



By
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EYE OF THE TEMPTRESS



Beginning with Eve, each period of our history has been influenced by a beautiful woman. But have you ever stopped to wonder why? Take, for instance, our present day temptress. . . .

“EVEN if it misses, everybody from New York to Chicago will be scared right out of their pants.”

“And if it doesn't . . . ?”

“A lot of Americans will die—especially, for instance if the hit is directly on Cleveland.”

The chief astronomer at Williams Bay Observatory gave up his place

at the telescope to his assistant, who peered fascinatedly into the night sky.

"Weird looking thing, isn't it?" he asked, after a moment. "Doctor Mellody, it looks like a gigantic eyeball."

"Yes, Tony. That black spot in the center does make it look like an eyeball, now that you mention it. What I can't understand is how it remains precisely placed in the center of the asteroid; apparently the asteroid isn't rotating in relation to its present course toward Earth—or it's rotating so slowly that we haven't had enough time to detect it."

"Isn't that an unusual state of affairs?"

"Extremely. For a migrant asteroid, its behavior is freakish. Ordinarily, a hunk of rock of that size would have a variety of motions, constantly changing due to outside influences. It almost seems to be able to correct its own course and influence its own motion, independent of gravitational interferences . . ."

" . . . like a living thing, rather than a piece of rock?"

Doctor Mellody grinned. "You read too many comic books, Tony Marcus. That black center might suggest, for example, an amoeba, but a living thing that size, in space, is preposterous. Maybe that eyeball effect suggests such possibilities—almost has a hypnotic effect when you stare at it."

Tony Marcus clambered from the seat before the eyepiece. "So you *don't* like comic books, Doctor Robert Mellody," he grinned back. "But I agree it's hypnotic. For a second, there, it seemed to be growing larger at an enormous rate. I had to blink to regain optical reality."

"It's going to be more than an optical reality within twenty-four hours," the doctor suddenly became very serious. "Although we haven't had time to chart an exact path, I'd say the thing will come within a thousand miles of the Earth as it passes over the northern hemisphere from the east. It should reach its closest point—or even collide!—somewhere between New York and Chicago."

"We ought to get a good view of the spectacle," Marcus said.

Doctor Mellody snorted. "A good view! It'll be terrific. Let me picture it for you: About two in the morning, tomorrow, it will appear as a bright light over the horizon to the east. First we'll see a crescent, lit by the rising sun behind it—something like a sword of Damocles, to wax poetic, over the eastern states. Then the crescent will rush in, growing less crescent-shaped until it passes overhead, when it'll become a globe. At that time it will enter our outer atmosphere and in a few seconds friction will set it afire. At first there'll be tremendous gouts of black smoke and red flame, then it'll take on a cherry glow,

and finally a greenish brightness will be followed by a light as bright as the sun. This won't last long, because masses of smoke will obscure the whole picture and exploding fragments will fly in all directions with a fireworks display that'll make anything you've ever seen before seem tame by comparison. The blackness that settles after that will make it possible to watch the thing go off into space again."

"But what if it hits?"

"Nobody'll get a very clear idea of what he is seeing--if he sees *anything* but black and red. To those directly in the path of the asteroid, there'll be a horrible brightness and heat, a pressure wave, and a thundering explosion none of them will bear. To those outside the direct contact area, there'll be a tornado of sound, wind, flame and fragments that will demolish cities as completely as though an atom bomb had struck them. To those still further away, there will be winds beyond belief, rains, storms and shock waves so destructive that the earthquake shocks that accompany them may hardly be noticed. Actually, if the asteroid is the size I think it is, the earth shocks may be worse than those that knocked out Tokyo and interior China in 1920. If you remember, more than a million died in that quake."

"You're not exactly happy about our position here at Williams Bay then?"

"We'll get a *lovely* view of the

whole thing," admitted the doctor. And if it lands anywhere near Chicago, it would plow a furrow right up to our front door and push us into the Mississippi -- only we wouldn't know it."

"I've always wanted to die in a grand way," Marcus said. "Spectacular deaths are quick."

"Better than cancer. But don't order your coffin yet--our observations are too limited to give us any accurate figures. We could be as much as five thousand miles off."

"In that case, think of the pictures we'll get!" Marcus said enthusiastically.

"You and your camera!" Doctor Melody laughed. "But that's something we do have to get busy on. Let's get every plate in the observatory set up for use. I've got to check with Harvard by phone first to see if they have any new bearings, then I'll help you."

TONY Marcus watched his superior hurry out of the telescope room, then turned and stared up through the open dome. The asteroid was still too far away and too small to be apparent to the naked eye; nothing was visible except the usual sparkling stars twinkling through the clear Wisconsin air. Frowning, Marcus slid once more into the seat.

Exactly centered in the eyepiece, the asteroid glowed with a soft, greenish gray, seeming almost transparent rather than solid. Still pre-

cisely in the position of the pupil of a giant eye was the baffling black spot, a pool of ink, a bottomless pit into the depths of the asteroid.

Marcus grunted angrily. "Impossible! How can it have such an absolute lack of rotation? It's moving and the viewpoint is changing constantly. If it has any rotation, it's exactly enough to compensate for the deviation that would be caused by its progress through the heavens; which coincidence is even more impossible!"

He stared at the unflushing object, fancying he could see tiny veins of red in the gray area surrounding the black spot. It seemed to enlarge itself hypnotically, growing until it filled the entire eyepiece. Waves of dizziness shot into Marcus' brain.

"By thunder," he gasped, stumbling from the chair and rocking on his feet, "they'd better not put that thing on television!" He closed his eyes tightly until the dizzy spell passed, then opened them on the relieving blackness of the observatory. "Got to get those plates ready," he mumbled. "You can't hypnotize a camera . . ."

* * *

PATRICIA Clio noted without looking that the handsome young man waiting at the bus stop was observing her while looking at nothing at all. Patricia knew she had a good figure and she was used to being stared at, covertly or not. Usually she paid no attention, but

tonight she was particularly aware that he was young, dashing, wholesome. She drew a tiny lace handkerchief slyly from her dress pocket and let it flutter to the sidewalk as she passed.

For an instant the young man seemed about to ignore the handkerchief, then a flush of red suffused his features. He retrieved the lace square and hastened after her. She looked straight ahead, but walked slower so that he could catch up with her more quickly. He pulled up beside her.

"Here's your calling card," he handed her the handkerchief.

Patricia felt the blood suffuse her neck. She halted in her tracks, whirled and faced the young man, saw that his features were drawn tight in scorn. She slapped his face hard.

He returned the slap instantly, rocking her back on her heels. Her mouth took on a round O of shock and surprise.

"Go ahead and call a cop," he invited. "You've sure got a corner on stupidity pulling a virtue act after that display."

"What are you calling a display?" she blazed, angry now to the core.

He laughed shortly. "Wouldn't you say that acting the part of a street-walker was a display? If I ever saw a handkerchief deliberately dropped, that was it. Go ahead, say it wasn't."

She glared at him, shaking with anger, but she was silent for a long

instant. "It was deliberate," she admitted at last, stiffly and with paling cheeks, an expression of alarm and concern growing on her face. "Yes! But why did I do it?" She was completely bewildered.

"Need I elaborate on the reason?" he snorted.

Staring into his contemptuous eyes, she felt ashamed and embarrassed. "No," she said faintly. "You needn't. It's obvious enough — but though you won't believe it, it wasn't the reason at all. There *wasn't* any reason. I don't do such things. As a matter of fact, I wouldn't pick you up if you were—" she hesitated and looked at his face closely, then rushed on "—*unless* you were properly introduced!"

With flaming face, she turned and ran.

Behind her, the young man looked after her blankly, but she didn't see that. Nor did she hear him mutter, "What in Hades was all that about?" Instead she was engaged in a conflicting turmoil of thoughts and emotions.

Put, you idiot, have you gone crazy? She felt a surge of panic as she half believed she was. She rounded a corner before she dared slow to a walk. She felt the lace handkerchief in her hand, flung it from her in renewed anger, then picked it up again and stuffed it defiantly into her pocket. *Of all the nutty impulses . . .* She stopped walking as she realized it wasn't that at all. She wasn't given to im-

pulses. It was her habit to think things out deliberately, then act only when she was sure of what she wanted to do.

"I *wanted* to do it!" she said aloud.

Then, since it wasn't a deliberated act, it was impulse. What had caused it?

She resumed walking, reflectively. *I wanted to do it so badly that it was almost a compulsion, as though I had been in the habit of doing such things for years. Why, I couldn't have done it more crassly professionally if I'd been in the business!* She blushed.

I never did it before! The thought was expressed defensively, as though she wanted to convince someone of the fact. *The man at the bus stop? Why on Earth should I? I don't know him from Adam . . .*

Once more she stopped in her tracks. "But I'd like to!" She said it so loudly her voice echoed back to her from the buildings along the street.

Need I elaborate on the reason?

His remembered voice echoed through her mind, and panic closed down over her again. She hurried toward her apartment, rushed into the bedroom and flung herself onto the bed in tears. But they vanished almost immediately as she exulted subconsciously in the thrilling surge of her blood through her vibrant young body.

She got up, disrobed, and stood in front of the mirror, gazing at

herself critically and with satisfaction. "Mr. Freud," she declared, "it isn't *all* in the head, and I can prove it!"

Inwardly, however, her scientific training frowned on this evidence of body over mind. There was something here, more than the eye could see . . .

* * *

HE got off the bus and hurried up the walk toward the looming dome of the Williams Bay Observatory. The ride around Lake Geneva had been very beautiful, but he had given it little attention. Instead, his mind was occupied with the chilling knowledge he had come here to check. He thought of his calculations of the past few days and his observations with his small, homemade telescope, and he shook his head. If those calculations were accurate it would mean . . .

What it meant was submerged, somehow, in an extremely irrelevant thought. He found himself looking once more into a flushed young face, and picturing himself handing a small square of lace to her. *Your calling card* . . .

That had been a mean thing to say. Why had he said it? If he was anything, he felt that he was civil and polite, and a respecter of womanhood. With a flush he realized that it had been his own desire regarding the girl, flashing upon him so suddenly as she passed, that had made him say such a thing. He felt guilty about it, and wished

now that he could apologize. Or better still, take her out. If he'd meet her this instant, to hell with the asteroid and checking his observations . . .

He found himself ringing the bell at the observatory door, and wrenched his mind back to reality. Sure, she was a lovely girl, and he'd muffed the grandest chance of his life; but he'd never see her again--if anybody could see anybody in twenty-four hours!

The door opened and a gray-haired man faced him.

"I'm Jules Cezar," he said. "You don't know me, but I'm an amateur astronomer, and if my calculations are right, I've got something mighty serious to discuss with you. That asteroid is going to hit right here . . ."

"Come in," said Doctor Mellody abruptly. "I'd like to see those figures. We'd estimated it might hit about Cleveland, or maybe miss the Earth by as much as five thousand miles."

"It won't miss!" Jules said grimly, stepping inside the door. "It's due to hit, this time."

"This time?" Doctor Mellody took his visitor's hat. "What do you mean by that?"

"Just that I think I've identified the object, and that it has been close to the Earth on enough occasions to give us a good calculation of its actual orbit. For instance, it appeared during Napoleon's time, to mention one of the latest appear-

ances, and it appeared in old times in the reign of the Queen of Sheba, and of Cleopatra . . ."

"Hardly accurate dates to calculate an exact orbit on," said Doctor Melody.

"Hardly," agreed Jules. "But I merely mentioned names to serve as an illustration. I have the exact dates, of course, and although the older dates are problematical, I have enough recent observations to give us correct figures even on the older dates. But I've got to have access to all your records on comets . . ."

"Comets . . ." Doctor Melody frowned. "But this isn't a comet."

"It is. And it will be obvious by nightfall—as soon as it approaches the sun sufficiently to melt the frozen gases surrounding the central core."

The Doctor stared. "Sit down, Mr. Cezar. I'll call my assistant, Tony Marcus, and we'll go over the records."

THREE hours later the three men faced each other with grim countenances.

"That's it," said Doctor Melody slowly. "There can be no doubt of it."

Tony Marcus looked bleak. "Doesn't seem to be."

"Yes. This thing, whatever it is, has an orbit like a comet, and returns periodically to the solar system. Always it passes quite close to the Earth, and sometimes closer than others . . ." Jules Cezar

glanced significantly aloft as he talked. "Some of those times the Earth has passed through the tail of the comet, through its melted gases, and each time there has been some significant event in history. A great war, or a pestilence, or some such disaster."

Tony Marcus grinned. "Judging from the instances you mentioned, the trouble has been a woman, most of the time. Cleopatra, the Queen of Sheba, Marie Antoinette, Anne Boleyn, Delilah, Salome . . ."

"What did you say?" asked Jules, staring directly at him.

"I didn't say it," Tony said blankly, "you did."

"*That cinches it!*" exclaimed Jules. "That proves it's the same celestial body. The girl with the handkerchief . . .!"

"Girl with the handkerchief? What are you talking about . . . or rather, who, and what does it prove . . .?"

"He's talking about me," came a voice from the doorway. "And it was very nice of him to say I have a celestial body. I hardly thought he had looked me over that well!"

"Pat!" exclaimed Tony with pleasure, leaping to his feet and going over to her. He took her by the arm and led her back to the other two. "Patricia Clio, my fiancée, Mr. Cezar. Pat, this is Jules Cezar. He's an astronomer, of the amateur type, but I can tell you he's a good one. He's come to us with

some figures that have . . ." he halted, grew red.

"Have what?" asked Patricia.

Jules looked at her closely and she began to blush. "Just confirmed some observations on the new *celestial body*," he said with emphasis on the last two words. "And incidentally, I want to say that I have revised my opinion of the handkerchief episode."

"You have new observations?" she asked archly.

"No."

"Then on what basis do you change your opinion. I *did* drop it purposely."

"What's all this about?" asked Tony blankly.

Patricia turned and kissed him lightly on the cheek. "Oh, I just tried to pick Mr. Cezar up at the bus stop. I used the old trick of dropping a handkerchief, and he accused me of being a street walker."

Tony's face grew dark and he turned on Jules. "What's that?" he said. "Is this true?"

Patricia looked calculatingly at Tony, then at Jules, and laughed deliciously. "Certainly it's true," she said. "What else could he say? I was acting the part of a tramp to perfection."

Tony turned to Patricia unbelievably. "You were? What on Earth for?"

"Need I elaborate on that?" asked Patricia, looking straight at Jules.

JULES' face was flaming now. "Please, Miss Clio," he said. "Don't let's rub it in. I've apologized, and I did it *before* this exchange, so you must know it was sincere."

"Oh, I don't doubt that," said Patricia, "but how do you know you're right in apologizing? If you are a good man at figures, you should know that you haven't a shred of evidence to warrant an apology. And if you are just being civil, I don't like it."

"Why not?"

Patricia drew her young body up proudly before him. "Need I elaborate on that?" Her eyes looked Jules up and down calculatingly.

"Pat!" said Tony in shocked tones. "What's come over you? Don't you think you've carried a joke far enough?"

"It isn't a joke," said Jules calmly.

Tony's face grew black again, and his hands clenched at his sides. "That sounds like an insult to me," he said grimly. "And this time I think an apology is really in order . . ."

"No offense," said Jules. "It's all the fault of the comet."

"The comet?" asked Doctor Melody interestedly, coming into the conversation for the first time.

"Yes, Tony, when you mentioned that the trouble was generally a woman, when the comet came through the solar system, I think you were hitting the nail on the

head. I know it doesn't sound sensible, but it is true that every time the strange object has passed the Earth, it has done something to its people. You have said it seems to have a hypnotic effect. Why, then, shouldn't it have an emotional effect on all human beings? After all, the ancients believed the stars guided our destinies. Perhaps there was some basis for their belief. Maybe this strange object in space is the basis for those beliefs. Maybe this object is the basis for Miss Clio's strange behavior. She told me immediately, she didn't know why she was doing it. Maybe Delilah didn't, either, or Salome. Maybe Napoleon set out on the conquest of the world because there was some strange emotional influence that drove him to it."

Patricia's laugh rang through the room. "How unscientific, and what pure bunk," she said. She drew her lacy handkerchief from her pocket. Whirling on her heel, displaying her body to greatest advantage, she dropped the handkerchief to the floor and walked suggestively from the room. At the outer door she paused an instant, and a hand gripped her by the elbow.

"Your handkerchief, Patricia," said a man's voice softly.

She turned and took the handkerchief from his extended fingers. "Why, Doctor Mellody, how perfectly gallant!" she exclaimed. She kissed him on the lips, and then ran down the stairs outside.

Doctor Mellody watched her go, a thoughtful look on his face.

* * *

THE night wore on. The three astronomers made repeated observations, and at morning, Doctor Mellody wore a haggard look. His concern was mirrored to a lesser extent in the face of Tony Marcus, who frowned often, apparently thinking of something else. Jules Cezar was deep in thought, and many times he caught himself looking reflectively at Marcus and watching the expressions chase each other across the junior astronomer's face.

"You'd better let me take a spell at that telescope," he said abruptly. "I think the thing's getting you."

Marcus looked at him a moment angrily. "How do you mean, getting me?"

"You're thinking of Miss Clio too strongly," said Cezar bluntly. "And if my theory is right concerning this comet, it might be better for you to try to forget her till this is over."

Marcus looked at him. "And you aren't thinking of her," he said truculently. "Maybe you are right about the comet!"

"We can thrash that out after the danger is over . . ."

Doctor Mellody interrupted the conversation. "I'd say the danger, when it is over, will have as effectually delayed your settlement as now, or more so . . . since we'll all be dead!"

Marcus whirled on the senior

astronomer in an attitude of stunned shock. "Are you sure of that? You've abandoned the possibility that you've made an error in your calculations?"

Doctor Melody nodded. "The comet will strike this immediate area a glancing blow sometime this evening, or before! There can be no doubt of it."

Tony Marcus looked at Cezar. "How far from here will the effects be catastrophic — say in a southerly direction?"

Doctor Melody shrugged. "I'd say South America might have a chance to survive, but the area from here to the Gulf and north to Hudson Bay will be pretty much devastated. No life will be possible except on the outer fringes. From Detroit to Denver, the result will be the same. Since the blow will be a glancing one, the earth shocks may not be so bad, but the atmosphere in this area will burn up almost completely. Other places on Earth will be subjected to violent hurricanes and winds up to five hundred miles per hour, due to the replacement of the burned atmosphere."

"Then the thing to do is to leave here immediately, by air, and head south. If we can reach Rio, or some such city, we might have a chance to survive!" exclaimed Marcus.

Doctor Melody shrugged again. "Who can tell? Personally, I think any flight is hopeless."

Marcus looked at him, then at

Cezar. "Gentlemen," he said. "I think that inasmuch as there is nothing we can do here, we might as well try to save our lives. So, Doctor Melody, if it's okay with you, I'll leave right now, and pick up Pat. My own plane will take me to the Gulf, and I think there we can take one of the Airways planes to South America. Nobody really knows, but us, *where* the comet will hit, or that it *will* hit, and nobody will know where to flee. So getting a plane shouldn't be too hard. At least, I am going to make the try."

Doctor Melody looked at him a long moment. "You have my permission, my boy. As for me, I'll stay here."

Marcus looked at Cezar. "And you?"

"I think I'll fly too, but in another direction."

A relieved expression flitted across Marcus' face. "Good idea," he said. "And since we've all made up our mind, I don't think we should waste time. The farther we get . . ."

Doctor Melody put out his hand. "Good luck, my boy. And if you live, think of the pictures I'll be getting!"

For an instant Marcus hesitated, then he shook the extended hand. "I won't forget," he promised. "And all the time I'll be hoping your calculations are wrong, and that the comet misses the observatory. If so, I'll be back."

He shook Cezar's hand also, and then hurried out.

DOCTOR Mellody looked at Cezar, who was watching Marcus' departing back. "And *which* way are you flying?" he asked shrewdly.

Jules Cezar stared at the older man. "East," he said. "That way the course of the comet will be to my advantage."

"A good idea," approved Doctor Mellody. He thrust out his hand again. "And you'd better be on your way too."

Cezar shook hands with the older man, looked at him thoughtfully a moment, then picked up his hat. "Goodbye," he said. "I've enjoyed my short association with you. If the observatory survives, I'd like to work here . . ."

"And you will!" said the doctor warmly. "If it survives. That's a promise!"

Jules Cezar cast a last look at the giant telescope, then turned on his heel and left. Once outside he hurried down the road toward the village, and once there, entered a drugstore and sought the phone book. As he paged through it, the features of Patricia Clio floated before his eyes. Once he had assured himself of her apartment address, he left the drugstore hurriedly and made his way to the bus station. He had to wait nearly an hour for the next bus, only to find that it would be a half-hour in leaving. Burning with impatience, he paced up and down in the station until leaving time.

It was after noon before he reached the street where Patricia's apartment was located, and he hurried toward it with the feeling that he would be too late. By this time, Tony Marcus would have arrived in his car and taken Pat away with him.

After all, he told himself angrily, she was Tony's fiancee, and it was insane of him to think that there was any sense in him making this trip. And if he did meet them, it might only result in a fight. Tony would be sure to resent it, and Jules felt sure that in his present frame of mind, his reaction might be quite violent.

But Jules himself felt impelled toward the apartment by a force that was beyond all reason. She *had* looked at him *that* way. A hunger filled him, made him ache with a peculiar longing to hold her in his arms. It was stronger than all reason, and he thrust the propriety of his mad pursuit from him with a physical gesture of contempt. This was no time for propriety—death stared them all in the face, and there was little enough of happiness and satisfaction to snatch at.

He reached the apartment almost on the run and dashed up the stairs. At the entrance he noted the name *Miss Patricia Clio* over the number 4 and he pressed the buzzer. There was no answer. But as he stood there, a man entered the front door, opened the inner door with his key, walked down

the hallway inside. Jules grabbed at the doorknob before the latch clicked, held it a moment. Then when the man inside had disappeared, he opened the door and made his way swiftly up the stairway to apartment four.

There was no answer to his knock, only silence. But within Jules Cezar now was only a furious flame that urged him on without regard for consequences. Hurling his shoulder against the door, he snapped the latch and the door banged inward. Stepping hastily inside and closing the door, he took a few steps toward the bedroom, visible just ahead, then halted with sharply indrawn breath.

Sprawled out on the floor, face down, was the body of Tony Marcus, a wooden-handled kitchen knife protruding from between his shoulder blades.

FACE white, Cezar knelt beside the body, turned it over sufficiently to see the face. There was no doubt about it—Tony Marcus was as dead as any striking comet would ever make him!

Jules rose shakily to his feet. Who had done it? Had it been Patricia? But no, what reason would she have had? And that knife . . . He stopped to examine the grim handle and shook his head. No woman could have wielded that knife so vigorously as to sink it into a man's back to the hilt. It was a broad-bladed heavy

bread knife, and no sharper, he guessed, than any other bread knife. Women were poor hands at keeping knives sharpened, especially in these days of already-sliced bread.

Someone had been here before him, had intercepted Marcus, and had obviously made off with Patricia. But no . . .

Cezar shook his head angrily. That wasn't the answer at all Patricia. Clio would never had gone willingly with Marcus' killer, nor could she have been forced to leave in broad daylight. Somehow Cezar knew that she was not the type to be intimidated in that manner. Then there was only one answer . . . she hadn't been in the apartment when the killing took place. Even now she must be entirely unaware of what had happened!

In a blinding flash of realization, Jules Cezar knew the answer, and as swiftly as the knowledge came to him, he raced from the apartment and down the stairway. He dashed into the street, stopped the first motorist and flung open the car door.

"One hundred dollars if you get me to the Observatory right away!" he panted.

The driver, a man dressed in overalls, blinked rapidly once or twice. Then he grinned. "Put it in my hand right now, and you'll be there before you can regret that rash offer."

Cezar pulled out his billfold and

counted out one hundred dollars in bills. "It's a matter of life and death," he said. "Break every speed law there is. Only get me there, and not up against a lamppost!"

PATRICIA Clio was fighting for her life, and she knew it. She used all the animal strength of her young body, but she was fighting a losing battle against the mad strength of the man who grappled with her. And he grappled with her with the self-assurance of a man who knew she was helpless — he was systematically tearing her clothing from her and flinging it aside. With each attempt to escape he blocked her way with an agile spring, and his clutching fingers ripped again at her clothing. In his eyes there was a ravenous glow that demonstrated but one fact to the panic-stricken girl—Doctor Robert Melody was quite insane.

"A girl with spirit!" exclaimed Doctor Melody. "I like them that way — and you *do* love me, you know! That kiss you gave me at the door when I returned your handkerchief proved it. Nothing could have been more sincere than that kiss!"

Even as she fought, Patricia knew he was right. It *had* been sincere. But everything that she had done recently had been sincere, and as insane as was the elderly astronomer.

"I *don't* love you!" she screamed, backing into a corner, trying to

gather the tattered remnants of her blouse about her. But the madman only laughed aloud and advanced toward her.

"But you do," he insisted. "And we have little time—because tonight we both die. Ah, what a way to die! You and I, in each other's arms, the greatest lovers of the age, going out in flaming passion as worlds crash together! It will be a love unequalled in all the history of the world. And it will be the last great love, for never again will the comet travel around its historical orbit . . . The last night of ecstasy is upon us!"

Patricia felt her last protective shred of blouse ripped from her, and she screamed and screamed again as she sank to the floor, cowering before the slavering advance of the mad astronomer.

AS Jules Cezar leaped from the car at the observatory entrance, the driver whirled it around and sped back down the road. Jules glared after him a moment, then shook his head in an annoyed nod. Obviously the man was risking no chance of losing any of his hundred dollars. Too bad, because he might need help . . .

He ran up the steps to the front door and pounded upon it. But there was no sound. He tried the door. It was locked. He ran around the building searching for a side entrance. As he passed a window he thought he heard a shrill scream,

muffled by intervening walls. He stopped dead in his tracks, to still the grating noise of gravel beneath his feet. Unmistakably, now, he heard it—a terror-stricken scream that repeated and repeated itself in utter hysteria.

Jules snatched up a stone from the walk, leaped to a window, and with a series of furious blows, smashed the glass and wooden frame inward. Then he pulled himself through the window to the room inside. The screaming was louder now, in the direction of an inner doorway. He turned that way. Abruptly the screaming stopped.

Heart in his mouth, Jules Cezar raced into the hallway and from doorway to doorway, flinging them open, going on in growing horror as he found each of them empty. At last he reached a door at the end of the hallway and wrenched it wide. Then with a growl he leaped forward and hurled himself toward the back of the man who was crouching over the half-nude body of Patricia Clio.

As he crashed heavily down, a brilliant reddish light flared at the window outside, and for an instant he halted his attack in horror as he gazed at the horizon to the east. Rising above the line of trees was a ghastly reddish crescent, and it was moving visibly.

The man beneath him squirmed around with amazing strength, lashed out with a fist that caught Jules unprepared. He reeled aside

and fell to the floor. Doctor Melody in his turn hurled himself upon Cezar and his clutching fingers sought Jules' throat. In an instant Jules found himself battling against the strength of a man driven by the worst insanity he had ever imagined. Slaving above him, with froth-dripping jaws, was the almost unrecognizable distorted face of the senior astronomer.

Jules failed in a desperate attempt to clude the clutching fingers and they closed on his windpipe with a finality that he knew he could never break. He thrashed around violently, hurling both his and the astronomer's body about like puppets on strings. But the grim grip did not lessen, and Jules felt a roaring blackness coming over him. Mentally he screamed at Patricia for help.

As in a dream, he saw her nude body, glowing redly in the light of the approaching comet, pick itself up from where she had been crouching. Then she disappeared.

Jules Cezar sank into blackness with a wave of helpless despair, and his weakening body relaxed beneath the smothering weight of the madman.

ALL at once he found that he could breath again, and he also found his face pressed against something warm and soft. And in his ears was the sound of sobbing.

"My darling, my darling," she kept repeating as she wept. "Oh

please open your eyes . . . "

He opened them and looked up at her from where she cradled his head against her breast. They were on the floor before the window, and the whole interior of the observatory was a glow of red. "They're open," he whispered hoarsely. "And what they see is the most lovely thing they have ever beheld."

She covered his lips with glad kisses, and for a long moment he felt that he was smothering again. But he fought his way up once more, and rose shakily to a sitting position. On the floor lay the Doctor, his head crushed beneath a heavy lamp base. He glanced out of the window. "The comet!" he exclaimed. "It's going to strike!"

"And we're going to die!" cried Patricia. "Don't look at it. Hold me in your arms. I want to die that way . . . "

Outside there was a tremendous roar, and instinctively Jules snatched her to him and held her close. "This is it!" he screamed into her ear. "I love you!"

For answer she pressed her body tightly to him, and her lips clung to his with a passion that made his senses reel. For an instant he forgot the crashing comet, then a thunderous explosion rocked the observatory . . .

* * *

JULES Cezar and Patricia Clio sat with their arms around each other, and listened to the voice of the announcer from the radio, giv-

ing the exciting story of what had happened.

" . . . according to Professor Stillman, head of the Observatory of Munich, the comet was not composed of solids at all, as at first supposed, but merely of a gigantic globule of gas with a frozen center. When it struck our atmosphere, it united with the gasses of the upper air and exploded. The resultant blast caused billions of dollars' worth of damage, and has cost an estimated one hundred thousand lives. But most of these were from fire, and most of them in the Cleveland area, where the gigantic flash-flame from space reached lowest. Other damage was due to concussion . . . "

Jules stroked Patricia's new blouse with his fingers as he looked at her adoring eyes and went on with the story he had been giving her before they paused to listen to the radio. "When I found Tony's body, I knew that there was only one possibility—that Doctor Melody had intercepted him there and killed him. He was insane, but not insane enough not to realize that with me gone and Tony dead, and with the comet due to wipe out all life, as he supposed, that very night, he could have his way with you at the observatory. The hypnotic effect of the comet, which has been responsible for so many emotional scenes in Earth's history, was terrific this time. We have heard from the radio of the fantastic things that happened to oth-

er people . . . It drove the doctor to a peak of passionate frenzy almost unimaginable. He felt there would be no consequences of his brutal killing, and of what he intended to do to you."

"Thank God you were not too hypnotized to know what to do," said Patricia, smuggling closer to him. "When he phoned me and asked me to rush out to the observatory, that you wanted me to come, the hypnosis of the comet made it all seem reasonable, and very desirable to me."

"But I *was* hypnotized," said Jules. "I would have smashed down anybody that had tried to keep me from you. I would have taken you as the Huns took the Saracen women. I was almost as mad as the doctor—with love for you!" He paused, struck by a sudden thought. "But the hypnosis is gone now!

And it'll never come to Earth again. The strange comet is destroyed!" He paused again, struck by yet another thought. "Does it still seem reasonable and desirable to you *now*?" he demanded.

She looked at him, then archly lowered her eyes. "What do you think?"

He ran his hands up and down the smooth silk of the sleeves of her blouse and she glanced up covertly again. "You like the blouse?" she asked.

"I liked it better the way you were in the observatory," he said, a gleam in his eye.

She got to her feet and felt for the button at the neck of the blouse. "Well . . . if that's the way you like it—"

He stared at her hypnotically.

THE END

EDITORIAL (Concluded)

child with its first candy eats too much and gets sick, man today is stressing his machines over his morality, and is making him sick. When we dropped an atom bomb, science fiction readers knew it was *wrong*. They knew that it would lead to another bomb, and another, and finally to an atomic war that would virtually sterilize the planet. They had read about it a hundred times, in a hundred different versions. They knew all the possibilities, because they were all talked out. Today, Mr. Gold, we ought to talk about a POSSIBLE FUTURE in

which the problem of the bomb is solved. Talk about THAT, Mr. Gold. Or talk about the United Nations of tomorrow. Talk about a Russia that is PART of that one world that is inevitable. Any science fiction reader has imagined all the possible results of nationalism, and has discovered that the road is ever toward bigger nations. He knows that it WILL be one world. And further, he knows it will be ONE PLANETARY FEDERATION—and what is more, ONE GALAXY. Talk about *that*, Mr. Gold . . . your magazine already carries its banner!—*Rep.*