the white hall of justice and tried me the without word and without gesture. Ni of them surrounded me, turning towa me marble faces like statue faces wi mossed lips. I waited in their midst, n knowing what was to come. Presently saw a shimmer and a beating around t head of one. The light leaped and sprea flashing from one to another until at la the forehead of each shone intolerab bright. Then I understood their justi which looked into my own mind to discov there my punishment. One by one though with words, each judge pronounce the sentence: Exile.

"When this was done they took me ar led me in solemn procession through t streets, pausing a little before each thir I had loved and now would see no mor Until at last I saw rise up before me t sweet traceries which ornament The Gat of the Sea. I began beseeching then f death mercifully in Atlantis. But the whi people were merciless. . . . A little scho of fish slanted past my face, silver banded with violet, fluttering tiny scarl fins. But then the gates swung wide, ar I was whirled outward in an explosion spume. . . . Men were pulling me over t gunwale of a small boat. 'Here's a cra man out of the sea,' one said, ar laughed. . . ."

The traveler was weeping. "Atlantis he cried. And again, "Atlantis!"

"I don't wear the pants, but I buy 'em, and... **Lee** 1948 models are here"

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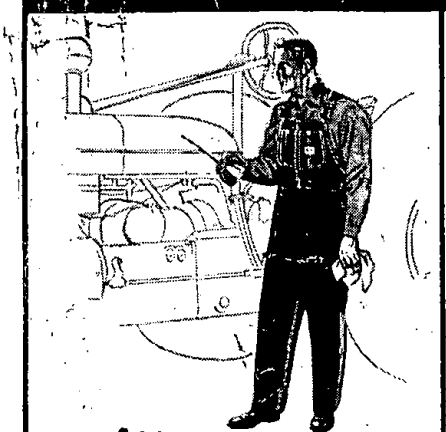

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Lee Matched Shirts and Pants

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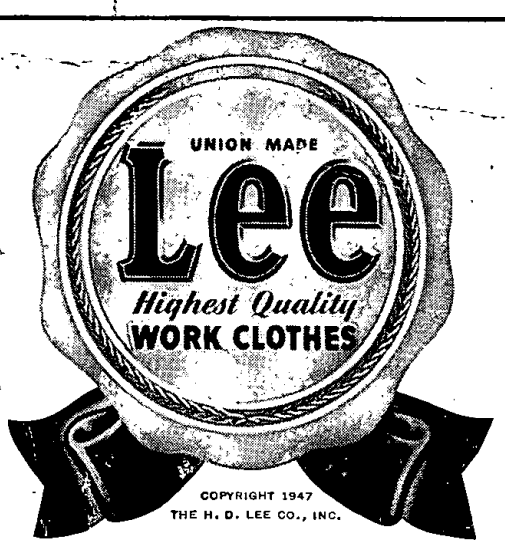
It's no surprise to us that, for eight straight years, Lee has won first place in a nation-wide preference poll* . . . or that Lee leads the next brand by 6-to-1."

*Nation-wide survey conducted by a prominent publisher on the question: "What brand of overalls do you prefer?" Lee Jelt Denim Overalls led eight straight years . . . the last two years by 6-to-1 over the next brand.



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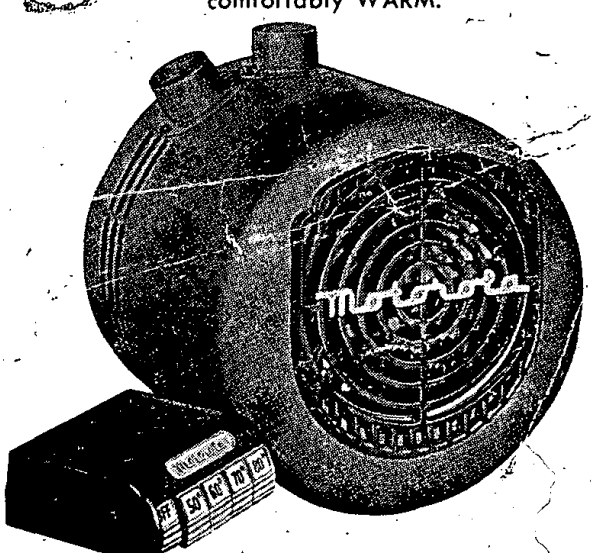

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