

L'Arc de Jeanne

Jnfantry Unit No. 97 of Drop XVI had landed on the north bank of *Le Fleuve d'Abondance* and deployed along the base of the alluvial slope that gave access to the Provencal. Plateau. Once the 97th gained a foothold on the plateau, the fall of *Fleur du Sud*, the key city of *Ciel Bleu's* southern hemisphere, would be assured.

The commander of the 97th, jubilant over the success of his part of the Drop, radioed his position to the GGS *Ambassadors*, the orbiting flagship from which O'Riordan the Reorganizer was supervising the first phase of the tenth and final campaign of the so-called Second Civil War. O'Riordan was delighted over the news and ordered that the city be taken at once. Soon, he reflected, *Ciel Bleu* would be as helpless as the nine other secessionist planet-states and the omnipotence toward which he had directed his political sights six years ago on Earth when he destroyed the nucleus of the religio-political Psycho-Phenomenalist Church and established the Galaxi-Government would be his.

Strafe rifles at ready, the 97th started up the alluvial slope. Blue beret-like helmets were set at jaunty angles; crimson battle-fatigues took on the hue of blood in the morning sunlight. The season was spring and a brisk wind was blowing out of the south. It was inconceivable that *Fleur du Sud* could muster sufficient forces to defend itself.

Nevertheless, when the 97th breasted the slope, it found itself confronted by an army of defenders. But it was a ragged army indeed, and even distance could not hide the fact that it was comprised primarily of old men, housewives, and boys. Earlier that morning, the main contingent of Drop XVI had landed far to the north, decoying the troops that had been stationed near *Fleur du Sud* away from the city. The battle appeared to be in the bag.

The 97th girded itself and prepared to charge. And then the ragged ranks of the defenders parted and a figure mounted on a magnificent black stallion rode through, and advanced across the plateau. The figure was that of a girl—a girl clad in shining white armor and carrying a shining bow in her left hand and a shining arrow in her right. Her head was bare and her light-brown hair streamed behind her in the morning wind. Her face, white and blurred by distance, was like a flower.

The 97th paused. It consisted of veterans of nine planetary wars, and yet whispers rustled through its ranks like frightened leaves.

Two hundred meters from the beginning of the slope, the black stallion came to a stop. The girl fitted her shining arrow to her shining bow and drew the bowstring back. In the dead silence the bowstring sang, and the arrow stabbed into the sky. Up, up it soared into the nonpareil blue, to pause, finally, high above the 97th. But it did not fall back down to Earth. Instead, it became a bolt of blue-bright lightning. Thunder sounded then, and the sky above the slope grew as dark as death. It began to rain.

The rest of the sky remained a serene and cloudless blue, and sunlight lay upon the plateau like golden grain.

The rain intensified. It came down in sheets; in torrents. It became a wall of falling water. The 97th's officers screamed to their men to charge, but the men were already mired in mud up to their ankles. The edge of the plateau gave way, and the whole slope began to slide.

Desperately, the 97th tried to fight its way to safety, but it was part of a river of mud now—a vindictive merciless river in which the men could only flounder as it bore them ineluctably into the swollen waters of another river—*Le Fleuve d'Abondance*. Officers, noncoms, privates—all suffered the same ignominious fate; but *Le Fleuve d'Abondance*, even in a swollen state, was anything but a raging torrent, and all gained the safety of the opposite shore.

They lined up like bedraggled rats along the bank and counted their blessings and their dry cigarettes. The commander radioed a description of the debacle—and its authoress—to the orbiting *Ambassadors*; then he withdrew his men behind a nearby ridge, deployed them, and smoked a damp cigarette while he awaited instructions from O'Riordan.

O'Riordan was no stranger to history. He spotted the analogy right away, and it was the analogy as

much as the threat of the meteorological warfare that gave him pause. He knew what a modern Maid of Orleans could do for the relatively primitive people of *Ciel Bleu*—knew that even without a weapon that influenced the weather, she could very well inspire them to a point where he would have to bomb them into submission, and in the process lay waste to property that he already considered his own. So he gave orders not only that the 97th be picked up and returned to the orbiting fleet, but that the rest of Drop XVI be picked up and returned as well; then, for the time being, he turned over the campaign to Smith-Kolgoz, his Chief of Intelligence.

In less than a week, Smith-Kolgoz had a report ready for him—and a plan.

Raymond D'Arcy, Decoder 2nd class, GGS *Watchdog*, had never attended a council of war before. Nor had he ever before been on board the *Ambadress*. He felt diffident and a little afraid.

The *Ambadress* was a city in the sky. In the city, in addition to the crew, dwelled O'Riordan himself, his advisors, his arbiters, his bodyguards, his Ministers of War, his Chiefs of Staff, his Secret Police, his Civilian-Control Corps, his Reorganization Corps, his Intelligence Corps, his personal cuisine, and his mistresses, valets, manicurists, barbers, and physicians.

In both shape and color the flagship resembled a monstrous orange. The orange hue, however, was not a true color but resulted from the reflection of the starlight on the special alloy that constituted the hull. There were seven decks altogether, the centermost and largest of which contained the units that housed the executive, administrative, and judicial departments, and their respective personnel-suites. The units encircled a large open area called the Green where real trees and genuine grass grew, and the trees and the grass in turn encircled an asphalt plaza.

The decks were connected by companionways and elevator shafts and each level was equipped with high-speed conveyor-corridors. In addition, the levels had boat bays that could easily be reached in time of an emergency and whose size and whose number of escape boats were in ratio to the dimensions of the deck. Artificial gravity was constantly maintained by intra-deck attractor-coils and the ship's power unit was located on Deck No. 1 where no one, except the *Ambadress's* maintenance men, ever ventured.

The Council of War Chamber was part of the executive unit and overlooked the Green. D'Arcy stood at one of the open casements, looking wistfully down at trees and grass and golden puddles of artificial sunshine. There were flowers growing in hydroponic parterres and hidden tapes supplied a nostalgic background of melodic birdsong. He tried to distinguish the various calls and warbles, but the voices in the room behind him made the task impossible. Presently he realized that one of the voices was directed toward him. "Over here, D'Arcy—O'Riordan's on his way down."

D'Arcy approached the long council table and took the seat that the council-co-ordinator had indicated. There was a glass of water in front of him, and he drank some of it. His throat still felt dry. He was uncomfortably aware of the row of important faces across the table; his own face struck a discordant note in a similar row on his own side of the table. There was the sound of a door opening and closing. It was followed by a thunder-clap of silence. "All rise!" the council co-ordinator commanded. All did.

D'Arcy had seen O'Riordan on telecasts, but he had never seen him in person. He was a small dynamic man with a flat face and bright brown eyes. He did not look his sixty-odd years. His face was ruddy, with hardly a wrinkle showing, if you discounted the intense crows' feet at the corners of his eyes. His hair was sandy and faintly flecked with gray. Even in the gorgeous blue and gold trappings of a supreme commander, he still managed to look like what he was—a one-time pauper who, by dint of peasant shrewdness and determination, had become a political prince.

Flanked by flint-faced bodyguards, he entered the room and seated himself at the head of the council table. "All sit!" the council co-ordinator cried. All did.

O'Riordan puffed a cigar to life and looked up and down the two rows of faces. His eyes flickered faintly when they met D'Arcy's, alighted finally on the sharp-featured visage of the Chief of Intelligence. "All right, Smith-Kolgoz—let's hear what you've found out."

Smith-Kolgoz stood up. "I think it will be best, your Magnificence, if we hear the report directly from the man who prepared it—Leopold McGrawski, Director of Field Operations."

A burly man in mufti got to his feet. Smith-Kolgoz sat down. MCGRAWSKI: "We were successful in tracing the girl your Magnificence, and I assigned three experienced ship-to-ground agents to investigate the case. They subsequently discovered that her name is Jeanne Marie Valcouris and that she lives all alone in a cave in *Le Bois Feerique*. *Le Bois Feerique* is a sizable woods located near a bucolic village named Baudelaire, which lies on the Provencal Plateau some fifty kilometers to the north of *Fleur du Sud*. She is known to its inhabitants as *la Pucelle du Bois Feerique*, and had it not been for your Magnificence's decision to suspend hostilities temporarily, thereby making it impossible for her to put in an appearance on other battlefields, the cognomen by now would have attained planet-wide circulation, and she would be firmly entrenched in the minds of her countrymen as an anti-denationalization Psycho-Phenomenalist heroine. As matters stand, the religio-patriotic zeal which she might have awakened still slumbers.

"Like most *Ciel Bleu* villages, Baudelaire is backward and bucolic and stubbornly adheres to the anti-progressive spirit of the French colonists who took over the planet three centuries ago. Jeanne Marie Valcouris' mother died while giving birth to her and her father died nine years later, at which time Jeanne Marie was consigned to a small Provencal-subsidized orphanage on the outskirts of the village. Up until the age of twelve she behaved normally enough and then, unaccountably, she ran away and hid herself in *Le Bois Feerique*. The orphanage officials finally located her—she was living in a natural cave and appeared to be in excellent health—but when they tried to take her back to the orphanage, she did something that frightened them so thoroughly that they fled from the forest and never bothered her again. Exactly what she did, we were unable to ascertain, but it seems that even prior to the Battle of *Fleur du Sud* the inhabitants of Baudelaire regarded her as an evil witch. Since the battle they have altered their viewpoint and now regard her as a good witch, but they are hardly less reluctant to enter *Le Bois Feerique*.

"There appears to be considerable justification for their attitude. A number of them claim to have overheard her talking to trees and flowers, and the several who were bold enough to question her claim that she told them that it wasn't trees and flowers she was talking to but 'voices in her head.' They—"

"Voices?" O'Riordan interrupted.

"Yes, your Magnificence. Obviously she is suffering from audio-visual hallucinations of the type generally associated with acute malnutrition. We know that she was brought up a strict Psycho-Phenomenalist, and I think we may safely conclude that she is a fanatic, and fasts for weeks at a time. Under circumstances such as that, it would be strange if she *didn't* hear voices and see visions."

"But the bow," O'Riordan said. "Where did she get the bow?"

MCGRAWSKI: "I'm sorry to say that we were unable to find out, your Magnificence. She carries it with her wherever she goes and there is always a quiverful of arrows on her shoulder. Assuming that a weapon capable of precipitating an isolated cloudburst would be capable of any number of things, I instructed the ship-to-ground agents not to let her see them except when absolutely necessary and not to provoke her in any way. Perhaps if they could have entered her cave when she was absent from it, they might have been able to learn more, but—"

O'RIORDAN: "But why couldn't they enter it? What was there to stop them?"

SMITH-KOLGOZ (hastily getting to his feet): "I ordered them not to, your Magnificence. After they located her, I devised a plan for abducting her that would entail a minimum of risk, and I didn't want to take a chance of tipping our hand ahead of time. Moreover, to carry out the plan successfully, I knew I would need to know as much about the girl's personality as possible, so I ordered the agents to concentrate on the villagers who knew her before she ran away from the orphanage and to question them exhaustively about her likes and her dislikes, her habits, and her attitude toward life. You *do* want her abducted, don't you, your Magnificence?"

O'RIORDAN: "Of course I do."

SMITH-KOLGOZ: "Good. Here then, your Magnificence, is what I've done thus far. First, I fed the data which the agents brought back into the *Ambadress's* computer, together with the following command: 'Describe the sort of male which a female of this type would be most susceptible to—physically, emotionally, and intellectually.' Next, I correlated the computer's subsequent description

with the dossiers of all the men in the fleet—a task of no mean magnitude, I can assure you, your Magnificence, but well worth the trouble. Naturally I couldn't narrow my choice down to one man on the data alone—the human animal simply isn't that varied. But on the basis of other qualifications, I was able to pinpoint the one who was most likely to succeed in carrying out the abduction. In my judgment he has an optimum chance of inspiring affection in this girl; then love, then trust. And once he has accomplished this, it will be child's play for him to obtain possession of her bow, and even possible for him to talk her into accompanying him voluntarily back to the *Ambadress*. And if he is unable to talk her into accompanying him voluntarily, he can always resort to force."

Smith-Kolgoz paused. He made D'Arcy think of a puppy that had just retrieved a stick thrown by his master and expected to be patted on the head for his prowess. But O'Riordan remained unmoved. "And just who is this irresistible member of the male species?" he asked coldly, eyeing D'Arcy with open contempt.

"D'Arcy, stand up," Smith-Kolgoz said.

Diffidently, D'Arcy did so.

"Raymond D'Arcy, Decoder 2nd class, GGS *Watchdog*, your Magnificence," Smith-Kolgoz went on. "Not only does he possess the essential qualities I mentioned before, but he is the descendant of *Ciel Bleu* immigrants and has an excellent idiomatic command of the language. If we provide him with a believable story, give him the necessary directions to find the cave, and night-sled him into *Le Bois Ferique*, I am certain that in two weeks' time, he'll be able to deliver both Jeanne Marie Valcouris and her bow and arrows into our hands."

O'Riordan shook his head. "Oh, no, Smith-Kolgoz—the girl, yes; but not the weapon. The weapon, we don't want. Because you see, Smith-Kolgoz, this whole caper may have been designed for no other reason than to trick us into taking the bow and arrows on board the *Ambadress*, and either or both could be a force that, once it was set in motion, could reduce us to a state of paralysis or turn us into a bunch of mindless puppets. Surely you've heard of the Trojan Horse, Smith-Kolgoz, and surely I don't need to point out to you that while the *Ambadress* isn't Troy, its 'fall' would mean the end of the Galaxi-Government, for the simple reason that to all intents and purposes, it *is* the Galaxi-Government."

Smith-Kolgoz's sharp-featured face had reddened. "The —the analogy failed to occur to me, your Magnificence," he said lamely. And then, "But what *should* we do with the bow and arrows, sir?"

"Bury them where they won't be found. After *Ciel Bleu* surrenders, I'll have them dug up and analyzed."

All this while O'Riordan hadn't once taken his eyes from D'Arcy's face. Now he said, "Doesn't it strike you, Smith-Kolgoz, that you're sending a boy on a man's mission?"

Smith-Kolgoz smiled ingratiatingly. "I must confess, your Magnificence, that at first it gave me pause. And then I realized that it wasn't a man's mission after all, but a boy's, and that essentially I was dealing with a new variation of an age-old love-story plot. Boy meets girl; boy makes girl; boy takes girl."

D'Arcy was a black-belt karate champion. He could clean and jerk over twice his own weight. He could chin himself ten times in succession with either hand. He had been decorated three times with the Barred Spiral for bravery above and beyond the call of duty. The margins of his palms were as hard as boards, and he could deliver a judo chop with the force of a sixteen-pound sledge. He felt his face grow hot, but he said nothing.

At length, O'Riordan said, "Do you think you can bring her back, boy?"

D'Arcy nodded. He did not trust himself to speak.

O'Riordan's eyes traversed the two rows of faces. "I think we should put the plan in operation. Anyone disagree?"

Heads shook in ludicrous unison. There was a chorus of sycophantic "No, sirs!" O'Riordan grunted and stood up. "All rise!" the council co-ordinator cried. All did.

To Smith-Kolgoz, O'Riordan said, "I want him in those woods before the passage of the next dawn belt." To D'Arcy, he said, "I'll give you ten days. If you haven't radioed to be picked up by then, I'll come down and do the job myself." He turned his back on the council table. "We'll see about those voices of hers," he muttered. "And if she wants to be Joan of Arc so bad, we'll let her be Joan of Arc." He

stomped out of the room.

When she heard the voices for the first time, Jeanne Marie Valcouris was twelve years old.

There were two of them, and after a while, they told her whose voices they were. The gentle one was St. Rachel de Feu's; the authoritative one, Joseph Eleemosynary the almsgiver's. Joseph Eleemosynary was the founder of the Psycho-Phenomenalist Church and had been dead for one hundred and twenty years. Rachel de Feu was the first Psycho-Phenomenalist saint. She had been dead for seventy-six years.

In the beginning the voices were disembodied, but it wasn't long before they acquired faces. As Jeanne Marie had never seen a picture of either Rachel or Joseph, it is not surprising that neither visage bore the slightest resemblance to the original. As Jeanne Marie "saw" it, Rachel's face was round and sweet, with gentle blue eyes and lips that loved to smile. Joseph's face was young and handsome—dashing in a boyish sort of way. He had curly black hair and disturbing dark eyes. His complexion was slightly swarthy but very very clear. Sometimes it was hard for Jeanne Marie to tell which face she liked best.

Go into *Le Bois Ferique*, Joseph "said" when they became better acquainted, and Rachel de Feu and I will find a cave for you to live in and help you fix it up like a little house and show you how to do all sorts of wonderful things.

Jeanne Marie didn't even hesitate. She didn't like it at the orphanage. She never had. She missed her father too much and kept thinking about him all the time and couldn't keep up with her lessons. So she went into the woods and Joseph and Rachel found a cave for her and showed her how to turn it into a regular little house by thinking through her hands. They called the process "psychotelluricism," but she thought of it as "think-making." It was an ability that the inner hierarchs had developed shortly before O'Riordan the Reorganizer had seized power from the Psycho-Phenomenalist Church and massacred them with radiation guns, Rachel de Feu explained. O'Riordan, when he heard about the process, had scoffed at it, saying that he didn't believe *anyone* could create solid objects by intellectual power alone to say nothing of semi-solid objects that could affect a person's emotions; but just the same, Rachel added, Jeanne Marie must be sure not to tell anyone that *she* had the ability.

After they showed her how to think-make the cave-house, they showed her how to think-make things to put in it—chairs, tables, dressers, rugs, drapes, lamps, a teleradio set, an escritoire, a self-regulating stove for the kitchen, a fireplace-furnace for the living room, a washer-drier for the utility room—and, most important of all, how to think-make things to eat. Oh, it was the most marvelous experience she had ever had! It was as though her fingers had little minds of their own and as though her hands were little factories that could produce anything under the sun. Rachel de Feu said that that wasn't the way it worked at all—that it was the energy she and Joseph Eleemosynary furnished her with that did the trick. This psychic energy, Rachel said, drew the necessary elements out of the ground and the air, combined them, and turned them into whatever Jeanne Marie wanted to make.

When the officials of the orphanage came into *Le Bois Feerique* and tried to get Jeanne Marie to return with them to the orphanage, Rachel and Joseph helped her to make gouts of smoke of the most horrendous shapes imaginable appear out of thin air and caused sparks to shoot from her fingers and fire to come out of her ears. The officials were so startled they nearly jumped out of their shoes and Jeanne Marie had never seen anyone run so fast in all her born days. After that, they left her alone, and people began calling her a witch. She didn't mind being called a witch, and if what she was, was a witch, she was glad of it. She had never had so much fun in her life.

When she was fifteen, Rachel and Joseph put her to work making a bow and arrows. The bow turned out to be the most beautiful thing imaginable. It was like a shaft of sunlight that someone had bent and strung with a bowstring made of morning mist. The arrows were scarcely less beautiful—and a good deal more remarkable. They were silver in hue, and so tenuous you had to look hard just to see them. She must take the bow with her everywhere she went, Joseph told her, and the arrows too. She made a little quiver out of daylight, darkness, sand, dust, time, hopes, dreams, wood, metal and a dozen other things and kept it slung over her shoulder except when she slept at night; then she kept it hanging on the bedpost next to her head, beside the golden bow.

When she was sixteen, Rachel and Joseph set her to work on an even more fascinating project—the manufacturing of a doll. Jeanne Marie was enchanted; she had never had a doll before, and wanted one more than anything else in the world. Day by day the doll grew—not rapidly, but very very slowly, for it was an extremely complicated piece of work. Jeanne Marie had had no idea it was so difficult to make a doll, not even such a big one, or that so many different things went into one. The list of elements—even the few she could identify—made her head swim. But such a doll it turned out to be! No girl had ever had a doll that could remotely compare to it. Its very uniqueness was probably the reason that Rachel de Feu told her to enlarge the cave and set aside a special secret place for it. Jeanne Marie did better than that: she made a regular little room and furnished it with a bed, two chairs, a vanity, a dresser, and a little throwrug. By the time the project was completed, she was eighteen years old and had almost, but not quite, outgrown her need for dolls.

Her next project was a suit of armor, and compared to the doll-project was a relatively simple one. The purpose of the suit, Joseph "said," was twofold: to protect her from harm and to exert a psychological influence on the enemy. She made it out of stardust and metal and a hundred other things and when it was finished, she tried it on. It was as bright as the sun and as weightless as a cloud.

And now, Joseph and Rachel "said" in unison, the time has almost come, and you must go into the village of Baudelaire and take with you one of the golden combs you made for your hair and trade it for the most beautiful black horse you can find. And Jeanne Marie did, and she named the horse after St. Hermann O'Shaughnessy, the second Psycho-Phenomenalist saint. Then she thought-made a stable for him in the side of the hill next door to her own cave, and everyday, except when it rained, she went riding in the woods.

And now, Joseph Eleemosynary "said" one day, the time *has* come; and Jeanne Marie, knowing full well what he meant, had donned the shining suit of armor, mounted St. Hermann O'Shaughnessy, and ridden proudly over the Provencal Plateau and entered the city of *Fleur du Sud*. Up and down the streets she rode in the morning light, crying, "Come and follow me, and I will lead you to victory over the forces of O'Riordan that threaten from the south. Come and help me save the Church of the Psycho-Phenomenalists from the powers of darkness." And St. Hermann O'Shaughnessy pranced and danced, and the people came out into the streets and cheered and when she set out toward *Le Fleuve d'Abondance*, they formed a ragged vanguard for her; and when the time came, she rode through the vanguard and launched a shining arrow into the sky, and the rain had come down in great torrents and washed the enemy away. And Jeanne Marie had returned to her cave in *Le Bois Feerique* to await her next Call.

One expected woods to be lovely in spring, but not as lovely as these woods were. D'Arcy, clad in *Ciel Bleu* peasant garb, still shivering from the pre-dawn dampness, rejoiced.

Leaving the clearing in which the pilot of the ship-to-ground sled had deposited him just before the passage of the dawn belt, he set forth into pleasant shadows and warm shafts of sunlight. Some of the trees were like fathers and some were like mothers and some were like little boys and girls. All lived together in a big happy family, green arms intertwined or green fingertips touching. Dawn dew was scattered like diamonds on the forest floor, and in the branches, real birds sang.

He proceeded on a straight course till he came to a brook; then he turned right and began walking upstream. The brook came from the hills, and it was in the hills, overlooking the little stream, that Jeanne Marie's cave was. The three ship-to-ground agents who had made the reconnaissance had briefed him before he departed and told him everything he needed to know.

About the terrain, that is.

Oh, they had told him about Jeanne Marie Valcouris, too, but he suspected that there were many things they hadn't told him about her because there were bound to be many things they hadn't found out about her.

She liked to walk, they had said, and she liked to run and play. She loved to go horseback riding through the woods. As a young girl she had been an avid reader. Her marks at the orphanage school had been about average and probably would have been higher if she had taken an interest in her studies. She liked to wear bright-colored clothes, and she loved brushes and combs and was forever combing her

hair. She was very religious, and during her years at the orphanage, she had said her mystics morning, noon, and night.

D'Arcy was at a loss to understand why these things should make her physically, emotionally, and intellectually susceptible to him, but who was he to argue with the *Ambassador's* computer?

The matter drifted from his mind, unable to compete with the distractions afforded by his surroundings. Pastel-colored flowers grew along the bank, ephemerally outlining the footsteps of a playful morning breeze. The brook sang as it purred over chalk-white pebbles, and now and then the shiny shards of fish could be seen, darting this way and that in the pellucid water. Foliage filtered sunlight lay upon the ground like scattered pirate's treasure.

A kilometer lay behind him. Halfway through another, he heard hoofbeats. They grew rapidly louder, overflowing the aisles and the bowers and the shady byways. Presently the brook broke out into a large clearing, and D'Arcy stepped into bright sunlight. Simultaneously, on the opposite side of the clearing, a horse and rider appeared.

He paused, but made no attempt to conceal himself. The horse was a black stallion and the rider was a girl wearing a blue skirt and a red blouse with white stripes. A golden bow hung on her right shoulder and the tufts of arrows showed above her left. She was both barefoot and hatless, and her light-brown hair was caught back from her face with a red ribbon. Her face made him think of a flower that had just opened its petals to the sun.

She rode right up to him and said, "*Bonjour, monsieur.*"

"*Bonjour, mademoiselle,*" he said back. "You must be *La Pucelle du Bois Feerique.*"

She smiled, and little lights danced in her eyes. They were the same shade of brown her hair was, and there was a dimple in her left cheek. She was just beginning to lose the ripe fullness of adolescence and was on the verge of becoming a woman. "My name is Jeanne Marie Valcouris," she said, "and I am a witch."

"So I've heard," he said.

"And you are not afraid?"

He grinned. "Why should I be afraid of a good witch? I can understand why I should be afraid of a bad one—yes. She could turn me into a newt or a toad, but a good witch could only turn me into something better than what I am, and I would be better, instead of worse, off."

Jeanne Marie laughed. Then she grew silent, and the attentive expression on her face indicated that she was listening, although what she was listening to he could not imagine. At length she said, "The voices like you. I'm glad, because I like you too."

"The 'voices'?"

"Joseph Eleemosynary and Rachel de Feu." Jeanne Marie slid down from the black horse, landing lightly on her bare feet. "And this is St. Hermann O'Shaughnessy. I think he likes you too."

St. Hermann O'Shaughnessy nickered. D'Arcy ran his fingers through the animal's black mane. "It's nice to know I've got so many friends," he said.

Remembering what McGrawski had said about malnutrition-produced hallucinations, he took a good look at the girl's face. Like her body, it bespoke a well-fed healthy female who, if she had ever fasted at all, hadn't done so for at least a month. Another explanation would have to be found for the voices.

But it wasn't up to D'Arcy to find it. His province was to abduct Jeanne Marie, not to find out what made her tick. "My name is Raymond D'Arcy, and I'm lost," he went on, somehow managing to make the second part of the statement sound as truthful as the first. "But even if I weren't lost, it wouldn't make much difference, because I couldn't go anywhere anyway. Last night while I was waiting for the air-diligence to Moliere, I was hit over the head and robbed, and when I came to, I found myself lying in a clearing in these woods."

The falsehood had been supplied by Smith-Kolgoz, who had insisted that a peasant girl like Jeanne Marie would be less apt to question a cliché than she would an original lie. Apparently he was right, for she made no attempt to check the story out by examining the bump on the side of the head which D'Arcy had had the pilot of the ship-to-ground sled administer to him. On the other hand, she seemed inordinately interested in D'Arcy's face and incapable of taking her eyes from it. He had no way of

knowing that it bore a startling resemblance to Joseph Eleemosynary's—Jeanne Marie's version, that is—nor that at that very moment Rachel de Feu was saying, "He certainly seems like a nice enough young man, child—why don't you help him?"

Jeanne Marie needed no second invitation. "Come, Raymond," she said, "and I will fix you something to eat at my house. It's only a little ways from here."

She set off along the brook, leading St. Hermann O'Shaughnessy. Guiltily, D'Arcy walked along beside her. "I have a very lovely house," she said, "wait'll you see. Some people would call it a cave, but they would be surprised. Of course," she added, "I've never invited anyone inside before."

He took advantage of their proximity and got a good look at the bow. Aside from discovering that it had been formed from an alloy which he couldn't identify and which left painful afterimages on his retina, he ended up no wiser than he had been before. A scrutiny of the arrows netted him even less. All he could see of them were notched ends and their silvery tufts, and somehow he got the impression that he wasn't seeing even that much of them.

He wanted to question her about the unusual weapon. But decided to defer doing so till a later date.

For some time now, the ground on either side of the brook, excluding the flower-pied terraces that bordered the water, had been rising. Soon, tree-clad successions of hills appeared, and the hillsides grew more and more abrupt. When at length the girl, D'Arcy, and St. Hermann O'Shaughnessy came opposite the cave, D'Arcy didn't even know it was there. The trees by this time had given way to vinelike growths and it wasn't till Jeanne Marie parted a curtain of these vines that he saw the opening. She parted another curtain, and he saw St. Hermann O'Shaughnessy's cave-stable. The floor was lined with hay, and there was a manger for him to eat out of and one for him to drink out of. He even had a light to see by—a self-perpetuating pinup lamp with a pink shade.

She left Hermann on the terrace to graze—he was such a stay-at-home, she said, that she didn't even bother to tether him except at night—and escorted D'Arcy into her cave-house. He was astonished when he saw the interior. There were four rooms and a closet—at least he assumed that the door in the bedroom gave access to a closet—and each room was completely furnished. Walls and ceilings were composed of fine-grained natural wood; the floors were tile, and strewn with throwrugs. The lights were of the self-perpetuating type, and each of the appliances had its own self-perpetuating motor. Running water was provided by subterranean pressure-pipes leading up from the brook.

Jeanne Marie seated him at the kitchen table and got eggs and bacon out of a little refrigerator that looked for all the world like a hope chest, and while the bacon was sizzling on the stove, she made coffee. She had a cup with him after he finished eating, and when he asked her how in the world a slip of a girl like her had been able to transform an ordinary cave into a house fit for a princess, she smiled. "I can't tell you," she said, "because it's a secret." And then, astonishingly, "Would you like to live here with me?"

He tried not to stare at her, but he wasn't altogether successful. Surely, he thought, she can't be *that* naive. It seemed almost a shame to take advantage of her. "What do your voices think of the idea?" he countered.

"Oh, they are all for it. I can fix a place for you to sleep on the sofa. It's quite large, and I'm certain you'll be quite comfortable. Also, I'll think—I'll make you some pajamas, and some trousers and shirts. Would you like another cup of coffee?"

"Thanks," said D'Arcy weakly.

Living in *Le Bois Feerique* with Jeanne Marie Valcouris, he discovered presently, was a little like being a child all over again and living—really living, that is—in one of the make believe worlds your nine- or ten-year-old mind had devised.

Long before his coming Jeanne Marie had invented all sorts of games to amuse herself, and now she made the necessary changes in the rules to permit two people to play. Three, if you counted St. Hermann O'Shaughnessy, for he was an indispensable part of many of them. In addition to the games, there were picnics in idyllic clearings and long and leisurely walks back into the wooded hills. Morning was invariably at seven and the hillsides were just as invariably dew-pearled; and in Jeanne Marie's heaven, at least, all was right with the world.

Evenings, they spent sitting at the base of the vine curtain that covered the cave-house mouth, looking at the stars and commenting now and then on the various happenings of the day. Some of the stars they looked at were planets—*Ciel Bleu* had eleven sisters—and some of them were the ships of O'Riordan's fleet. The latter were easily distinguishable from the others, not only because of their perceptible movement but because they followed a perfect equatorial path. They looked like an attenuated diamond necklace held together by an invisible string. The flagship was the pendant, and was distinguishable from the other diamonds by its size and its orange hue. It reminded D'Arcy of a moon sometimes, and in a way it was a moon—an artificial moon with a man in it who wanted to conquer the cosmos.

Jeanne Marie would look at the flagship again and again from the moment it rose in the northeast to the moment it set in the northwest. But when he commented on her interest she said that it wasn't she who was interested but Joseph and Rachel. "They see and hear through me," she explained. "So whenever they are interested in something, I let them look or listen to their hearts' content."

He gazed into her eyes, searching them for some sign of guile, but he saw nothing except tiny stars—stars no less lovely than the ones that swam high above her head. It embarrassed him that he himself had brought them into being. Yes, she was in love with him already, Jeanne Marie was. The computer had been right. But ironically he felt nothing for her except a brotherly affection. It was better that way, he supposed—it made what he had to do a lot easier.

Wherever she went, her bow and quiver of arrows went too. One day he asked her why they were such an inseparable part of her, pointing out that she never tried to bring down any of the small game that frequented the region, and she answered him, saying that Joseph and Rachel had instructed her to keep them with her at all times, as they had many magic properties, any one of which would protect her from harm.

D'Arcy had a sudden hunch. "Did Rachel and Joseph help you make the bow and the arrows?" he asked.

She nodded reluctantly. "Yes."

He didn't for one minute believe her, but it was perfectly possible that she believed herself. "And the cave house and the furniture?"

Another reluctant nod.

He grinned. "What would happen if I touched the bow?" he asked. "Would I turn into a grasshopper?"

"Of course not," she laughed. "But if I shot an arrow at you, there's no telling what might become of you. Not," she added hurriedly, "that I'd dream of doing such a thing."

One afternoon when they were walking in the woods, they became separated and D'Arcy was unable to find her. Reasoning that she would probably head back to the cave, he set out in that direction. But although he walked fast, he saw no sign of her. By the time he reached the cave, he was half convinced that something had happened to her.

He went inside and called her name. No answer. Was she hiding on him, perhaps? Frequently she did such things; indeed, hiding on each other was one of the games they played. He looked under the sofa. He went out into the kitchen and peered behind the stove. He searched the utility room. Finally he entered the bedroom and looked under her bed. There was nothing there except one of the pairs of shoes she disdained to wear.

Straightening, he found himself staring at the door to her closet. He snapped his fingers. He'd bet any money she was hiding behind it, concealed, probably, among multicolored dresses, blouses, and skirts. Grinning, he seized the knob, intending to turn it quickly and throw the door wide open. But the knob refused to turn. Looking at it closely, he saw that it was equipped with a fingerprint-lock and that the lock had been depressed.

Frowning, he left the room. None of Jeanne Marie's other doors was equipped with a print-lock—why, then, had she chosen to make a single exception? Was it because she kept her suit of armor in the closet and didn't want him to see it? Now that he came to think of it, she had never mentioned her role in the Battle of *Fleur du Sud*. Maybe she was ashamed of what she had done.

He was inclined to doubt it, which meant he would have to look elsewhere for an answer. Then,

emerging from the cave, he saw Jeanne Marie coming out of the woods, and he was so relieved to see her and to know she was all right that he forgot all about the incident.

On another occasion when he was walking in the woods—alone, this time—he wandered into a deep, gloomy hollow and came upon two skeletons. They were stretched out side by side beneath a granite overhang and one of them—judging from its more delicate bones—was that of a woman. There were several rotted wisps of clothing in evidence, and near the man lay a small brass disk. D'Arcy picked it up. It was thickly corroded, but after scraping away the verdigris with his pocket knife, he saw that it was a Psycho-Phenomenalist identification tag. According to it, the man's name had been Alexander Kane. The name rang a bell in D'Arcy's mind, but for the life of him, he couldn't remember where he had run across it before.

It also struck a note of incongruity. On *Ciel Bleu*, as on all nationalist planets, the inhabitants bore names strictly in keeping with their common ancestry, and whatever else it might be, "Alexander Kane" wasn't French.

Before leaving the hollow, D'Arcy pocketed the disk, and when he got back to the cave, he showed it to Jeanne Marie and told her about the skeletons. "I have seen them," she said. "They have been there for many years. But I never go near them."

"Are you afraid of them?"

She shook her head. "I—I don't think so. But Rachel and Joseph have expressly forbidden me to visit that part of the forest unless I absolutely have to."

Why? D'Arcy wondered. But he didn't ask the question aloud. For one thing, he doubted very much whether Jeanne Marie knew the answer herself, and for another, he still refused to take the voices seriously and was reluctant to give them credence by discussing them. They were Smith-Kolgoz's problem anyway not his. And if not Smith-Kolgoz's—O' Riordan's.

But the problem wouldn't leave him alone, especially this new aspect of it. Why, he kept wondering over and over, should two voices in Jeanne Marie's mind—assuming there really *were* two voices in her mind—be afraid of two harmless sets of bones?

That night as he lay sleeping on the sofa, a low voice awakened him. It was O'Riordan's and its source—or at least its apparent source—was the miniature receiver-transmitter concealed in D'Arcy's wristwatch. "Two more days to go, D'Arcy. Just thought I'd remind you."

D'Arcy was incredulous, not only because O'Riordan had deigned to radio him personally but because he had lost all track of time. In one way, it seemed as though he had only been in *Le Bois Feerique* for a few days; in another, it seemed as though he had been there all his life.

"You there, D'Arcy?" O'Riordan demanded.

"Yes—yes, sir."

"Well, I'm glad to hear it," said the man in the moon. "Everything going according to schedule?"

"Yes, sir."

"Good. I'll expect to hear from you within the next forty-eight hours then. If I don't, you can expect to hear from me. And remember—before you leave, bury that bow and those arrows. Deep—and where nobody will find them."

The man in the moon signed off.

That was the end of D'Arcy's sleep for that night. When dawn came, he was still battling with his conscience, but he had it pretty well under control. In a way, he would be doing Jeanne Marie a favor by abducting her. Idyllic or not, a forest was no place for a young lady to live in. Charming or not, a cave was not a fitting habitat for a young girl. O'Riordan's arbiters were six sycophants clad in long black robes that made them look like bears and when O'Riordan said "Dance!" the bears danced; but according to the rules agreed upon at the Deimos Convention, Jeanne Marie could not be tried as a war criminal, and while O'Riordan would definitely try her for something, her sentence should be slight. And when *Ciel Bleu* was conquered—as it would be within a month—she would be turned over to an appropriate department of the new government, which would re-educate her, rehabilitate her, and find a suitable place for her in the new society.

That afternoon, he radioed the *Ambadress*, gave the coordinates of the cave, and arranged to be

picked up two hours before the next dawn belt passed over *Le Bois Feerique*. He and Jeanne Marie spent the day rambling through the woods, alternately riding St. Hermann O'Shaughnessy or walking along side by side, with St. Hermann bringing up the rear. She had packed a picnic lunch, and they ate in a woodland glen several kilometers from the cave. Curious from the beginning as to how and where she obtained her food supply, D'Arcy finally got around to asking her point-blank. He expected her to smile and say it was a secret, and that was precisely what she did.

If it hadn't been for two considerations, he would have sworn that she was capable of psycho-telluricism. But, like O'Riordan, he believed psycho-telluricism to be nothing more than a myth that the Psycho-Phenomenalist hierarchy had invented in order to frighten the enemies of the Church; and even if he had believed it to be something more than a myth, he still wouldn't have deemed Jeanne Marie capable of it, because its first prerequisite was a genius-level IQ and its second, the availability of a "parasynthetic mind" of similar IQ level with which "ideal rapprochement" could be both attained and maintained.

Darkness was beginning to gather when they got back to the cave. After putting St. Hermann O'Shaughnessy to bed, they sat down on the hillside and watched the stars come out. The "moon" rose above the horizon right on schedule. On its next pass, a moonbeam would come sliding down the dark and awesome slope of space and take D'Arcy and Jeanne Marie away.

D'Arcy tried not to think about it, only to discover that he had no volition in the matter. That night, before going to bed, he set his mental alarm-clock for two hours after midnight. Arising, he dressed in darkness; then he crept into the bedroom where Jeanne Marie lay lost in sleep in the pale radiance of the nightlight that hung above her bed. Deftly, he lifted the bow and the quiver of arrows from the bedpost. As he did so, she stirred and turned on her side, facing in his direction. He stood there tensely, not daring to move, expecting her to open her eyes at any moment. But her eyes remained closed, and presently she sighed softly, as though still deep in sleep. Relieved, he tiptoed from the room, through the living room, and out into the night.

He buried the bow and arrows in the hollow where the two skeletons lay, reasonably certain that no one ever came there. By the time he got back to the cave, the *Ambassadors* was rising above the horizon again. He sat down in front of the vine-curtain to await the arrival of the moonbeam.

He saw it presently. It was like a falling star. Down, down, it fell, drifting toward *Le Bois Feerique* now; now homing in on the co-ordinates he had supplied. At length the little craft settled down on the flower-pied terrace that bordered the brook.

The transparent nacelle opened and the pilot climbed out. Spotting D'Arcy, he came over and asked him if he needed any help. "No," D'Arcy said, and got up and went into St. Hermann O'Shaughnessy's stable and untied him. "Good bye, old buddy," he said, patting the animal on the croup. "Jeanne Marie and I are going away, and I'm afraid we won't be back."

Leaving the stable, he entered the cave-house. As he stepped into the bedroom, he thought he heard a muffled sob, but he must have been mistaken because Jeanne Marie appeared to be fast asleep. He shook her gently by the shoulder, marveling at the cool smoothness of her skin. "Get up and get dressed, Jeanne Marie," he said when she opened her eyes.

"Is something wrong, Raymond?" she asked. And then, "Where is my bow? Where are my arrows?"

"You mustn't ask questions, Jeanne Marie. You must trust me and do as I say. You do trust me, don't you?"

Her face was inscrutable in the dim radiance of the night-light. "Yes, Raymond, I trust you completely."

Hating himself, he waited while she dressed; then he led her out of the cave. It wasn't until she saw the ship-to-ground sled that she appeared to guess the truth, but he had a firm grip on her arm and when she tried to break away, she got nowhere. He forced her into the sled and sat down beside her. "I'm sorry, Jeanne Marie," he said. "I hope someday you'll try to forgive me."

She did not look at him, nor did she say a word. The pilot got behind the controls and closed the nacelle, and the little craft rose above *Le Bois Feerique* and became a moonbeam once again.

NOW HEAR THIS/NOW HEAR THIS/NOW HEAR THIS GGS AMBASSADRESS:

10 9/MONTH, 2353

SUBJECT: TRIAL AND SENTENCING OF ONE JEANNE MARIE VALCOURIS, CHARGED WITH INVOKING THE FORCES OF NATURE AND USING THEM TO SUPPLEMENT THE LEGALIZED WEAPONS OF CIVILIZED WARFARE.

FINDINGS: 1) THAT THE FORCES OF NATURE, WHEN USED AGAINST MAN, CONSTITUTE AN ACT OF GOD, AND THAT SUCH AN ACT IN THE TIME OF WAR IS CONTRARY TO THE RULES LAID DOWN BY THE DEIMOS CONVENTION; 2) THAT A CRIME OF THIS MAGNITUDE CANNOT BE ATONED FOR THROUGH ORDINARY PUNITIVE PROCEDURE; 3) THAT JEANNE MARIE VALCOURIS DID KNOWINGLY COMMIT THIS CRIME AND IS LIABLE FOR IT; AND 4) THAT THE VOICES WHICH JEANNE MARIE VALCOURIS CLAIMS TO HEAR ARE AUDIO-VISUALIZATIONS SIMILAR TO THOSE DESCRIBED BY FRANCIS GALTON, CIRCA A.D. 1883, AND HAVE NO BEARING ON HER CRIME.

SENTENCE: JEANNE MARIE VALCOURIS, HAVING STEADFASTLY REFUSED TO REVEAL TO THIS COURT THE TRUE NATURE OF THE WEAPON WHICH SHE EMPLOYED AGAINST THE 97TH INFANTRY UNIT OF DROP XVI AND THE IDENTITY OF THE PERSON OR PERSONS WHO SUPPLIED IT, SHALL, AT 0945 HOURS ON THE MORNING OF 11 9/MONTH, 2353, BE ESCORTED FROM THE AMBASSADRESS'S BRIG TO THE GREEN AND THERE BE SECURED TO A WOODEN STAKE, WHICH SHALL IN THE MEANTIME HAVE BEEN ERECTED ON THE PLAZA, AND BE BURNED ALIVE BEFORE A BATTERY OF RADIO-TELEVISION TRANSMITTERS WHICH WILL CARRY HER IMAGE AND HER SCREAMS INTO EVERY LIVING ROOM ON CIEL BLEU.

ALL OFF-DUTY PERSONNEL ARE REQUESTED TO ATTEND.

D'Arcy was horrified.

Four hours had elapsed since he had turned Jeanne Marie over to Smith-Kolgoz and he had spent them wandering about the Green, waiting for someone to remember his presence and arrange for his return to the *Watchdog*. When the incredible announcement had appeared on the plaza's teletype screen, he had been sitting under a nearby tree, thinking of *Le Bois Feerique*.

His first impulse was to storm O'Riordan's heavily guarded suite and kill the man with his bare hands. He had badly underestimated the Reorganizer's ruthlessness and his resourcefulness and he had forgotten that the laws of war, like all laws, could be manipulated to fit any and all situations and to effect whatever result the manipulator desired to bring about. Jeanne Marie had provided O'Riordan with an ideal means of bringing the inhabitants of *Ciel Bleu* to their knees, and he had intended to burn her at the stake all along, whether she revealed the secret of the bow and arrows to him or not.

But D'Arcy did not act on the impulse. To have done so would have resulted not in O'Riordan's death but his own, and Jeanne Marie would have been no better off than she had been before. His only logical course of action was to concentrate his energies on rescuing her, and this he proceeded to do.

He was already in the right place. All he had to do was to conceal himself and wait till the right moment. Night and day were strictly differentiated on the *Ambadress*, and every evening at 1800 hours the artificial sunshine that bathed the Green during the day automatically diminished itself to a pale glow that resembled starlight, and every evening at the same time, the taped birdsong that provided the sonic background for the daylight hours automatically gave way to the taped pipings and stridulations of insects. He waited till after the metamorphosis took place; then he found a secluded bower and settled down for the night, praying that his presence on board the *Ambadress* would go unremembered for at least another sixteen hours.

He did not try to sleep, but sat in stony silence, wondering why it had taken him so long to see O'Riordan for what he really was. D'Arcy's myopia was inexcusable, for he had read history, and history was full of O'Riordans. Some of them had worn deerskins and some of them had worn tunics and some of them had worn oriental raiment and some of them had worn uniforms and some of them had worn hair shirts and some of them had worn Brooks Brothers suits; but every one of them had been a member of the same fraternity and all of them had placed power on a pedestal, and the ruthless methods they had

employed to acquire it were comparable only to the ruthless methods they had employed to keep it.

Toward "dawn" D'Arcy chose a strategically located tree, climbed into its branches, and ensconced himself on a leafy limb that arched over the path down which the brig wardens would lead Jeanne Marie some three hours and forty-five minutes hence. It was his plan to wrest the girl from them, head for the nearest boat bay, board one of the escape boats, plummet to the surface of *Ciel Bleu*, and land in *Le Bois Feerique*. There he would dig up the bow and arrows and employ them in Jeanne Marie's defense. It was an ambitious undertaking to say the least, but it was the only chance he had.

At 0700 hours the ship's carpenters showed up and began erecting a wooden stake on the plaza. Around it, they piled synthetic fagots that would burn with ten times the intensity of ordinary wood. After they left, the radio-television techs came around and set up their transmitting equipment. Finally, the maintenance crew appeared, cut a vent in the "sky" directly above the stake, installed a powerful suction fan, and ran two hundred feet of intra-deck ventilation-tubing to the nearest exhaust lock. All was now in readiness for the auto-da-fe.

Toward 0900 hours the Green began to fill with O'Riordan's advisors, his arbiters, his bodyguards, his Ministers of War, his Chiefs of Staff, his Secret Police, his Civilian-Control employees, his Reorganization employees, his Intelligence agents, his personal cuisine, and his mistresses, valets, manicurists, barbers, physicians, and the off-duty members of the *Ambassadors's* crew. The atmosphere should have been one of horror. It was nothing of the sort. There was laughter and there was levity; there were dirty jokes and there were dirty digs. A male member of the reorganization corps pinched a female member of the civilian-control corps; a barber stole a kiss from a manicurist behind a weeping willow tree; a homosexual physician struck up a conversation with a homosexual chief of staff. An intelligence agent broke out a fifth of Scotch. Blessed are the sycophants and the civil-service seekers, D'Arcy thought, for they shall inherit the cosmos.

He was hungry and he was tired, and his arms and legs were cramped from clinging to the limb. But he was hardly aware of any of these things. He knew only hatred and disgust.

A little after 0900 hours O'Riordan himself appeared, flanked as always by his bodyguards. Two of the guards carried a brocaded armchair, and after the party made its way through the crowd to the edge of the plaze, the two guards set the chair on the ground and O'Riordan seated himself. He was wearing a snow-white uniform with epaulettes the color of blood and he was smoking a long cigar.

D'Arcy's hands had flattened of their own accord and turned themselves into deadly weapons. He forced them to relax; forced himself to go on clinging to the limb. His one remaining mission in life was to rescue Jeanne Marie, not to assassinate O'Riordan.

At length a silence swept the Green, and looking up the path he saw her approaching. Her light-brown hair fell in disarray about her winsome face; her gaudy peasant garb made a vivid splash of color upon the verdant background. As always, she was barefoot.

Accompanying her were three burly brig wardens armed with numbguns. D'Arcy raised himself to his hands and knees and when the quartet was directly beneath him, he sprang.

Alighting on the shoulders of the warden who was bringing up the rear, he dispatched the man with a powerful chop to the side of the neck. He was upon the second warden before the fellow had a chance to turn all the way around. He sent him crashing to the path with a sledge-hammer rabbit punch.

By this time, warden no. 3 was in the process of drawing his numbgun. D'Arcy brought a board-like hand down on the man's forearm, shattering the bone, and the numbgun went flying. Catching it with one hand, D'Arcy seized Jeanne Marie's wrist with the other. "Come on," he said, "we'll have to run for it!"

To his amazement, she held back. "Why are you still here?" she gasped. "Why weren't you returned to your own ship?"

He wondered vaguely, way in the back of his mind, how she had found out that he didn't belong on this one. But he did not pursue the mystery. "Never mind," he said. "Come on!"

"No, no—you don't understand!"

Angrily, he picked her up and slung her over his shoulder. She was surprisingly heavy for so slight a girl, but it wasn't her weight that hampered him—it was her frenzied attempts to free herself. "For heaven's sake, Jeanne Marie," he cried, "do you *want* them to burn you?"

"Yes, yes!" Abruptly she ceased struggling and went limp. "But you don't understand and I can't make you in so short a time. Oh, it's hopeless!"

He was running now. Behind him and to his left and to his right, people were shouting and screaming. Secret police popped onto the path to bar his way, but he numbgunned them down before they had a chance to bring their own weapons into play. The trees thinned out, and he came to the esplanade that bordered the administrative sector. Turning right, he pounded toward the red-lit entrance of the boat-bay corridor. After he passed through it, he and his burden were borne swiftly to their destination. Arriving in the bay, he closed the heavy emergency doors and sealed them. Until such time as they could be burned through, he and Jeanne Marie were safe.

The bay contained eighteen escape boats altogether. They stood side by side on an automatic launcher and the first one was already in position before the self-operating locks. He carried Jeanne Marie over to it and lowered her into the cockpit; then he climbed in after her and closed the nacelle. He leaned forward to inspect the controls. He glimpsed the descending wrench out of the corner of his eye. Where she had obtained it, he did not know. Probably she had found it on the seat. He had a hunch even before he tried to dodge that he was too late, and he was right. The stars that presently swam before his eyes burned almost as brightly as the stars that lay upon the face of night, and the darkness that followed them was almost as black as space.

D'Arcy had been knocked out before; consequently, when he regained consciousness a subjective second later, he suspected that objectively he had been out for a far longer period of time.

A brief survey of his surroundings more than confirmed it.

The escape boat hung like a tiny ornament on the vast Christmas tree of space. Behind it—perhaps a hundred kilometers distant—hung the larger ornament of the *Ambadress*, and backgrounding the flagship was the largest—and by far the loveliest—ornament of all: *Ciel Bleu*.

It wasn't difficult to figure out what had happened. After striking him with the wrench, Jeanne Marie had programmed a course on the a.p., climbed out of the escape boat, and launched the craft into space.

Buy why? And how had a simple peasant girl managed to carry out such a sophisticated operation?

His head ached fiercely and his thoughts kept tripping over one another's feet; nevertheless, he found an answer to the first question. Jeanne Marie had wanted to get him out of the way so that she could allow herself to be recaptured ... and burned.

He now had another "why" to contend with—a rather large and horrible one.

Like all escape boats, the one in which he had been jettisoned was equipped with a radio-television unit. The receiver was already tuned to the *Ambadress's* channel; it remained but for him to activate the screen. With trembling fingers he did so.

He recoiled. The burning was already in progress.

Frenziedly he halted the headlong flight of the escape boat and turned the craft around, all the while aware that he was acting out of blind instinct and that Jeanne Marie was beyond earthly aid.

Abruptly the screen went blank.

He fumbled with the tuning mechanism, not because he wanted to bring the hideous scene back to life, but because he felt somehow that he had to. But the screen refused to co-operate and he picked up nothing but snow.

Presently he became aware of a strange brightness. It was all around him in the cockpit, but the cockpit was not its source. Raising his eyes, he looked through the transparent nacelle ... and turned his gaze quickly away.

Where the *Ambadress* had been, a nova was in the process of being born.

Shocked, he changed the escape boat's course. The shock had a cleansing effect on his mind, and after it passed, he found himself possessed of a clarity of thought he had never known before. He took the two skeletons he had stumbled upon in *Le Bois Ferrique* and tied them in with the voices Jeanne Marie's mind. Then, for the sake of deduction, he assumed not only that the Psycho-Phenomenalist hierarchs had really developed psycho-telluricism but that they had used it as a stepping stone to yet another mental milestone: the ability to concentrate awareness and will in the intellect and achieve a sort

of transcendent existence, or ens; and to separate the ens from the flesh.

It was common knowledge that when O'Riordan had overthrown the terrestrial Psycho-Phenomenalist Church, he had employed radiation guns to destroy its hierarchs. It was also common knowledge that a few of the hierarchs, although fatally burned, had managed to escape to the outlying planets of the pre-reorganization empire where Psycho-Phenomenalism had obtained a firm if primitive, foothold. O'Riordan had never pursued them for the simple reason that to all intents and purposes, they were already dead.

Having proceeded thus far, it was now a simple matter for D'Arcy to remember who Alexander Kane was—or rather, who he had been. He was one of the hierarchs who had escaped—and his wife, Priscilla Kane, had escaped with him.

It was now possible to piece together what must have happened. Arriving on *Ciel Bleu*, Alexander and Priscilla had known that they had but a few days to live and that consequently their only means of thwarting O'Riordan and bringing about his eventual defeat was through their entia. This meant that they would have to find a host, because their entia were capable of moving only a limited distance through space, and even though capable of telepathy, incapable of functioning effectively without eyes and ears. Either Alexander or Priscilla had remembered the Joan of Arc legend, and the plan had been born. Jeanne Marie had represented an ideal host and after transforming themselves into entia, Alexander and Priscilla had abandoned their decaying bodies in *Le Bois Feerique* and taken up residence in her mind. Masquerading as her protectors, they put their plan into action. The bow and arrows they had helped Jeanne Marie make had been a decoy designed to distract O'Riordan's attention from the real Trojan Horse—Jeanne Marie—and once on board the *Ambadress*, Alexander and Priscilla had waited till the psychological moment, transformed their entia into pure energy, and blown the *Ambadress*—and themselves and Jeanne Marie—to Kingdom Come.

D'Arcy leaned forward and rested his head on the control panel. He remained in that position for a long time. At sporadic intervals, shudder after shudder racked his body. When at last the reaction passed, he straightened, and punched out the co-ordinates of *Le Bois Feerique* on the a.p. Finally he deflected the lever marked "Full Speed."

Why did D'Arcy return to *Le Bois Feerique*?

Who can say? Perhaps because he was still curious about the bow and arrows and not altogether certain that "Joseph Eleemosynary" and "Rachel de Feu" had caused the cloudburst that had washed the 97th into *Le Fleuve d'Abondance*. Perhaps because he wanted to visit Jeanne Marie's cave-house and put her things in order.

He would have had to return to *Ciel Bleu* in any event, for mere moments after the destruction of the *Ambadress*, the remainder of the demoralized fleet had departed for Earth.

He put up the bow and the arrows first. Then, leaving the escape boat in the little clearing where he had brought it down, he walked through the woods to the cave-house. Before going inside, he glanced into St. Hermann O'Shaughnessy's stable. It was empty.

The cave-house was empty too. He had expected it to be, of course, but just the same he experienced a tightness in his chest as he walked through the quaint little rooms.

He stepped softly into the bedroom. He looked at the empty bed. "Forgive me, Jeanne Marie," he whispered.

Suddenly he noticed that the door he had tried in vain to open a week ago was no longer closed. But it did not lead to a closet. It led to another room.

Wonderingly, he stepped through the doorway. The room was almost identical to the one he had just left. There was a bed, a vanity, a chest of drawers; a little throwrug upon the floor ... Had Jeanne Marie had a twin sister perhaps?

No, not a twin *sister* ...

D'Arcy already knew the truth when he stepped out of the cave-house into the morning sunlight and saw the girl on horseback emerging from the woods on the opposite side of the brook. When she got her eyes on him, her face lit up like a little sun, and she sent the black stallion plunging through the stream and slid from his back the moment he reached the bank. St. Hermann O'Shaughnessy nickered a happy hello

and Jeanne Marie cried, "Raymond, you came back! Be—before Joseph and Rachel went away with you, they said you probably would, but I was afraid you might not, and oh, Raymond, I'm so glad to see you again!"

D'Arcy's voice wasn't quite as steady as he would have liked it to be. "Then you're not mad at me for—for—"

"For stealing my doll? Of course I'm not. Joseph and Rachel said that it was all part of the plan—that was why they had me put it in my bed that night and hide in the other room. I didn't know then what the doll really was, or what they were going to do. Will—will they be back, do you think?"

D'Arcy shook his head. "No, Jeanne Marie."

Tears trembled in the corners of her eyes and one of them escaped and twinkled down her cheek. "I am sorry. They were very nice."

"Yes," D'Arcy said, "and very brave."

Brave, yes—but not quite as omnipotent as he had thought. The doll that they had brought to life had been the bomb—not they themselves. They had merely been the detonator.

"Before they left my mind," Jeanne Marie said, "they made me promise them something." She selected an arrow from the quiver and placed it in D'Arcy's right hand "They told me that if you came back, I should have you shoot this arrow into the air. They said that that was part of the plan, too, only they didn't say 'plan' then—they said 'plot.'"

"All right," D'Arcy said, "I will."

And he did. The arrow went up and up and up ... and then it turned around and came streaking straight back toward him. He leaped to one side, but it merely made the necessary adjustments in its course to reach its predetermined target. He felt nothing as it entered his chest and penetrated his heart. Nothing he could put his finger on, anyway.

Abruptly the bow disintegrated and disappeared. So did the arrow transfixed in his heart. So did the rest of the arrows.

When next D'Arcy looked at Jeanne Marie, he saw a beautiful woman instead of a pretty girl—the very woman for whom he had been searching all his life and had never been able to find. Before he knew what had happened, she was in his arms and he was kissing her.

"Joseph Eleemosynary" and "Rachel de Feu" had believed in happy endings.