



## **Out of the Silence**

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**About Cox:**

Erle Cox (15 August 1873 – 20 November 1950) was an Australian journalist and science fiction writer. Cox was born at Emerald Hill, Victoria, on August 15th, 1873, the second son of Ross Cox, who had emigrated from his native Dublin as a youth during the early gold rush days of the 1850s. He was educated at Castlemaine Grammar School and Melbourne Grammar School. In 1921, Cox joined the editorial staff of The Argus newspaper as a writer of special articles and book reviewer; later he was the principle movie critic. In 1946 he joined the staff of The Age. Cox died in 1950 after a long illness. Source: Wikipedia

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## Prologue

There was a man seated at a table in what appeared to be a vast physical laboratory. On the table, which was littered with instruments and apparatus, stood a large glass tank in which a fish could be seen swimming. The silence was broken only by occasional movements of the man utterly absorbed in the work he was doing.

Of the many striking features of the room, the man himself was the most remarkable. Even seated, his unusual height was apparent. It was the face however that marked him as one apart. His hair was sparse, and beneath the high wide forehead were set cold grey penetrating eyes from which human emotion seemed absent. Beneath the thin straight nose was a mouth that formed a straight lipless line. Every feature down to the strong chin was clear cut and regular. It was a face that inspired a feeling of awe. Even in repose he seemed to radiate power.

Behind him, the further wall of the room was formed of one great window, set in a wall so thick that its low sill formed a seat. Through it could be seen a broad valley through which a river flowed. Beyond in the distant background stood a vast structure in the shape of a sphere, set on a cubical base.

Intent on his work, with his long slender fingers moving with delicate precision among the instruments before him, the man seemed oblivious to the entrance of a woman, who paused with an expression of surprise on her face when she saw him. For a moment she seemed about to speak, but with a faint smile and shrug of her shoulders she crossed the room and took her place at another table.

Any other but the man with the fish might well have been aroused by the presence of the newcomer. She was as exquisitely lovely and feminine as he was forbidding and masculine. Her long simple gown, caught at the waist by a pliant metal band made her appear taller than she was. As she crossed the room the grace of her movement seemed floating rather than walking. She was a figure of radiant youth and glorious beauty that could hold mankind spellbound.

For a few moments after she seated herself she looked speculatively at the man with the fish, then turning to her work, her hands moved among some mechanism before her. As she did so a large dark disc standing in front of the table glowed with a yellow light across which strange characters in rows began to move. Occasionally with a touch of her hand, she halted them to make a note, but for an hour she sat, with her eyes intent on the disc—until suddenly the silence was broken by the

clear note of a bell. In response to a swift movement of her hand, the colour of the disc changed from yellow to blue, and was again covered with moving characters. Eagerly she watched until, on the second sound of the bell, she shut off the light.

Leaning back in her chair, a slow smile of amusement crossed her face as she looked over at the other table.

"How long will it take you to discover the utmost capabilities of that fish's brain, Andax?" she asked.

If the man heard, he gave no sign. The smile broke into a light laugh, and the woman turned slightly to a large screen beside her, beneath which, on its frame were several rows of light bulbs. Then she pulled over a small switch on the table.

Then her clear voice rang through the room with a note of command.

"General Call! By order of the High Council."

As she spoke the bulbs along the frame began to glow until all responded but one. She watched the dull bulb impatiently and repeated more emphatically.

"General Call! By order of the High Council." As she spoke the last bulb responded.

As it did so her voice rang out again, "General Call, Earani, director of the central geophysical station reports on behalf of the Council. Polar observation stations announce steady and progressive deflection from terrestrial stability. Last observation, 2.33 a.m., shows variation of 2,000 feet. Vast fissures are growing over both polar ice caps. Estimated duration of life on the planet, 43 days. First audible indications of disruption detected at general Station No. 7 at midnight last night. Council orders that until further instructions all work on the planet will go forward as usual. No exceptions will be granted."

"High Council Order No. 2. Volunteers are called to fill mortality wastage at polar stations at the probable rate of 100 per day. Volunteers will report at station No. 16 with full polar equipment. Order and report closes."

As the lights on the frame faded the woman pulled over another switch and spoke sharply—"Special call Station 11." As she spoke the screen glowed and on it appeared the figure of a young man.

"Name?" she demanded.

"Bardon," came the answer.

"Bardon the poet?"

"Yes."

"Explain 30 seconds' delay in answering a general call."

"I was writing a poem."

"You know the regulations, you are in charge of a station. You know the penalty?"

"Yes!"

"Report to your district executive committee at midday tomorrow. They will deal with you. I will send a relief."

She switched off the light as she spoke and the figure vanished.

From across the room came a cold ironical voice—"Flat dereliction of duty, Earani. You should have turned the ray on him."

Earani laughed lightly. "If anyone deserves the ray it is the man or woman who put a poet in charge of a general call station. Besides, since we will all be dead in 43 days I see no object in official executions."

"Still," Andax persisted, "the council's order said all work must go forward as usual."

There was a touch of hauteur in her voice as she replied. "I exercise my official right of discretion. Anyone but one of your breed would know that one of Bardon's poems is worth the 43 days of life left to the planet."

There was a contemptuous "Humph!" from the fish table.

Earani laughed and imitated the "Humph!" perfectly. "If it comes to dereliction of duty, Andax, how is it that I find you in my department and not in your own?"

"Those audible indications of disruption. Your department is insulated—mine is not."

Earani left her table and walked quietly to the window where she sat looking over the landscape. "If I used my authority of the ray, does it occur to you, that you too, have made yourself liable to its application?"

"As always, you are right," Andax answered without looking around. "Don't allow my feelings to violate your strict sense of duty."

"Get back to your fish, Andax," she retorted. "You and it make a fine cold blooded pair."

The grating voice came back. "I hold a theory that all of the ills that have beset humanity arise from a feminine influence that distracted the Creator when He was making the Universe."

"Judging by what women have suffered from men ever since, I should not be surprised if you were right."

"My fish has one charm, at any rate, that is denied your suffering sex."

"Flatterer!" she laughed, "Don't be shy and spoil the compliment by leaving it incomplete."

"The fish, dear lady, has the virtue of being inarticulate."

Earant looked at the bent figure and said slowly and with conviction. "Somewhere in the world, my dear Andax, there must be a woman who does not realise the happiness she enjoys through your being a bachelor. You can see our world end with the comforting thought that you have made at least one woman happy."

"Stars in heaven! How can a man work?" He stood up and walked over to her. Earani gazed out over the landscape disregarding his approach.

Andax towered over her. "Listen Earani," he spoke abruptly and emphatically. "There are 43 days left. More than time for the operation and recovery."

Without turning her head, Earani uttered a decisive "No."

As she spoke Marnia entered the laboratory, without speaking to the others she seated herself at Earani's table and read through the notes that Earani had made.

Andax took up the tale. "But the whole thing is so simple. It could be done tonight."

She turned and looked up at him defiantly. "When you first asked me two years ago to allow you to graft one lobe of your precious brother's brain onto mine, I refused, I have refused twenty times since. Do you imagine with but 43 days left I would submit to such an infliction. I don't wish to end life with a mind like yours or your brother's."

"You women!" he sniffed impatiently, "can't you see that what before was merely an experiment is now an imperative necessity."

"I can see no imperative necessity to gratify your wish to convert me into a feminine semi-Andax," she said derisively.

"Can't you realise that you will be chosen to occupy the third sphere?" he demanded.

"I?" Earani stood abruptly, facing him with amazement.

"Yes! You!" he retorted impatiently. "Since one of the three must be a woman, the Council is left with no option."

"But," she exclaimed. "The selectors recommended Marnia to the High Council."

Andax shrugged his shoulders. "True! but the fool is in love. Do you imagine the council will allow one of the three to carry a sentimental complication into the new world?"

"But Marnia—" began Earani.

Marnia rose from the table, and walking towards them interrupted—"What about Marnia?"

Earani took her hand—"Andax says that you are not to be one of the three."

The girl smiled and said gently. "He is right, Earani. I could not bear to stay behind and leave Davos. I petitioned the Council. It is not officially announced, but I know they have agreed. Do you mind very much?"

"But I have heard nothing," protested Earani.

"I have only just heard myself," explained Marnia. "I came to warn you, but Andax has forestalled me. How he knew, I don't know. The decision was made less than an hour ago."

There was a thin smile on Andax's lips as he said, "I knew nothing officially. But the fact was obvious."

"Pure Andaxian speculative philosophy," laughed Marnia.

"Well," sneered Andax, "seeing that you and Davos have done everything but announce your insensate infatuation by a general call, the deduction did not impose a great strain on my pure Andaxian speculative philosophy."

"But why me?" asked Earani helplessly.

"Because," Andax threw his arms wide, "the Creator and the Council in its wisdom only know why, they have insisted on choosing a woman to be one of the three."

"To clip your wings in the bright new world if there ever be one," taunted Marnia.

"But there are others!" exclaimed Earani. "There must be others!"

There was a scarcely veiled sneer in the voice of Andax. "A becoming modesty Earani. However, since you have done biology, geophysics, law, engineering and domestic science, you will do as well as another. Besides the selectors placed your name second on the list—drew them by lot I suppose."

Marnia put her arm fondly round Earani's waist. "What a delightful companion he will be for you in the new world," she laughed merrily.

"You poor, gland-ridden automaton," his thin smile took the sting from the words. Then he turned abruptly to Earani. "Well what about the operation now?"

"Now less than ever," she answered in a tone that closed the discussion. As she spoke she resumed her seat on the window ledge.

There was blistering contempt in Andax's voice. "A woman and a fool, a useful fool I admit, but never anything else than a woman."

He turned and walked towards her table, as he did so Davos entered.

Marnia uttered a joyful "Davos!" and ran to meet him. "You have heard? I am reprieved."

"Yes, I know, I know." Davos put his arm across her shoulder. "We go together." Then turning to Andax he went on. "I would not settle down to work, Andax, you and your fish will be parted almost immediately."

Earani who had been watching them from the window, broke in. "What dreadful partings this calamity will cause. You had better kiss it, Andax."

Disregarding the taunt, Andax turned to Davos. "You mean?"

Davos nodded his head. "The High Council is in session. You and Earani are bound to be summoned almost at once. Your partner in the spheres, Mardon, has already been notified. His speed ship is due almost at any moment."

Davos, his arm still about Marnia's shoulders, walked with her towards Earani's table where they stood whispering together; Earani turned away gazing through the window at the distant sphere. Andax looked from one to the other with an expression between boredom and amusement.

Then with a gesture of impatience he barked at Davos. "Perhaps, Davos, you can spare me a moment from the contemplation of the delights of an impending violent death with Marnia to supply me with some official information."

The three broke into laughter.

"One thing I admire in your breed," said Earani, "is its unfailing tact and consideration for the feelings of others."

Davos bowed to him ironically. "Surely there is no information that a Davos can give an Andax?"

"Spare my humility," snapped Andax. "Perhaps you can tell me if the allocation of the spheres has been decided."

Davos waved his hand in the direction of the sphere in the window. "Yes, Earani goes to number one, you take number two, and Mardon will have number three."

"Hump!" Andax turned to Earani. "This means that we will be sealed up almost immediately. The council will take no risks now that the time is so short." Then to Davos, "Have you heard anything?"

Davos paused before replying and looked speculatively at Earani.

She understood his hesitation. "Don't worry about my feelings, Davos," she smiled. "I am very interested and not very anxious."

"Well," replied Davos, "number one will be sealed tomorrow at mid-day. You go north tomorrow night, and Mardon leaves for number three this evening."



"Not losing any time now, are they?" commented Andax. Then abruptly to Davos. "What is the estimate of you and your committee of geniuses. Have you finished wrangling and guessing yet?"

Davos shrugged his shoulders. "The only wrangling in the committee was done by that delightful brother of yours, Andax. I sometimes feel convinced that his manners are worse than yours."

Andax snorted—"I'm not asking for fulsome flattery, but for information."

"Well, since you ask so nicely," replied Davos, "the committee is of the opinion after weighing every factor, that at least twenty seven million years must elapse before the planet is fit for intelligent human civilisation again."

Andax smiled across to the window. "It seems, Earani, that we are about to enjoy quite a long rest."

"Yes," said the girl quietly, "but if we come through it will be worth it."

"Yes," Andax murmured. "If!" For the moment he shed his arrogance. "Scientifically, mathematically and theoretically, the plan is perfect."

"Well," broke in Marnia, "I don't envy either of you even if it does succeed."

"The only flaw is that the spheres may not stand the strain of the final smash," put in Davos.

"Stars in heaven," Andax exclaimed, his grey eyes flashing enthusiasm. "It is worth a thousand times the risk. Think of the glory of having a new world to play with, and to mould how we wish."

Davos laughed as he replied. "Anyway we have one advantage you two will not enjoy. It will be a unique experience to witness the final smash."

"A pity to miss it," Andax agreed grudgingly. "But we cannot have both."

From the window Earani spoke. "A flying courier has just landed at the door. The summons, I expect."

A moment later a courier in tight-fitting flying kit entered. He included the four in a general salute. "By command of the High Council. Andax and Earani will wait on the Council without delay."

He bowed and retired.

Earani arose from her seat. "Come with us, Marnia—to the door of the chamber, at least," and the four followed the courier.

It was a vast majestic hall in which the High Council sat on a raised dais at its further end. Down its centre from the entrance ran a wide carpeted passage. From this passage on either side rose galleries crowded

with silent spectators. The President who occupied the central seat on the platform was a tall stately man with a calm and benevolent appearance. The four councillors who sat on either side of him were all advanced in years. Two of them were women.

There was an atmosphere of strained expectancy over the whole assemblage as the wide doors of the great chamber slowly unfolded. All eyes were turned on the little group they revealed that waited on the threshold.

The voice of the official rang through the Hall. "Surrendering to the command of the High Council. I have the honour to present Andax, Earani and Mardon."

From an official at the foot of the dais came the command. "Enter, Andax, Earani and Mardon and learn the will of the most honourable High Council."

As the three walked slowly down the long passage all of the spectators rose and remained standing until they paused, bowing before the dais. Not until the murmur and rustle of the great gathering ceased after they had resumed their seats, did the President stand and come to the edge of the dais.

Looking down on the three, he spoke slowly and with profound earnestness. "My children, it has pleased the creator of our planet to permit the destruction of all who dwell upon its surface. That moment, long foretold, is upon us. But in the hope that all of the achievements of our race for the happiness of humanity may not vanish utterly with them, we have resolved on an expedient whereby they may hand down the wisdom of our race to that, which, in the fullness of time, may follow us."

"On you three, my children, has fallen that grave and terrible trust. It may be, for our eyes are blinded to the outcome, that you face events beside which the death that shadows the planet will be a very small thing. We know none among us fears death. But, what the future holds for you, none may say. Therefore I charge you, if your hearts be not firm in their purpose, you may now retire from it in peace and honour, and with the goodwill of your fellows—none hindering or none blaming.

"Speak now, each one of you."

The voice of Andax echoed through the chamber. "I take the trust upon me for the honour of the race."

Earani's clear sweet voice followed. "And I for the love of humanity."

From Mardon came. "I gladly and willingly accept the trust with which I am honoured."

A low whispering murmur that swept over the assembled throng was stilled by a motion of the President's hand.

Again he spoke. "In the name of our race the High Council commends you and accepts the sacrifice.

"My children, from this moment you surrender yourselves to the will of the High Council. I charge you in the knowledge that any deviation from the way of honour will call down upon you its own penalty of atonement, that you will carry out in all things the plans of our race in which you have been instructed. In the discharge of the trust you have assumed there must be no thought of self, and should the time come, there will be no swerving from the course laid down, nor any shrinking from the tasks, however terrible, to bring peace, wisdom and happiness to those who may follow us."

He paused. "Kneel, my children!"

Quietly the three sank to their knees.

Looking down on them the President went on. "Raise your hands and repeat after me my words.—I swear on the faith of my creator—upon the honour of my name—and by my loyalty to my fellowship of the race that is about to die—that I will never, by word or deed—betray the trust that is imposed upon me. I swear unwavering loyalty to my ideals, and to the two partners who share my trust—and for them, if need be, I will lay down my life."

So still was the hushed hall as the three voices followed that of the President, that it might have been empty.

The old man raised his hands in benediction over them. "The blessing and love and the hopes of the dying race be upon you; may they make strong your hearts and purposes; and may you be guided in wisdom justice and honour in the days of your trust."

As he returned to his seat the three stood up, still facing the Council.

A woman councillor on the right of the President stood and addressed them, her voice trembling a little as she began.

"Earani, it is the will of the High Council that at noon tomorrow you surrender yourself at the sphere known as number one, and there you will be given oblivion.

"Andax, by sunset tomorrow night you will leave for your post at number two sphere, and there surrender yourself to the district council.

"Mardon, within the hour you will depart for number three sphere where the Western Council awaits you—and may grace and strength go with you all," she added solemnly.

The three bowed to the Council, and turning passed down the passage between the silent throng that rose in their honour.

Outside the hall as the doors closed behind them Davos and Marnia hurried to meet the three in the hope that they would pass the evening with them. Mardon excused himself, pleading the order for his immediate departure.

"But you will come with us, Andax," begged Marnia.

He shook his head and came as near to laughter as Andax ever came. "No, Marnia, No. You three go and indulge in an orgy of sentiment. I would spoil it.

"But what will you do?" she asked anxiously. "Go back to my fish, dear lady," and he went.

# Chapter 1

BRYCE brought his car to a stop in front of the deep verandah of the homestead, and, before getting out, let his eyes search the vivid green of the vines for the owner. The day was savagely hot, and the sun, striking down from the cloudless blue-white sky, seemed to have brought all life and motion to a standstill. There was no sign of Dundas amongst the green sea of foliage. Now and then a dust devil whirled up a handful of dried grass and leaves, but seemed too tired to do more.

Bryce strolled to the end of the verandah and peered through the leaves of the trellised vine that shaded it. Some 200 yards away, in a slight hollow, he noticed a large pile of dusty red clay that added a new note to the yellow colour scheme. Even as he watched he caught a momentary flash of steel above the clay, and at the same instant there was a fleeting glimpse of the crown of a Panama hat. "Great Scott!" he murmured. "Mad—mad as a hatter." He turned rapidly off the verandah, and approached the spot unheard and unseen, and watched for a few moments without a word. The man in the trench had his back turned to Bryce. He was stripped to singlet and blue dungaree trousers, which clung to the figure dripping with perspiration.

"Alan, old chap, what is it? Gentle exercise on an empty stomach, eh?" The pick came down with an extra thump, and the worker turned with a smile. "Bryce! By the powers!" Then with a laugh: "I'll own up to the empty stomach," and, holding out a strong brown hand, he said: "You'll stop to lunch, old man?" Bryce nodded. "Might take the cheek out of you if I say that was partly my reason for calling in." Dundas only grinned; he knew just how much of the remark was in earnest. "I am very sorry, Hector, but I am 'batching' it again, so it's only a scratch feed."

"You unfortunate young beggar; what's become of the last housekeeper? Thought she was a fixture. Not eloped, I hope?" They had turned towards the house. "Wish to glory she had," was Alan's heartfelt comment. "Upon my word, Bryce, I'm sick of women. I mean the housekeeping ones. When they are cold enough to be suitable for young unattached bachelors, and have settled characters, those characters are devilish bad.

The last beauty went on a gorgeous jamboree for four days. I don't even know now where she got the joy-producer."

"Well?" queried Bryce, with some interest, as Dundas paused.

"Oh, nothing much. I just waited until she was pretty sober. Loaded her and her outfit into the dogcart, and by Jove," with a reminiscent chuckle, "she was properly sober when I got to the township and consigned her to Melbourne. Billy B.B. was in topping good form, and tried to climb trees on the way in."

"But, Dun, this is all very well," said Bryce, laughing. "You can't go on 'baching.' You must get another."

"No, I'm hanged if I do. The old 'uns are rotters, and, save me, Hector, what meat for the cats in the district if I took a young one."

"I'm afraid it would take more than me to save you if you did," said Bryce, laughing at the idea.

They had reached the house. Dundas ushered his friend in. "You make yourself comfy here while I straighten myself, and look after the tucker."

Bryce stretched himself on the cane lounge, and glanced round the room. It was a room he knew well. The largest of four that had formed the homestead that had originally been built as an out-station, when the township of Glen Cairn had got its name from the original holding, long since cut up. It was essentially a man's room, without a single feminine touch. Over the high wooden mantel were racked a fine double-barrelled breechloader and a light sporting rifle, and the care with which they were kept showed that they were not there as ornaments.

The walls held only three pictures. Over the cupboard that acted as a sideboard hung a fine photogravure of Delaroche's "Napoleon," meditating on his abdication, and the other two were landscapes that had come from Alan's old home. From the same source, too, had come the curious array of Oriental knives that filled the space between the door and the window. What, however, attracted most attention was the collection of books that filled the greater part of two sides of the room, their shelves reaching almost to the low ceiling.

The furniture was simplicity itself. Besides the sideboard, there were a table and three chairs, with an armchair on each side of the fireplace. The cane lounge on which Bryce was seated completed the inventory. Above the lounge on a special shelf by itself was a violin in its case. To a woman, the uncurtained windows and bare floor would have been intolerable, but the housekeeping man had discovered that bare essentials meant the least work.

Presently a voice came from the kitchen. "Hector, old man, there's a domestic calamity. Flies have established a protectorate over the mutton, so it's got to be bacon and eggs, and fried potatoes. How many eggs can you manage?"

"Make it two, Dun; I'm hungry," answered Bryce.

"Man, you don't know the meaning of the word if two will be enough." Five minutes later he appeared with a cloth over his shoulder and his arms full of crockery.

A thought of his wife's horror at such simplicity flashed through Bryce's mind. "You're a luxurious animal, Alan, using a table cloth. Why, I don't know any of the other fellows who indulge in such elegance. Or am I to feel specially honoured?"

"No, Bryce; the fact is that I know that a man is apt to become slack living bachelor fashion," returned Dundas seriously, "so I make it a rule always to use a table cloth, and, moreover," he went on, as if recounting the magnificent ceremonial of a regal menage, "I never sit down to a meal in my shirt sleeves. Oh, Lord! the potatoes!"

With two dishes nicely balanced, Dundas arrived back again, and after another journey for a mighty teapot, he called Bryce up to the table. To an epicure, bacon and eggs backed by fried potatoes, for a midday meal with the thermometer at 112 deg. in the shade, may sound a little startling, but then, epicures rarely work, and the matter is beyond their comprehension. Bryce stared at the large dish with upraised hands. "Man, what have you done? I asked for two."

"Dinna fash yersel', laddie," answered Dundas mildly. "I've been heaving the pick in that hole since 7 o'clock this morning, and it makes one peckish. The other six are for my noble self. Does it occur to you, Bryce, that had I not scrapped an unpromising career at the bar, I might also have regarded this meal as a carefully studied attempt at suicide?"

"Humph! perhaps—I believe you did the best thing though, and I own up that I thought you demented then."

"Lord! How the heathen did rage."

"True. But don't you ever regret or feel lonely?"

"Nary a regret, and as far as for the loneliness, I rather like it. That reminds me. I had George MacArthur out here for a week lately. He said he wanted the simple life, so I put him hoeing vines. More tea? No? Then, gentlemen, you may smoke." Dundas reached for a pipe from beneath the mantel, and then swung himself into an armchair, while Bryce returned to the comfort of the creaking lounge.

"By the way, Alan," said Bryce, pricking his cigar with scientific care, "you haven't told me the object of your insane energy in that condemned clayhole." Dundas was eyeing the cigar with disfavour. "I can't understand a man smoking those things when he can get a good honest pipe. Oh, all right, I don't want to start a wrangle. About the condemned clayhole. Well, the fool who built this mansion of mine built it half a mile from the river, and that means that in summer I must either take the water to the horses or the horses to the water, and both operations are a dashed nuisance. Now observe. That condemned clayhole is to be ultimately an excellent waterhole that will save me a deuce of a lot of trouble. Therefore, as Miss Carilona Wilhelmina Amelia Skeggs so elegantly puts it, you found me 'all a muck of sweat.'"

"Yes, but my dear chap, you can afford to get it done for you."

"In a way you are right, Hec, but then I can't afford to pay a man to do work that I can do myself."

"Don't blame you, Alan." Then, after a pause, and watching him keenly: "Why don't you get married?"

Dundas jerked himself straight in his chair, the lighted match still in his fingers. "Great Scott, Bryce! What's that got to do with waterholes?" The utter irrelevance of the question made Bryce laugh. "Nothing, old chap—nothing. Only it just came to my mind as I was lying here." Lying was a good word, had Dundas only known. "You know," he went on, "there are plenty of nice girls in the district."

"You are not suggesting polygamy, by any chance?" countered Alan serenely from his chair, having recovered from the shock of the unexpected question.

"Don't be an ass, Alan. I only suggested a good thing for yourself."

"Can't you see the force of your argument, Hector, that because there are plenty of nice girls in the district (I'll admit that) I should marry one of them."

"You might do a dashed sight worse."

"You mean I mightn't marry her?"

"You Rabelaisian young devil! I'll shy something at you in a minute if you don't talk sense."

"Well, look. If you want reasons I'll give you some. First, for the same reason that I cannot afford a pumping plant. Now do shut up and let me speak. I know the gag about what will keep one keeping two. It's all tosh. Secondly, I wouldn't ask any nice girl to live in this solitude, even if she were willing. Third—do you want any more? Well, if I got married I would have to extend and rebuild this place." Then he quietened down,



and said seriously, "I know what you mean, Hector; but those," pointing to the books, "are all the wife I want just now."

Bryce smiled. "By jove, Alan, who's talking polygamy now? There are about six hundred of them."

"Oh!" answered Alan serenely. "I'm only really married to about six of them. All the rest are merely 'porcupines,' as the Sunday school kid said."

"Alan, my son, I'll really have to consult the Reverend John Harvey Pook about your morals, and get him to come and discourse with you."

"Lord forbid!" said Dundas piously. "That reminds me. I told you I had George MacArthur here for a week, living the simple life. Well, he was never out of his pyjamas from the day he arrived till the day he left. However, one afternoon while I was taking the horses to water, who should arrive but the Reverend John Harvey and Mamma and Bella Pook, hunting for a subscription for a tea-fight of some sort. Anyhow when I got back the noble George was giving them afternoon tea on the verandah. Just apologised for being found in evening dress in the day time."

"Humph!" commented Bryce, "did Pook get anything?"

"Well, I paid a guinea just to get rid of them. George was making the pace too hot," replied Dundas. "Pook nearly fell over himself when George came to light with a tenner."

Bryce smoked a few minutes, watching Alan through the cloud. "Why did you get MacArthur down here?" Dundas, who had been gazing off through the window, spoke without turning his head. "Oh, various reasons. You know I like him immensely in spite of his idiosyncrasies. He's no end of a good sort. It's not his fault that he has more thousands a year than most men have fifties. He lived a godly, upright, and sober life the week he was here. Pity he doesn't take up a hobby of some sort— books or art collecting or something of the kind."

"I'm afraid an old master is less in his line than a young mistress," said Bryce sourly.

Dundas looked around, wide-eyed. "Jove, Hector, that remark sounds almost feminine."

Bryce chuckled. "You must have a queer set of lady friends if that's the way they talk."

"Oh, you owl! I meant the spirit and not the letter. Anyhow, what's MacArthur been doing to get on your nerves? You are not usually nasty for nothing."

"You've not seen him since he left?"

"No, I've not been near Glen Cairn or the delights of the club. Been too busy. Anyhow, you don't usually take notice of the district scandal either."

Bryce stared thoughtfully at the ash of the cigar he turned in his fingers. "Well, if you will have it. Here are the facts, the alleged facts, club gossip, tennis-court gossip, also information collected by Doris. The night after he left you, George MacArthur filled himself with assorted liquors. Went down with a few friends to the Star and Garter (why the deuce he didn't stay at the club I don't know). He made a throne in one of the sitting-rooms, by placing a chair on the table. On the throne he seated a barmaid—I'm told it was the fat one (Perhaps you can recognise her from the description). Then he removed a leg from another chair and gave it to her as a sceptre. I believe, although statements differ, he made them hail her as the chaste goddess Diana. Rickardson tells me that, as a temporary revival of paganism, it was a huge success."

Alan's frown deepened as the recital went on. "Bryce, how much of the yarn is true? You know the value of the confounded gossip of the town."

"I've given you the accepted version," said Bryce slowly.

Alan, still staring through the window, said, a little bitterly, "I suppose the verdict is Guilty? No trial, as usual."

"The evidence is fairly conclusive in this case," answered Bryce. He was watching Dundas keenly. Then he went on, in a slow, even voice, "I saw Marian Seymour cut him dead yesterday." Then only he turned his eyes away as Alan swung round. For a moment he made as if to speak, but thought better of it.

Bryce heaved himself out of his lounge. "Well, Alan, we won't mend the morals of the community by talking about them. You'll come over to dinner on Sunday, of course?"

Alan stood up. "Jove, Hector, that will be something to look forward to. Tell Mistress Doris I'll bring along my best appetite."

Bryce laughed. "If I tell of your performance on the eggs to-day I'd better forget that part of the message. You had better break the news of the calamity yourself. Phew! What a devil of a day! Surely you won't go back to that infernal work?"

"You bet I do! I've taken twice my usual lunch time in your honour. Aren't you afraid some of the gilded youths on your staff will do a bunk with the bank's reserve cash if you are not there to sit on it?"

"Not one of 'em has as the bowels to do a bunk, as you so prettily put it, with a stale bun. You can thank your neighbour, Denis McCarthy, for this infliction. I had to pay him a visit."

"Humph! It's about the only thing I've ever had occasion to feel genuinely thankful to him for. You found him beastly sober, as usual?"

"Well," said Bryce grimly, "I found him beastly and I left him sober. Yes, very sober. Thank goodness that finishes the last of my predecessor's errors in judgment." He stooped to crank up his car. "Goodbye, Alan; don't overdo it." He backed and turned in the narrow drive before the verandah, while Dundas stood and made caustic comments on the steering in particular and motor cars in general. The last he heard was a wild threat of "having the law agin' him" if he broke so much as a single vine-cane.

## Chapter 2

IN a long white robe before the mirror of her dressing table Doris Bryce stood flashing a silver-backed brush through her long, thick hair. Her lord and alleged master had already reached the stage of peace and pyjamas, and was lying with his head already pillowed. There was rather more than the shadow of a frown on the comely face of Doris, which, Bryce, wise in his knowledge of his wife, affected not to see. There had been a few minute's silence, during which Doris had tried to decide for herself whether she had heard aright or not.

At last! "You really said that, Hec?"

"Yes. What difference does it make?"

"You mean to tell me you asked Alan why he didn't get married?"

"Well, I didn't ask any questions. I merely suggested that he ought to."

"Well!" said his wife, pulling a fresh handful of hair over her shoulders. "All I've got to say is that you are an absolute donkey."

"My dear girl!"

"Suppose you were fishing, and I came and threw stones beside your line?"

Said Hector soothingly: "I might say, dear, that your action was ill-advised." A slight shrug of her shoulders showed him that his correction was not being received in a spirit of wifely submission. "You must remember," he went on, "that I stand 'in loco parentis.'" "In loco grandmother." Doris had put down her brush, and commenced to plait one side of her hair. "Well, if you like it better, 'in loco grand-parentis.' My Latin has got a bit rusty; anyhow, I can't see for the life of me what difference it makes."

Doris disdained to answer. "Perhaps," she asked coldly, "you can remember what he said to your beautiful suggestion?"

Bryce eyed her in silence for some moments, calculating how far he might risk a jest. From experience he knew the cost of miscalculation. "I must confess," he ventured, "that his answer came as a shock. Alan owned up that he was already married." His voice had a nicely-toned seriousness.

"Hector!" Her arms dropped. "You don't mean to say—" Words failed her.

"Yes, my dear. About six wives, he was not quite sure, and several hundred porcupines. A regular young Solomon."

There was a look in Doris's eyes as she turned away that made Bryce feel that he had rather overdone it. "I think I have told you before that I do not want to hear any of the club jokes. I suppose that is meant for one." Her voice was anything but reassuring. "Perhaps you will tell me what you mean."

"Well to tell the truth, Doris, he didn't seem to take kindly to the idea."

"Not likely when it was pelted at him like that," was his wife's comment. She stared at her reflection thoughtfully. "He will come in to dinner on Sunday, I hope?"

"Yes, of course," answered Bryce, pleased to be able to give one answer that might mollify a somewhat irritated wife.

"Ah, well, I have invited Marian Seymour to dinner on Sunday as well. I told her you would drive out and bring her in in the car."

"Good idea, Doris. It will be bright moonlight in the evening, and we can go for a spin after we take her home."

Doris, who had stooped to remove her shoe, straightened up, and looked at him helplessly. "Good heavens! What a man! To think I'm married to it!" She turned up her eyes as though imploring heavenly guidance in her affliction. "Hector, if I thought there was the remotest possibility of your suggesting driving her home, I should most certainly jab your tyres full of holes. It's beyond my comprehension. They say you are the cleverest business man in the district, but in ordinary matters of domestic common sense you are just hopeless."

"Now, what in the name of all that's wonderful have I said?" asked the injured man, groping for light. "Must I put it into plain cold English?"

"Well, my good woman—"

"For goodness' sake, Hector, don't say 'good woman.' You know I hate it."

He did know, as a matter of fact, and that is why perhaps, he used the expression. "Well, Doris, may I ask you to be a little less complex?"

"A little less complex! Instruction for the young!" she said bitingly. "Alan Dundas will drive in to dinner on Sunday. Marian Seymour will be driven in by you to have dinner with us on Sunday. Do you follow that much?"

"I have already absorbed those two ideas," said Bryce mildly.

"Well, as you have already remarked, it will be bright moonlight when it is time for them to go home. Your car will have something wrong with its engine—"

"But, my dear, it hasn't anything wrong."

"It had better have then."

Bryce hastily remarked something about sparking plugs.

"Then, as I said, your car will not be fit to take Marian home in, so it will be necessary for Alan Dundas to drive Marian Seymour home, a distance of five miles—in fact, nearly six—in the moonlight, and," she concluded, "I know the seat of Alan's dog-cart is not very spacious for two. Perhaps you see now?" and she tossed her head disdainfully.

Bryce spoke slowly. "And Alan called me a Machiavelli! Good Lord! Well, as you please. These manifestations are beyond me."

That afternoon Dundas watched the dust of Bryce's car until it died away along the track, and after setting his domestic affairs in order returned to his "condemned clayhole." For some time he stood on the edge of the excavation staring thoughtfully into it, but in spite of appearances, his thoughts were far from pick and shovel. Had Doris Bryce only known, she need not have condemned her long-suffering man on her own somewhat biassed and self-satisfied feminine judgment, for Hector's sledge-hammer diplomacy had undoubtedly given the owner of 'Cootamundra' an unexpected mental jolt that for the time being had left the smooth running of his thoughts somewhat out of gear.

For a long ten minutes Alan stood and stared, then pulling himself together abruptly he scrambled down, and drawing his pick from its cover began to make up for lost time. He worked himself mercilessly in spite of the breathless, sweltering heat.

The greater part of the afternoon had gone before he paused, after clearing up the bottom, to survey the result of his labour with pardonable satisfaction, and he estimated that a couple of weeks' clear work would see his property the better for a serviceable waterhole. Then, taking up his pick, he struck heavily at a spot on the face some two feet below the surface level. The result of the blow was both unexpected and disconcerting. Hard as the clay was, and braced as his muscles were for the stroke, the jar that followed made his nerves tingle to the shoulder. The pick brought up with a loud, clear ring, while two inches of its tempered point and a fragment of clay flew off at a tangent and struck his foot. Alan swore softly, but sincerely. He picked up the broken point and examined it critically. Then he stooped and inspected the spot where the blow had taken effect. Then he swore again wholeheartedly. "Rock,

and I suppose the only rock on the whole dashed place, and I've found it." However, he was not the sort to waste his time in growling, so set to work carefully and scientifically to discover the extent of the obstacle, and the longer he worked the more puzzled he became.

His usual stopping hour passed. The shadows of the trees and homestead grew to gigantic lengths and grotesque shapes, but the rim of the sun was touching the distant timber belt before he finally flung down his tools.

In the fading light of the evening, Dundas strolled back to the hole again. He had hurried over a meal that he usually took at his leisure. He had brought with him a cold chisel and a heavy hammer, and after throwing off his coat he jumped into the excavation. There was just enough light for his work, and he selected a spot for an attack. Holding the chisel carefully against the uncovered rock, he brought the hammer down on it again and again with smashing force, bringing a flash of sparks with every blow, until at last a corner of the tool's edge snapped with a ring, and whirled into the dusk like a bullet. Alan examined the dulled and broken edge with a frown, and then peered at the spot on which he had been striking. The stone showed neither chip nor mark. Not the faintest scratch appeared on the hard glass-smooth face after a battering that would have scored and dented a steel plate. Just as wise as when he started his investigation, he returned the ruined chisel and hammer to the tool shed, and went back to the house.

The book Dundas selected lay on his lap unopened for half an hour. The pipe he lit hung between his lips, cold after a few pulls, and he stared into the dark through the open window. Finally he pulled himself together and sat up.

At last he stopped, at peace with himself and the world. Close beside him and just where the light fell from the open window, a vine shoot from the verandah had sent down a tendril, and along the tendril, doubtless attracted by the light, appeared, cautiously feeling its way, a fat black vine caterpillar. The insect arrived at the end of the tendril and reared up as if seeking assistance to continue its journey. Dundas watched it idly. With absurd persistence it reached from side to side into space. Then, speaking half aloud, (habit formed of his solitary life), he addressed his visitor.

"My friend, can you tell me this? I have to-day broken up ground that I am absolutely sure has never been broken before, and yet below the surface I have come on rock that is not rock. It is a rock that I am prepared to stake my life on came out of a human workshops and not nature's.

Perhaps you can tell me how that human handiwork comes to be embedded in virgin soil that has never been stirred since time began. No, Mr. Caterpillar, the smoothness of that rock, which is not a rock, does not come from the action of water. I thought so myself at first. No, and again, no. It is human work, and how did it get there? Give it up? Well, so do I—for the present. I'm off to bed, old chap, and I'm very much obliged for your intelligent attention."

Ten minutes later darkness and silence held the homestead.



# Chapter 3

NEXT morning Alan Dundas returned to his work with an interest he had never known before.

When he had stopped the night before, he had uncovered about two square yards of the obstacle that had broken first his pick and then his cold chisel. In colour it was a dull red, not unlike red granite, but without a trace of "grain." The surface was as smooth as glass, but it was the indication of a symmetrical shape that puzzled Dundas most. Where he had cut away the clay low down in the hole the rock sprang perpendicularly from the ground for about two feet, then from a clean, perfectly defined line it came away to form a dome. Of that he could make no mistake. Running his eye over the uncovered space, he estimated roughly that, supposing the lines continued as they appeared, he had unearthed the edge of a cylindrical construction, terminated by an almost flat dome, of some twenty-five to thirty feet in diameter. How far down the foundations might go he could not even hazard a guess.

So, filled with curiosity, he set to work, and as the hours passed the original idea of tank-sinking fled, and he worked solely to solve the mystery he had unearthed. The course he had to follow took his trench across the boundary he had first marked out, but as he worked surmise became fact. The boast he had made the day before was forgotten, and he ate his midday meal standing in his kitchen, and washed it down with a drink from his water-bag. By evening he surveyed the results of his day's work, the most perplexed man in Christendom. To follow the course of what, for want of a better name, he called the rock, he had cut around the segment of a circle of about the size of his original estimate for about twenty feet. He had made his cut about three feet wide and shoulder deep, and all round he had found the clean cut line of the spring of the flat dome as clearly defined as if it had been moulded, and every inch he had uncovered strengthened his first idea that the work was from human hands. So far as he had examined it he was absolutely at a loss to account for its purpose. It was like nothing he had ever seen or heard of,

and moreover again and again came back the certainty that the surface of the soil had been hitherto unbroken.

For a while he considered whether he should catch Billy Blue Blazes and drive into Glen Cairn to talk the matter over with Bryce, but the mystery had eaten into his soul, and in the end he determined at all costs to solve it for himself. When he had arrived at this resolution he felt a keen satisfaction in the thought that his place was so far removed from the beaten track.

It was not until late in the afternoon of the following day when the strain of the past few days was beginning to tell on his energy, that he came on the first break in the wall, and it so far revived his spirits that he redoubled his efforts until he had assured himself that the break he had come upon was the top of an arched doorway. There could be no possible doubt of that, and when he had satisfied himself on the point he set to work, tired and aching as he was, to fill in enough earth all round his trench to hide as far as possible all indications of the construction. He felt certain that the solution of the problem would come from within, and he left only enough uncovered to enable him to have easy access to the newly discovered doorway.

Eight hours of dreamless sleep banished every ache. The morning was yet very young when Alan swung his dogcart into the main street of Glen Cairn, and Billy stopped, with his forefeet in the air, before the principal store in the town. There Dundas gave orders for timber and galvanised iron. Would it be out that day? And swag-bellied Gaynor, the storekeeper, swore that Mr. Dundas's order would take precedence over all other in the matter of delivery.

Then it struck him that by driving a few miles off his homeward track he might see someone more interesting—that is, by accident.

Man proposes. Alan drove home by the long way. He irritated Billy by pulling him into as slow a pace as that bundle of nerves and springs ever assented to, but neither down the long hedged lane, nor in the curving oak-arched drive, nor yet about the white house half buried in the trees, was there any flutter of skirt or sign of her whom he sought. He was not good at fibbing, and, trying his best, he could not invent a reasonably passable excuse for a call.

And so home, all the time turning things over in his mind, till Marian Seymour first receded to the background of his thoughts and then disappeared altogether, and It took her place. "It." After days of racking toil he could find no other name for his discovery than "It." At times there flashed across his mind that there might be some simple and rational

explanation for "It," and with the thought came a sense of disappointment and depression. The feeling soon vanished, however, under analysis. Every sense of his being told him that he stood on the verge of the unknown.

When he reached 'Cootamundra' he attended to Billy's requirements, and then sought means to pass the time until the arrival of his material from Glen Cairn.

Unconsciously his feet carried him back to the excavation, and he smiled grimly at its appearance. Its original symmetrical shape had vanished. Its apparently objectless outlines and the patent fact that it had been partially refilled made it look as an effort at tank sinking about as mad as some of his theories.

Although he was itching to recommence his explorations, he had to possess his soul in patience, and it was long after noon before Gaynor's team arrived bearing the material he had ordered. Alan had the cart unloaded well away from the scene of his labours. He was taking no risks, although he felt sure that the driver's one idea would be to make his delivery and get away.

It was no light task that he had set himself. To make up for his enforced idleness of the morning he worked until the fading light made it impossible for him to continue. He had to admit to himself that as architecture the framework he had erected was beneath contempt, while a carpenter's apprentice would have snorted at his workmanship; but if it lacked all else it had strength, and would serve its purpose.

Next morning saw him working with beaver-like persistence.

But, in spite of damaged and blistered hands and raw-edged temper, the work advanced. When evening came his persistence was rewarded by an almost completed enclosure ten feet high, surrounding the spot where he had been excavating. Raw it looked, and a blot on the not too beautiful landscape, but he felt that it would serve his purpose. Another day would see it roofed and completed, and then not even the most curious visitor, known or unknown, would have sufficient curiosity to investigate what was to all appearances, nothing but a shed for storing implements or fodder.

Alan felt at the day's end that Sunday's rest, if nothing else, was a justification for Christianity. When he finally put away his tools and tramped wearily to the empty house, he told himself that until Monday morning he would empty his head of every thought of work.

## Chapter 4

DUNDAS woke late and care-free. It was ten o'clock before he had finished his leisurely breakfast, and captured and groomed Billy. Then he turned his attention to his toilet. To a man with a regard for the decencies of life, there was a deep sense of satisfaction in discarding his serviceable but unpleasantly rough working garb for more conventional clothing.

Truly clothes maketh the man. Few would have recognised in the the smart figure, clothed in spotless white from head to foot, the dungaree and flannel clad man of yesterday. As he stepped into his dogcart that morning, nineteen women out of twenty would have found Alan Dundas a man to look at more than once, although they might pretend they had never noticed him, as is their way.

Billy Blue Blazes made his own pace on the road to Glen Cairn, a privilege he was rarely granted, and made the most of it. Two miles out of the township Alan met Bryce in his car on his way to bring in the other visitor. The two exchanged hasty greetings as Billy clawed the air, and expressed his opinion on mechanical traction in unmistakable fashion. So, after stabling at the club, it was Doris alone who greeted Alan at the bank. And Doris, when she looked at him, said in her heart that her work would be good.

From her deck chair on the verandah she chaffed him for a hermit. "I suppose, Mistress Doris, that wretched man of yours has been telling tales of my menage. You know he had lunch with me last week."

"Of course, Alan, he told me that you were starving yourself, poor boy. I do hope that you have recovered your appetite."

"The traitor! He said he would do nothing to warn you of the impending catastrophe. Well, if he has to go without on my account, serve him right."

There came the hoot of a motor-horn from the street. "There's Hector now; he went out to bring us in another guest, Alan—guess?"

"I'm too lazy and contented for a mental effort." Then, after a pause, "MacArthur?"

Doris made a sound that approached a dainty sniff. "I'm not playing speaks with Mr. MacArthur," she said, a little stiffly.

"You might do worse, Mistress Doris. Give him a chance."

There came a sound of voices from the garden, and they both stood up. "Come on, Maid Marian. We'll find them on the verandah." Then the others turned the corner. Bryce greeted Alan heartily, and then turned to the girl beside him. "I've brought you a judge, jury, and executioner, Dundas. I hear you have been guilty of treason, desertion, and a few other trifling offences. It's currently reported that you were squared by the Ronga Club not to play yesterday."

Alan took the warm firm hand held out to him. "I've been executed already by Mistress Doris, Miss Seymour, you can't punish me twice for the same offence." The girl smiled as she took the chair he drew up for her. "Luckily we pulled through without you. What excuse have you?"

"Only Eve's legacy—work," he answered.

"Doris dear," said Marian, "is not the excuse as bad as the offence? A nasty slur on our sex by inference and a claim to the right to work when we want him to play."

Then, standing up: "Guilty on all counts, and remanded for sentence—until I can think of something sufficiently unpleasant to fit the crime."

"Then I can only throw myself on the mercy of the court. Make it a free pardon, Miss Seymour," said Dundas, laughing.

She regarded him with laughing eyes, and then turned to Doris. "I doubt if severity will have any lasting effect in this case. Perhaps if we extend the clemency of the court—" Then to Dundas: "Case dismissed. I hope you will not appear here again. Isn't that what father says on the bench?"

Bryce chuckled. "A disgraceful miscarriage of justice. That's what it amounts to. Coming in, Doris, nothing but his bleeding scalp would satisfy her. Now he is pardoned. It's too thick."

"Out of your own mouth, Bryce," said Alan, "a free pardon was the right course. The quality of mercy is not strained. Why? Because it's too thick."

Doris stood up. "Come and take off your hat, Marian. A constant diet of eggs has affected his mind. He's absolutely unworthy of notice."

Left to themselves Bryce and Alan settled down to a yarn that drifted from politics to town and district news, and thence to the absorbing topic of vines and crops. "How grows the waterhole?" asked Bryce after a while. Dundas was waiting for the question, and with elaborate carelessness answered briefly that he had struck rock and abandoned it. "I am

building a fodder-house on the site as a monument to my displaced energy," he went on. "I was so busy with the building that I missed coming in to town yesterday."

Bryce shook his head. "You'll overdo it, Dun."

"Hector and Alan." It was Doris's voice. "If you want any dinner you had better come now."

It was afterwards when they were at peace with the world, the one with a pipe and the other with a cigar, that Alan put the question that he had been quietly manoeuvring for.

"Can you tell me, Hec, if at any time there has been any big building work done at 'Cootamundra', or even started?"

Bryce reflected for a few moments. "I've known 'Cootamundra' now for nearly forty years, and I'm certain that, beyond the present buildings, nothing of the kind has ever been done there. Why ask?"

"Oh, nothing much," answered Dundas, fibbing carefully. "Now and again I thought I noticed traces of foundations about the place near the house."

And so the talk drifted lazily off into other channels until they were re-joined by Doris and Marian.

It was the strange behaviour of his wife that occupied Bryce's attention for the rest of the day, to the exclusion of all else. As an onlooker he thought he should have seen most of the game, and knowing the rules, or thinking he did, it was, he found, a game that he did not understand. When Marian came on the scene he prepared cheerfully to give Dundas a clear field, but to his surprise he found that every attempt was neatly foiled by his erratic spouse.

Thereafter he watched her manoeuvres with amused astonishment. It was apparent to the densest understanding that both Alan and Marian would have welcomed each other's society undiluted, and Bryce enjoyed to the utmost Alan's diplomatic but persistent efforts to "shoo" off his too attentive hostess, and her apparently unconscious disregard for his efforts.

In the end it came as a relief to be able to announce a wholly fictitious trouble with the engine of his car that threw on Alan the responsibility of delivering Marian safely at her home. It was nearly ten o'clock when Dundas brought the snorting Billy B.B. to the door of Bryce's quarters at the bank, and Marian made her hasty farewells, for Billy was never in a mood on a homeward journey to stand on four legs for two consecutive seconds.

The two watched the receding lights of the dogcart for a few minutes, and then returned to the house. Doris began to straighten some music that was lying about, while Bryce, leaning back in an easy chair, watched her thoughtfully. Presently she appeared to be aware of his scrutiny. "What's on your mind, Hec?" she asked.

"It's not what's on my mind, best beloved; it's what's in yours that is making me thoughtful," answered her husband.

Doris returned the music to its place, and sank into a chair, while Bryce, after placing a cushion for her head, took his stand in front of her, feet apart, hands in pockets. "Now, my lady, I want explanations; lots of 'em."

Doris looked up at him with a slow reminiscent smile that ended in a little gurgle. "Aren't they lovely, Hec? The dears! I'm sure Alan would have liked to shake me. Don't you think so?"

"By Jove, Doris, I wonder at his self-control! Now, listen." Here he shook an admonitory finger. "If you don't immediately explain your scandalous conduct, I'll act as Alan's deputy, and shake you till you do."

"Violence is quite unnecessary, Hec," she laughed softly. "You know it struck me this morning, that if I left them together Alan would just take things easily, and let them drift. You know I'm not altogether sure of Alan." Here she paused thoughtfully.

"And so?" persisted Bryce.

"And so," she went on, "I just teased them by not giving them a chance, because, well, suppose you dangle something a child wants just out of its reach, and then suddenly rest for a moment, the probabilities are that the child will grab when it gets the chance." Another pause.

"And you mean?" asked Hector with dawning comprehension.

"Well, there is a tantalised nice man, and a specially nice girl, and a narrow-seated dogcart, and a wonderful moon, and if the man doesn't grab—well, I don't know anything. Oh, you monster!"

Bryce's arms had swept outwards and gathered her in with one heave of his shoulders. "Oh, Hec, do let me down." He backed to his armchair, still holding her firmly until her struggles ceased. "Will you be good?" he asked. "Good as gold," she answered, with her head on his shoulder.

"It's my opinion, Doris, that you are a scandalous little schemer. Great Scott! What chance has a man against that sort of thing?"

"Do you think it will work, Hec?" passing her hand round his neck.

"Maybe—it won't be your fault if it doesn't, you imp! The only thing against it is that you forgot Billy. He is a straight-forward little animal,

whatever may be said against him, and I doubt if he will permit his owner to become a victim of your conspiracy."

"Hum—dear boy—it would take wilder horses than Billy to stop a man if he really meant business."

"Look here, Doris, I want to know, are we all treated like this? Are you and your kind really the destiny that shapes our matrimonial ends? You know it makes one nervous. I never dreamed of such depths of duplicity. What about me, for instance?"

She looked at him with shining eyes, and smiled softly. "Oh—you—well, Hec, special cases require special treatment. I've read somewhere that natives when they want to get certain very shy birds, just do something that will attract their attention and their curiosity. Then, when the bird comes to see what it is, they just put out their hands and take it. That is, if the bird is worth taking."

"So—I see—I see—I don't seem to recollect any tactics of that kind in our case, Doris, and I'm sure I would have remembered, because I have read somewhere, too, that the method adopted by the natives is to lie on their backs and twiddle their toes in the air. Now, if you had done that—" There was a brief struggle and a soft hand closed over his mouth, and the rest is of no interest to outsiders.



## Chapter 5

MEANWHILE, way down the long white road between well-ordered vineyards and scattered homesteads nestling in orchards, sped Marian and Alan behind the fretting Billy, and with them a silence that neither seemed inclined to break. There were not many women even in that district of horse-women who would have sat calmly and care-free beside Dundas, knowing Billy's reputation. Where a city-bred girl would have clung with white knuckles to the side-rail, Marian sat with loosely folded hands, letting her body sway with the swing of the dogcart. Billy's breaking-in had been peculiar. His forebears had been remarkable more for speed than for good temper. George MacArthur had acquired him as a yearling, and under that gentleman's able tuition he had developed more than one characteristic that made sitting behind him more exhilarating than safe.

MacArthur, grown tired of buying new dogcarts, sent Billy to the saleyards, and insisted that the auctioneer should read a guarantee that described Billy as perfectly sound, and an ideal horse for a lunatic or anyone contemplating suicide, and it was under this guarantee that Alan purchased for a couple of sovereigns what had originally cost MacArthur fifty guineas.

Alan used to say, when asked why he retained Billy, that to get rid of him would deprive him of the joy of a royal progress. "You have no idea how polite people are to me when B.B.B. gets moving. I've seen a dozen vehicles pull off the road the moment I came in sight, and stand still till I passed them."

Tonight Alan was driving with special care, for his freight was very precious. He felt, too, a pride in the fact that Marian had trusted herself to his care without hesitation. It was only when the first struggle was over, and Billy had settled himself into his real gait, that he turned to the girl beside him. "Now, he is not so bad as he is painted, is he?"

Marian laughed. "No horse could be as bad as Billy is painted, not even Billy himself, but he is splendid!" Then, after a pause, "but I think it is almost criminal to have spoiled such a horse in the first place."

"Don't believe it," answered Alan. "I've studied Billy carefully for three years now, and I'm quite convinced that his habits are a gift. MacArthur only cultivated them, just as a fine voice is cultivated." Marian looked straight ahead, and said, "I'll admit that in this instance he could not have had a more able tutor."

Alan looked round at the calm, disapproving face, and smiled. "Et tu, Brute," he said, quietly.

She turned quickly. "Do you stand by Mr. MacArthur?"

"Inasmuch as he is my friend, yes; more so now than usual, perhaps."

She turned his answer over in her mind a moment. "Yes, I suppose you would," she said.

"What does that mean—approval or otherwise?" he asked.

"I only meant that I thought that you would be very loyal to your friends, right or wrong. But, at the same time, in this instance I don't agree with you."

"God made him for a man—let him pass. Steady, Billy! That's only a cow."

There was a full and lively thirty seconds until the horse had recovered from his attack of nerves. Then Marian took up the tale.

"That's all very well, but is it fair, I ask you? Suppose, now, that I carried on a flirtation with the groom at the Star and Garter, which God forbid, for methinks he is passing fond of beer. Would your charity stand the strain?"

Dundas made a mental comparison, and chuckled. "I'd take the strongest exception to your taste, apart from conventions."

They had turned off the white main road, and the clatter of Billy's hoofs was muffled in the dust of the unformed track they followed, that twisted in and out among the big timber. The moon splashed their path with patches of black and silver, and in the deep hush of night they moved as through a dream landscape.

Alan spoke slowly. "I laughed, but God knows I did not mean to, Maid Marian. It is not good to hear you slander yourself, even in jest. To me the idea was worse than sacrilege." He changed the reins swiftly over to his right hand, and covered the soft slender hand on her lap with his. For a moment it shrank timidly and then lay still. For a little while he held it, and then, bending forward, he raised it to his lips unresisting. For one instant her eyes met his and told their secret. "Oh! Marian, Maid Marian," he said softly. Momentous words were on his lips, but words decreed by fate to remain unuttered in that hour.

For the moment he had forgotten everything but the girl beside him, and the right hand relaxed its hold, and as it did a hare darted from the shadow of a log and flashed under Billy's nose. There came a swift jerk on the reins, and Alan recovered them in a flash, but too late.

He set his teeth and strained his eyes into the patchy light to catch the first glimpse of dangers to avoid. Only once he turned to Marian. The rush of air had swept her hat back on her shoulders, and her hair was a flying cloud about her face. But in her eyes there was no trace of fear. "Don't mind me, Alan; I trust you absolutely."

But for her presence he would almost have enjoyed the excitement, but the thought of danger to her turned his efforts to tightlipped savageness. He sawed Billy's leathery mouth as he had never done before, when, to his delight he felt Billy's mad rush falter. For the first time he had won in a straight-out fight, and though they took the curve on one wheel, by the time they came in sight of the white gate in the lane Billy was snorting angrily, but behaving like a normal animal otherwise.

"I am sorry, so sorry, Marian. That was my fault," he said soberly; "I should have watched Billy more carefully." The girl turned slightly and rested her hand lightly on his sleeve. "Please, don't blame yourself, Alan. I want you to believe me when I tell you that all the time I felt perfectly safe, and I wouldn't have missed it for anything."

Alan laughed grimly. "Precious little honour to me that I did. It is the first time that he has ever given in so soon." He reined Billy to a standstill at the gate, and as he did so a voice came from the shadow of the avenue beyond. "Is that you, lassie?" and there was a glow of a cigar in the darkness "Father!" she whispered. Then aloud, "Yes, father, Mr. Dundas has brought me home." The owner of the voice came forward into the light. "Oh! Dundas, come in, it's not too late for a glass of wine." Billy stirred uneasily and backed a little. "I'm afraid I cannot to-night. B.B.B. does not approve of late hours." He pressed Marian's hand tenderly as she rose. "Good night, Maid Marian," he said softly. "Good night, Alan. Oh! be careful going home," came the whispered answer. In a second she had jumped lightly to the ground. Billy half turned, and bored at the reins fretfully. Standing where the light fell full on her face, Marian looked up at him smiling. "Good night, Mr. Dundas, and thank you so much for the drive." Alan waved his hand as the dogcart turned with a jerk, and the next moment he was pelting down the lane homeward. Marian stood beside her father watching the two twinkling red stars as they disappeared in the distance. "Now that," said her father, "is a man, but I'm blessed if I like the horse. How did he behave on the way?" Marian slipped her arm

round his shoulder, and looked up laughing. "If you will tell me whether you are referring to the man or the horse, I might be able to answer," she said. "Oh, lassie!" he said, taking her hand, and looking down at her fondly, "I think I'll inquire about both." Marian drew his head down and kissed him. "Daddy dear, as a judge of men and horses, I can honestly say that neither could have behaved better." Which, when one considers it, was a truly feminine answer. Nevertheless, she lay awake that night smiling happily with her thoughts.

Fortunately for Alan, Billy's performance had taken the edge off his appetite for bolting that night at least, for with his thoughts in a state of chaos he paid little attention to either road or horse. That one glimpse of Marian's eyes as he had raised her hand to his lips had been a revelation, and he knew, although no word had passed between them, that he had awakened in her the love that until then he had known nothing of, and the wonder of it held him spellbound.

He spent a longer time than usual rubbing Billy down after his arrival at 'Cootamundra,' and when he had finished he brought his hand down with a resounding whack on the back of the contentedly munching pony. "Billy, you little devil; I don't know whether I ought to shoot you, or pension you off on three feeds of oats a day. I must ask Marian." He walked over to the homestead, and looked at its darkened solitude distastefully.

He unlocked his door, but in attempting to light his lamp found that it was empty, and spent five minutes striking matches to find a candle before he could refill it. He splashed his clothes with kerosene, and before he had finished his task he had declared to all his household gods that 'batching' was a rotten game.

## Chapter 6

DUNDAS was feeling "Monday morningish." He over cooked his eggs and the bread he fried refused to crisp, and its doughiness and the extra annoyance of having let the water boil too long before making his tea started him on his day's work with a distinct feeling of dissatisfaction with the world.

He knew he was shirking work, and owned up to himself. There was only one remedy, work itself. In his heart he felt that Marian could and would wait, and then he felt dissatisfied with himself that he could let it go at that. And so he turned to, and after a while his self-training asserted itself. By ten o'clock he had finished his walls, and when he came to make a start on the roof he had no room for thoughts foreign to the matter in hand.

At last it was finished. When he had fitted a heavy towerbolt to his shed next day, Alan felt he could go on with the real work, and discover what was to be discovered without endangering his secret. It was with a feeling of intense satisfaction that he started again with pick and shovel, after clearing away the planks with which he had covered the spot where he had first found the archway. As his work advanced, his delving showed that the opening was about three feet wide, and was evidently recessed for a considerable depth; how far he did not at once try to ascertain. His first object was to clear the entire doorway. In order to give himself plenty of room, he sank a shaft about four feet square, having one of its sides formed by the door-pierced wall. It was no easy task, for the iron shed seemed to absorb all the sun's heat, while its doorway gave little light and less air. Indeed, it took him the whole day to sink seven feet, when, as he anticipated, his pick uncovered the foot of the entrance. By six o'clock next morning he was making his first tentative strokes with his pick in the doorway he had uncovered. On either side was the hard smooth surface of the wall showing a clearly defined three by seven opening, filled with almost brickhard clay, and on this he set to work with a will. He commenced by breaking it down well in the upper half, and in less than an hour found his progress barred by some obstacle that

defied both pick and crowbar, at a depth of about eighteen inches. By no means discouraged, for he expected such a development, he continued to clear away the clay with undiminished vigour, and soon found that his advance had been stopped by a smooth surface, which, until he had completed its clearance, he decided not to examine. By midday his task was completed, and, on returning to work after lunch, he brought with him one of the acetylene lamps from his dogcart, for the light from the shed door was insufficient to reveal the interior of the recess where his work had ceased. When the white clear light was flashed inwards, he was for a while at a loss as to the real nature of the obstacle. The discoloration from the clay and the lapse of ages had tinted the whole to a dull red that made it appear as if the back were composed of the same rock-like cement as the walls. Kneeling in the archway Alan rubbed the surface with his moistened finger. In a moment the dry clay worked to a paste, and, as he continued rubbing, from the spot where he cleaned the clinging dust, there showed up the dull but unmistakable glow of bronze-like metal.

"I've been a navvy; now I might as well turn charwoman," was his mental note on the situation. He armed himself with a scrubbing brush and a bucket of water, and by dint of much labour and splashing he thoroughly cleaned from every vestige of clay or grit the metal surface of the door, giving special attention to the corners. While he worked one fact was strongly forced on his mind. However long the metal had been in its place, the surface showed no sign of corrosion. From its absolutely unmarked smoothness it might to all appearances only have been erected a day. Although over and over again in breaking down the clay the point of his pick had come heavily against it, there was not even a scratch or dent left. Another point which puzzled him not a little was that the entire surface was perfectly blank, without knob or projection of any kind. When he had finished his scouring he took his lamp and made a minute examination of every inch of the door, and when he had completed it his sole gain in knowledge was that its fitting had been absolutely perfect. There was not room for even the point of a needle to penetrate between door and wall.

Alan went to the house, and returned with a box and a heavy driving hammer, with the fixed resolution of solving the problem confronting him before the day was out. Using the box as a seat in the bottom of the shaft, he reasoned the matter over as he resurveyed the blank and uninviting metal wall. Undoubtedly it was a door of sorts. Whoever put it there meant it as a means of ingress or egress. "Therefore," he said aloud,

"the darned thing must open somehow;" and he emphasised his remark by bringing the hammer down with a hearty bang on the metal. The result was rather disconcerting, for the door answered the stroke with the deep, hollow boom of a mighty bell that seemed to reverberate into unknown distances. "I won't do that again," said Alan to himself, dropping the hammer. "It's almighty funereal, whatever causes it. But that blessed door—it might have hinges, or it might slide up, down, or sideways, and there isn't a vestige of a sign to show which." He shook his head, and stared long and thoughtfully. "Now," he reflected, "the people who built this box of tricks were not fools." He took up the hammer again, and, starting from the top right-hand corner, he tapped his way over its entire area, and in doing so he awoke a booming, metallic clamour that almost deafened him. No pressing or straining for hidden springs availed, and nightfall found him owning up to defeat.

After his evening meal he paced slowly about the shed, every now and again descending into the shaft to try the effect of some fresh idea as it occurred to him. At last, as the hour grew late, he decided on bed. Perhaps the morning would bring wisdom or guidance. He returned to the house, and commenced slowly to undress. Seated on the edge of the bed with one boot already unlaced, he suddenly straightened up in answer to a thought that flashed across his mind. "Now I wonder?" he said softly. "By Jove! I'll try it now!" In a moment he had relighted his acetylene lamp, and hurried across to the shed, and scrambled over the loose clay into his shaft. Then, beginning on the step of the doorway, he commenced carefully to sound the cement of the recess. All over the step he worked, and up the left-hand side without detecting the slightest variation in sound. Was it to be another disappointment? He changed over to the right side. For the first two feet the sound of the clank remained unaltered—a little lower. Then, as the hammer fell, Alan drew a deep breath, and struck again. There was no mistaking it. The wall rang hollow beneath the blow. "Got it! By gad! Got it!" he almost shouted. He flashed the lamp to the spot, but even under the dazzling white glare he could detect no alteration in the appearance of the surface. There was no line or crevice to indicate a patching of the wall. Nevertheless, he knew for a certainty that in the wall was a covered recess of some kind.

## Chapter 7

NATURE took her full toll of his weary body, and it was nearly nine next morning before Dundas kicked off his bed clothes with a hearty exclamation of dismay at his laxness. He awoke keenly alive to the possibilities of the day before him, and after hurrying through his domestic routine he made his way to the shed with a handful of tools. He fixed his lamp so as to give the best possible light, and then, by means of careful sounding, he marked out with chalk the area that rang hollow beneath his hammer, and which he finally estimated was about a foot square.

Before long, by working on one spot, he had penetrated about an inch, when, to his delight, a small hole, no larger than a pin's head, appeared. Once broken through, he found that the work of enlarging the opening became easier. The cement began to fly in larger fragments from the edge of the chisel. In about two hours he had enlarged the opening sufficiently to admit his hand, but in spite of his eagerness he refrained from a close examination of the interior. It was when lunch time arrived, and half the area that had been marked out was broken down, that he turned the light inwards only to meet with disappointment. One inch behind the cement was a metal plate that blocked his view. This, he found, was loose, but he could not remove it until he had cleared away the whole of the cement. If they had done nothing else, his difficulties had made him philosophic. He had come to recognise the fact that whatever the intelligence was that had created his discovery, that intelligence had so adjusted matters that the secret could not be lightly violated.

The result of his work next morning justified his surmise about the metal plate. He found that the recess was just ten inches square, but so accurate had been the fitting that while a chip of the cement remained round the edges it was impossible to remove it. Smoking contentedly he pegged away at the work, his thoughts all the while as busy as his hands. All the edges were clear, and at last he chipped the fragments that still held the corners until by careful coaxing he was enabled to work out the metal plate. As he did so it slipped through his fingers and fell clattering to his feet. Quickly Alan turned his light into the recess. It was not more



than four inches deep, allowing for the inch of cement he had removed, but small as it was it held enough to call forth a quick exclamation of pleasure. Arranged in the form of a square at the back of it were four small, bright metal knobs, each one of which reflected back the rays of the acetylene lamp from brilliant points of light. Each knob was at the end of a stem protruding from the wall, and each stem sprang from the intersecting point of two deep grooves that formed a crosscut in the cement. "So," said Alan softly, "this is the open sesame—now I think I'll step right inside, or perhaps this is merely a—hell!" With the forefinger of his right hand he had touched one of the knobs. The next instant he was lying in the bottom of the shaft in a sickly odour of acetylene gas, with the extinguished lamp beneath him.

He pulled himself painfully together, ruefully rubbing the various bumps he had acquired during his somersault, and wondering whether his jarred system were entirely sound. "Well, I'll be hanged if that wasn't a dirty trick to play on the innocent investigator—electricity! And the father of sin himself only knows how many volts. No, my friends," he went on, addressing the unknown builders, "you certainly did not mean that door to be opened by a fool." He dragged himself to the surface and examined his lamp to find it intact and in good order. Then he turned, and looking into the darkness at his feet, asked in injured tones how many more surprises it held for him. He relighted the lamp, and returned to the doorway. The glittering knobs winked back at him as he turned the light on them. Fixing his lamp behind him so as to have both hands free, he sat down and regarded the recess sourly. "Now I wonder," he said to himself presently, "did I get it all the first time, or is there more to follow? I wish to goodness I knew something about electricity." Putting his fingers up gingerly, he touched the same knob again. Even prepared as he was, the shock he received brought forth an angry grunt of pain, and again he almost overbalanced himself. He rubbed his quivering arm savagely. "Knowledge may be strength," he said angrily, "but it's confoundedly painful to get in this locality. No, this is certainly no place for fools. However, we'll see." He roused himself, and scrambling to the surface betook himself to the house. He ran his eye over his bookshelves, pulled down a volume, and for a quarter of an hour he buried his nose in its pages. Finally he banged the book with his open hand. "Might have thought of it before if my head had not been wool-gathering," he said aloud, then with his hands in his pockets he leaned back in his chair and stared through the window, whistling softly. Suddenly he sprang up. "The very thing!" He went to his bedroom and returned with an old

raincoat, which he flung on the table. Spreading the garment before him, he took his pocket-knife and cut a 3 inch strip from the lower hem, and then carefully examined the material. "Yes," he repeated, "the very thing," and proceeded to cut from the strip four pieces about 3 inches square, and with these and some twine he hurried back to the shaft. "Now, my friends," he said, as he seated himself on his box before the recess. "We'll see who knows most." Holding a piece of the cloth-cased rubber carefully in his fingers, he pressed it to the knob with, as he expected, entire success, for his simple non-conductor answered his purpose. Then he folded the cloth carefully about the shank, and fastened it in place with twine, working gingerly, so as to keep his hands from coming into contact with the other danger points. Then he treated the other three in the same manner, and found he could handle them all without fear.

So far so good. Now what were the knobs for? How were they to be operated? A few tentative presses and twists soon found an answer. Each one could move in four directions, for deep in the cement the shanks worked on a pivot that allowed the knobs to follow the lines of the crossed grooves, up or down, and right or left, and realising this, Alan realised, too, that he was face to face with a problem that might baffle him for an indefinite time. That the door could be operated by the knobs he felt certain, but he felt more certain that he was faced by a cunningly contrived combination lock that would test his wits to the uttermost before he won success.

There were in all five positions, counting the upright, in which each knob might be placed, and there were four knobs. "Now bless my soul," Dundas murmured, "I wonder how many thousand variations the dashed things are capable of, and must I go on fiddling with them until I'm grey-headed? Reminds me of how many places nine men in a boat can be put in. Only this is worse."

With a silent prayer for patience he began to work, moving the levers to and fro, trying them systematically in rotation, combination after combination, till his arms ached from being held in the one position, and his fingers almost refused to do his bidding. Then in the end he sat back and filled his pipe. So busy had he been that time had passed unnoticed, and it was only the clamouring of an angry stomach that directed his attention to the hour, and he found to his surprise that night had fallen while he worked. Another night, and he was still outside the longed-for goal! It was no use going on, he told himself. For all he knew, unless he stumbled on the right combination by accident, it might take him weeks or months to exhaust all possible variations of the levers. Stiff and tired,

he dragged himself to the surface, and then to the homestead, disgusted with his failure.

Alan set out for the shed next morning in a cheerful mood, and with the determination to stick to his task, in spite of failure. He had recharged his lamp, and he set to work, whistling light-heartedly. Following up his first idea, he commenced by numbering the levers from one to four, and then he moved them alternatively in numerical rotation, thus avoiding a repetition of variations. It was a tiresome task, but he relieved the monotony with an occasional pause for a smoke, and to stretch his cramped limbs. As time passed his movements became mechanical. He leaned forward with his face close to the recess, and his elbows against the wall to relieve his tired body, for he found his occupation more trying than the hard manual work that had preceded it. He was thinking vaguely that it was about time for lunch, when he suddenly started up. He had heard nothing move, but some subtle sense told him of a change. He turned his head slightly, and an involuntary cry broke from his lips. The mighty door had disappeared, and he was staring into the blackness beyond where it had been.

## Chapter 8

FOR a little space Alan could scarcely believe the evidence of his eyes. With wildly beating heart and shaking hands he reached for his lamp, and without rising from his seat he turned its glare into the gloom beyond. Then he sat staring before him, big-eyed and wondering. What he saw was a bare circular apartment about twelve feet in diameter. Immediately inside the doorway was a small landing not more than 3 feet square, surrounded on two sides by a balustrade of the same familiar concrete about three feet high, while from the third side appeared a flight of steps that curved with the wall down into the darkness. Right before him near the low ceiling on the opposite wall his eyes were held by a tablet, on which stood out in bold relief three groups of characters, one below the other. The characters were evenly spaced, the top group having three, the middle four, and the lower one six. Moving his light slightly from side to side, Alan's eyes rested on the doorway. "Well! May I be hanged, what's become of the door?" for truly it had vanished. He had heard no sound as it opened, and within there was no trace of it. Then with a chuckle of pleasure he solved the mystery: there was a foot-wide groove where it had been, and flashing his light to his feet he saw that it had slipped downwards into the thickness of the wall till its upper edge came exactly to a level with the floor.

Allowing for eighteen inches outside, a foot for the thickness of the door, and another eighteen inches inside Alan estimated the thickness of the wall to be about four feet, and four feet of such material as he knew it to be composed of meant practical indestructibility. In spite of his quivering excitement, Dundas held himself in hand. His previous experience had made him very wary, and the possibility of unpleasant results made him curb his impatience to investigate further. Without leaving his seat, he turned the light over every visible portion of the interior. Again the tablet with its bold inscription took his eye, and he studied the characters long and thoughtfully. "It might be an address of welcome," he mused, "or, again, it might be a notice to keep off the grass. Looks like a mixture of Russian and Hebrew, with a dash of Persian. Anyway, it's been dead a

lot longer than any of the dead languages I've rubbed against, and me-thinks I'll find no Rosetta stone lying about." Then he turned his light to the winding staircase. "It would appear," he went on, half to himself, "as if I'd found an entrance from the attic, and if I go downstairs I'll come on the furnished apartments." He half rose, but came to rest again in answer to a warning thought. "Alan, my son, it behoves you to move carefully, or you may find yourself in a nasty fix. The architects of this problematically desirable building were no second-raters."

First he turned to the levers, and after carefully noting their position, he again commenced to work them. Watching the door carefully, and as nothing occurred he returned them to the combination that had gained him entrance. Then he went to his tool shed and procured a crowbar. Armed with this he returned to the doorway, and while standing outside he carefully tested the landing within for any hidden trap that might lead to trouble. He satisfied himself that all was secure, and then took up his lamp and stepped over the threshold. Standing on the landing he turned his light into the darkness below him, but all he could see was the stairway winding down into the blackness beyond the lamp's rays. As the chamber was about twelve feet in diameter, and the stairway about three feet wide, it followed that there was a circular shaft about six feet across down the middle leading to goodness only knew where. Strain his eyes as he would, Dundas could only penetrate the darkness some twenty or thirty feet, where the light caught on the winding balustrade below. He returned to the outside of the shaft and picked up a small piece of clay, and, holding it well over, he let it drop, and listened intently. In the silence he heard the whiz of its passage through the air, but no sound of its fall. He straightened up, and looked about thoughtfully, and as he did so, the light falling on the balustrade drew his attention to a small but significant matter. He rubbed his finger carefully over its smooth surface, and then examined it under the lamp. "Not a trace. Not a particle of dust. And yet—countless centuries—good God! What does it all mean?" He broke off, murmuring disjointedly. One thing was clear to his mind. It would be madness to attempt to descend without ascertaining as far as possible the state of the air in the shaft.

Back to the homestead he hurried, and after rummaging in the drawer of his sideboard he found several fishing lines, then from its hook in the kitchen he took a hurricane lamp, and with these he returned to the shed. He lit the hurricane lamp and attached it to one of his lines, and, leaning over the balustrade, he lowered it slowly, using a short piece of wood with a groove in the end to keep the lamp in the centre of the shaft, and

prevent it from striking against the balustrade in its descent. He played out his line carefully yard after yard, and watched the glow grow fainter and fainter as the depth increased.

At twenty yards his line ran out, and he attached another, and continued lowering. By hanging over and watching carefully he could follow the course of the lamp, but it was too far down for him to distinguish anything. Then the second line came to an end, another twenty yards, or one hundred and twenty feet in all. Once or twice the silence was broken by a dull echo when the lamp had touched the side somewhere below, and the sound came up magnified and uncanny. Alan added a third line to the others, and continued paying out as before. Half of the third line had run out, and it was only by straining his eyes that he could catch a faint speck of light in the depths. "Deuce take it all," he thought. "It might be a thousand feet or more, and I've only one more line." At the moment the line came slack in his hand, and out of the depths came a slow, whispering sound that told of contact somewhere below. "At last!" He looked at the remainder of the line in his hand, and judged its length. "A hundred and sixty feet at least. By Jove! What a trip to the bottom." He plumbed carefully to make sure that the lamp had not caught, and that it was really on the bottom, and, having assured himself of this, he commenced to haul up. He was not long in satisfying himself of the purity of the air below, for the gleam of light from the lamp grew stronger as he drew it upwards, and when he finally retrieved it he found it burning as brightly as when he began to lower it. A careful examination of the bottom of the lamp showed that it was quite dry, and this was sufficient to indicate that whatever dangers the shaft held, foul air and water were not included. It was meagre information at the best, but still it was something.

He had already made up his mind as to his future movements, and his curiosity, now at fever heat, could no longer be restrained. In spite of unforeseen dangers, he would not have shared the honour of exploration, even with a friend, for a kingdom. Leaving his hurricane lamp on the landing and taking with him the acetylene lamp from his dogcart in one hand, and the crowbar in the other, he turned to the stairway and began to descend. His progress was slow, for with the bar he tested every step before putting his foot on it. In spite of his eagerness, or perhaps because of it, his heart was going a good deal faster than usual, but his head was perfectly clear, for he thoroughly realised the importance of keeping his wits about him.

At the first turn he lost sight of the doorway, and after that his world consisted of the winding path before him, and its dancing shadows. As he went lower and lower the echoes around him increased. Every sound was magnified and distorted out of all recognition. The clank of the iron bar on each step as he tried it rang and rolled up and down in deep metallic murmurings. The sound of the tread of his heavy boots was thrown from wall to wall until it seemed that in every step he was accompanied by an unseen multitude who thronged round him in the darkness. Even when he paused, awed in spite of himself, the winding gallery seemed full of mysterious uncanny whisperings. "My aunt! What a beast of a place—enough to make anyone funk," he thought. But he sternly repressed his feelings and recommenced his descent.

All the way down the walls showed unchanging and unbroken. At first he had tried to calculate the distance he had gone, but there was nothing to guide his eye, and he soon lost all sense of his position. His slow progress seemed unending. The blackness from above seemed to weigh on him with a palpable force, and in spite of every endeavour to put aside the idea, the ghostly crowding footfalls about him seemed to grow in numbers. The clanking ring of the bar boomed and echoed off into the distance, and returned like the tolling of iron bells. It seemed hours since he had started on his journey, though he knew it could not be more than a few minutes. With his teeth clenched and his breath coming fast through his nostrils he forced himself to go on. In his heart he knew if he paused he would give away to panic and bolt for the surface. He felt a cold, clammy sweat break out on his forehead, and it seemed as if each hair on the back of his head lifted separately. Would he never reach the end of these damned steps, he wondered. Did this twisting, nerve-racking track wind downwards into a ghost-haunted eternity? "God Almighty!" The words were wrung from terror-parched lips as he paused on the last step. The iron bar clashed clamouring to the floor, then he turned and fled—fled with a shriek that echoed in a devil's chorus. Upwards—upwards—anywhere. Oh, God! for the light of day. An animal instinct made him cling to the light he carried as he fled. After the first wild cry he made no sound. Afterwards he could recall no detail of his flight. Instinct lent him strength to scramble from the shaft at last. The glorious light of day partially calmed his semi-madness as he sped to the house. Once there he snatched his rifle from its rack, and jamming a cartridge home with his thumb, he ran back to the verandah, and stood looking towards the shed with the weapon at the ready, waiting for he knew not what to appear.

As he stood there, pale faced and with the perspiration rolling off him, he almost jumped a foot to hear a voice behind him. It was nothing more unusual than the driver of the storekeeper's cart with supplies from Glen Cairn. Alan forced himself to calmness with an effort, and answered the man's astonished stare with a smile. "Wild turkey," he said. "Not exactly legal, you know," he went on, glancing at the rifle. "But it's hard to resist temptation." Fortunately for Alan, the man was not gifted with any imagination; he accepted the story without question. "Gord's truth, Mr. Dundas, when I seen you comin' out of that shed I made sure you was snake-bit. Cripes, but you did leg it. Where's the bird?"

"Gone into the vines," said Alan, setting down the rifle and glancing over his shoulder. Then he took delivery of his goods and gave the man an order for his next trip. The proximity of a fellow-creature was all that he wanted to restore his shaken equanimity, and by the time the driver was rattling down the track to the road he was almost himself again.

Alan went back to the house and poured himself out a nip of whisky with a hand that let the bottle rattle a tattoo on the edge of the glass. "Pretty state I'm in," he murmured. "Dutch courage, too." He gulped down the spirit and returned to the verandah to stare thoughtfully at the shed that held the mystery, and pieced together in his mind the events of his exploring trip.

"Now, was it just pure funk—or was it. No, by heaven! It was real. My eyes couldn't have played tricks like that. And yet it's slam dancing dementia on the face of it." But dementia or not, he knew that as he had come to the last step on that infernal staircase; a step that had brought him on to a wide circular landing; just directly opposite to where he had stood was an opening in the floor of the landing, and from that opening came a brilliant stream of light that flung itself against the wall before him, and in the midst of the light showed up clear and distinct the shadow of a human figure with one threatening hand up-raised. Alan knew he had not imagined this. Yet the sheer impossibility of, in the first place, light, and in the second place humanity, in such circumstances might well make him hesitant to accept the evidence of his senses. He glanced at the watch in his belt. It was just four o'clock. He snapped out the cartridge and returned the rifle to its rack. Then he went to his bedroom, and from a drawer in his dressing-table took a .32 automatic pistol and some cartridges, and slipped in a full clip.

At the door he paused and returned again, and took off his heavy working boots, and substituted for them a pair of thick rubber-soled tennis shoes. He did not want the company of the ghostly army on his



second trip. Then with the pistol in his hand he made his way once more to the shed. At the door he listened intently. Not a sound broke the stillness. He advanced and looked into the shaft. There he saw the acetylene lamp he had abandoned in his flight still burning brightly. Again he listened intently for a few moments, and then let himself down. Inside the massive doorway the hurricane lamp still glowed, lighting up the interior. He picked up the acetylene, and with his finger on the trigger of the automatic, he stepped inside. He leaned over the balustrade, and listened with strained senses. In the intense silence, he could only hear the deep drawing of his breath. Then, tight lipped and with tense nerves he turned to the stairway.

It took courage of no light order to force himself to those black whispering depths, where in spite of all his self-assurance, his shrinking flesh told him that any turn in the winding path might bring him face to face with something nameless, and beyond the ken of imaginations.

Down he went, this time faster than before, for he had now no need to test his path. In order to divert his mind he counted his steps as he went. He held the lamp so as to throw the light as far ahead as possible, and in his right hand he grasped the pistol ready for instant action. At the one hundred and fiftieth step he paused, and in a moment the whispering murmurs of his progress died away into aching silence. It was a stillness so intense that he could plainly hear the thumping of his heart. Then he pulled himself together and went on. One hundred and seventy-five—eighty surely he must be near the end. Ten more steps and still the darkness ahead. Then his lamp flashed on a break in the descent, and showed his crowbar lying on the lower landing, and Alan braced himself for what he knew was coming. It was not until he stood on the final step, that he could be sure. Treading with feline stealth, and with every nerve alert, he went downward. Then he knew at last that his eyes had not deceived him. Both light and shadow were still there.

## Chapter 9

STANDING rigid, with his breath coming in quick gasps, Alan took in every detail of his position. The landing he had come upon appeared to be an enlargement of the shaft. It was circular, and quite forty feet in diameter, with a low ceiling and with walls perfectly devoid of ornament. At first only one fact fixed his mind to the exclusion of all else. Straight before him on the opposite side of the landing was an opening in the floor leading to a lower apartment, and from this opening shone a brilliant, white, steady glow that flung a clearly defined arched light upon the wall in front of him, and this arched light framed the shadow of a motionless human figure. How long Dundas stood staring he did not know, but long as he stood the shadowed figure showed no sign of movement. With one arm upraised and distorted by the angle of the light, it stood out immense and threatening, as if to warn him away.

After minutes that seemed like hours Alan summoned up his courage. Hard as it was to go forward, he felt he could not go back without having solved the mystery of the light. Slowly, with infinite care to make no sound, he placed his lamp on the step behind him; then he stepped forward gingerly and went down on his hands and knees, keeping his eyes fixed on the shadow, and his pistol ready for instant use. Inch after inch he wriggled himself across the cold, hard floor, now and again pausing to listen. At length he came to the opening and drew himself forward cautiously, till by craning his neck he could peer over the edge to satisfy his burning curiosity. It was a long time before he moved again, although what he saw allayed his fears, his astonishment held him spell-bound. A flight of steps led to another floor thirty feet below, to an apartment the size of which he could not determine. Just below him on the floor was a tripod that held what appeared to be a ball of white fire, from which emanated the light that streamed through the opening he was looking through. It was not a diffused light, but was projected as if from a powerful lens. For a little time Alan was at a loss to account for the shadow of the human figure on the wall, until he realised that it was projected directly from the source of light itself, and was beyond doubt

thrown on the place where it could be seen from above, with the object of doing to investigators what it had done to Dundas. That the device had scared him badly Alan admitted ruefully, but he felt some consolation in knowing that there had been no witness to his stampede.

"By Jove! whoever was responsible for that little game scored properly," he thought with a grin. "If his spirit is anywhere in this locality it must have been tickled to see me foot it upstairs." Gradually as he stared below another fact forced itself to his senses. Somewhere beyond the range of his vision was another source of light unaccounted for by the one below him. It was not strong, but diffused, and served to show what appeared to be a pattern on the pavement beneath. "Someone left the light burning," he mused. "There ought to be a pretty bill. Great Scott! Fancy being landed with an account for several hundred thousand years' light supply." The idea tickled his fancy. "Wonder if I could be made responsible? What a pretty case to argue before the Full Court. Good Lord, though, it's no wonder. The originators of this concern knew a few things, and didn't want to leave the finding of them to chance. That light now, for instance—I guess I'm going to see things before this is over, provided"—he paused, turning things over in his mind. "Yes, provided I don't stumble on any little prearranged contrivance to end my explorations." He sat up and slipped the pistol into his belt, realising that by his wits alone could he guard himself against the dangers of the task before him. Then he walked over to where the crowbar had fallen, and, picking it up, he returned to the opening. There was no need for his lamp, so he left it where he had set it down. He started down to the lower chamber, testing each step as before. The floor he had left was about six inches deep, and when he reached the fourth step he sat down and looked around him. The stairway he was on went down steeply against the so that the first glance enabled him to take in the whole of his surroundings, and for a long time he sat motionless with his thoughts in a state of chaos. It seemed as though he had penetrated to a great circular vestibule, fully eighty feet in diameter, whose walls were broken at regular intervals by what appeared to be six wide, translucent doors. Four of these he could see plainly from where he sat, and his eyes wandered from one to another, drinking in a beauty that was beyond his dreams of the beautiful and wonderful. They appeared to be composed of stained glass, through which the light he had noticed streamed, filling the vestibule with its soft radiance. Even from where he sat the gorgeous figured designs on the panels opposite were perfectly distinct. He had very little artistic lore, but a strongly developed love for the beautiful, and he felt

certain that nothing he had ever heard of could approach those translucent panels for sheer beauty of colour or design.

The soft glow filtering through showed the vestibule to be quite empty but for the tripod bearing the lens, whose beam of light cut into the semi-darkness like a sword of fire, and one other object the nature of which, until his eyes became accustomed to the gloom, he could not make out. Gradually under his straining sight it took shape, and resolved itself into a sculptured group of three figures on a low pedestal that occupied the centre of the apartment. Close as they were to him however, Alan could determine no details in the cathedral gloom. Another thing at the same time fixed his attention. He had noticed it before, but had been so occupied with other matters that its significance escaped him until now. The stairway he was on had no balustrade. Instead, from the roof above to each step, were fixed two thin bars of metal, hardly as thick as a lead pencil. They were sufficiently close together to prevent even a child from passing between them, but so slender as to be almost unnoticeable.

Dundas looked at them sourly and suspiciously. "Now what the deuce is the reason for that?" he thought. "Another infernal trick?" After a few minutes he touched one of them gingerly, half expecting a shock that would reward his curiosity; but found he could handle them with impunity. Emboldened by his immunity from trouble, he grasped one of them firmly and tried its strength. The result of the attempt took him by surprise, for in spite of its wirelike proportions it remained as rigid as a bar of inch steel against the utmost pressure he could exert. "So, my friends," he muttered, "visitors are expected to go all the way down the steps, and not take any short cuts. Now, if I have learned anything about this blessed place, those wires were not put there out of considerations of safety. There's a reason, and I doubt if it's a pleasant one." He stood up and recommenced his descent, sounding before him with his crowbar more carefully than ever. Two-thirds of the way were passed in safety, and he was beginning to think he had judged wrongly. Then he struck downwards with his bar at the tenth step from the bottom. As it touched the step something flashed for one fleeting second before his eyes, something that swished viciously so close to his face that it seemed almost to touch him. There was a loud clear twang of metal under immense tension, and a jarring blow on the bar he held that almost wrenched it from his grasp. Then something heavy clanked down the lower steps and came to rest on the pavement below. Dundas sprang backwards with a cry half anger and half surprise. What had happened? The bar in his hand felt lighter and shorter, and he held it up close to his

eyes and examined it. Nearly a foot of its length had been severed by a clean, smooth cut that had gone through the metal as if it had been putty, and it was the severed end that had clattered down the steps. In a moment Alan realised how close he had been to death, and a cold chill went through him. "The devils," he muttered savagely. "The devils!" He retreated upwards, got the acetylene lamp he had left behind him, and returned to the lower stairway. Moving with infinite caution he examined the wall above the danger point. The clear white rays showed what his eyes had missed in the gloom. It was the line of a narrow vertical cleft in the wall, and turning the light downward he saw a similar cleft along the step beneath him. He placed the light beside him, and then sat down. Then he leaned well backward out of reach of danger, and again pressed the crowbar to the step below. At the first slightest touch a great white blade flashed out and downward from the wall, severing the bar as before. The thought of what would have happened had the step been pressed by his foot brought a cold perspiration to his forehead. The fiendish ingenuity that had barred his way struck a cold fear to his heart. Alan knew that but for the precaution he had taken he must have met a terrible death, and his mutilated body would be lying there at the foot of the stairway in the gloomy silence. The shock to his nerves made thinking out of the question, and with shaking limbs and dazed senses he made his way upwards. Out into the dusk he went, and locked the door of the shed behind him. In his heart was a deep feeling of gratitude for his preservation.

That evening he prepared his meal in thoughtful silence. There was none of the cheerful whistling and singing that usually accompanied his last work of the day. When he had finished and set all in order, he sat down and commenced to write. He set out in clear detail every incident of his discovery, and every danger to be encountered so far as he had gone. It was far into the night when he had finished. Then he enclosed the many sheets in an envelope and wrote across it in clear, round hand: "If I am missing, the contents of this letter must be read before any search is made for me." This he signed and dated. Then he placed the envelope in a conspicuous spot on the mantelpiece, so that it could not be possibly overlooked. "Now," he thought, "if I do get bowled out, Bryce, or whoever comes to investigate, will run fewer risks." Then, satisfied that he had insured others to a certain extent, if not himself, he went to his bed thoroughly tired out with his strenuous day.

But, tired as he was, the sleep he longed for refused to come at his bidding. The wonder of his discovery had gripped his mind so that, try as

he would, he could not clear his brain of the questions that clamoured for an answer. The feeling of anger which he had at first felt at the deadly trap he had escaped had given way under a quieter reasoning with himself. Whatever mystery was hidden behind those great doors was surely worthy of the care taken to guard it. He realised that every difficulty that he had encountered so far was capable of solution, and that every obstacle was one which would bar effectually an unreasoning or unintelligent intruder, and that behind it all was the evident fact that everything had been planned to prevent the secret of the place from falling into the hands of anyone who was unfitted by lack of courage or mental training to estimate it at its proper value.

Alan smiled to himself when he realised how completely the events of the past few days had absorbed him. Glen Cairn may have been a thousand miles away for all the thought he gave it. The friends he knew had been completely forgotten. It seemed years since he had last seen Bryce, instead of just one week. The next day would be Sunday, and he knew that, instead of resting, nothing could tear him from the work in hand. He felt he should have gone to see Marian, but he determined that while the mystery remained unsolved he would be chained to the spot.

At last sleep came, deep and untroubled, and the sun had risen long before Dundas became conscious of the day.

## Chapter 10

WITH his hands deep in his pockets and his chin on his chest, Alan paced slowly up and down the verandah of the homestead. He had abandoned his first idea of going at once to the shed because he wanted to think with his mind untroubled by the weird surroundings of the great vestibule. Obviously there were some means of passing that murderous blade. It would be easy for him to jump from the step above to the floor beneath, but the possibility of finding something as bad, or worse on landing, forced him to put the idea aside. He felt that each bar to his progress must be fairly overcome before he could safely press forward. In his mind's eye he went over the surroundings for the key of the situation, and he could see only one way out. Whatever motive force there was behind the blade could not be inexhaustible. Doubtless it was a question of mechanics, and the only means he could see was to exhaust the power that drove the flying death until he could pass unharmed.

He went to his tool shed and fastened a pair of ploughshares together with a piece of fencing wire leaving a fair length of wire over that he bent roughly into a hook. Then he took his lamp and made his way down into the winding staircase. He had become familiar now with its echoings, and smiled to think of his racked nerves on his first descent. At length he reached the bottom of the first landing, and found the remnant of the crowbar he had left there the night before. This he carried with him, and, scarcely pausing to glance at the shadowed wall, he made his way to the great vestibule. Treading carefully, he stopped above the danger mark, and sitting down, he examined the step beneath. He found, as he had expected, that the cleft that allowed the passage of the blade terminated about an inch from the end of the step near the wire bars. Holding the crowbar carefully so that it was clear of the sweep of steel, he touched the edge of the step lightly beside the wires and the touch was answered instantly by the ringing whiz of the flying metal. Even prepared as he was, Alan flinched back from the blow and released the pressure. Then he took the ploughshares he had brought with him, and adjusted the hook so as to catch the bar of the step, and let the weight fall

outside. It was a simple plan that would keep a continuous weight on the step that would be out of reach of the blade, and it acted to perfection. The moment the pressure came to the step the blade flashed outward. As Alan had surmised, it was fitted to an axle set in the wall, and instead of stopping as before after one slash when the pressure had been released, it continued flashing before him with ever increasing speed. Somewhere in the wall beside him he could hear the deep drone of machinery in motion. In a few seconds the speed was so intense that it appeared as if a dazzling quadrant of burnished metal had darted out of the wall. The whizzing as it cut through the air rose from a wail to a thin, high-pitched screech, and even after retreating upwards several steps to be out of reach of possible harm, Alan could feel the displaced air pressing against his face as if driven from a blast. With his lamp turned full on the spot, he watched the whirling, flying blade with grim satisfaction. Patience was an asset in the game he was playing, but he felt sure he had found a key to the barrier before him, and he was content to wait.

Presently his eyes strayed from the shimmering quadrant to the great doors that shed their soft splendour through the dim vestibule, wondering at the mystery they guarded, and from the doors they turned to the sculptured group in the centre. On this he turned the glare of the acetylene lamp. Of the three figures only one faced him, and this he scrutinised with bated breath. It was the life-size image of a man clad in a long robe that fell almost to his feet, and under the steady white rays every detail stood out with perfect distinctness. The body was bent forward slightly with both hands resting on a short staff, and the robe showed ragged and torn as if slipping from the shoulders of the gaunt frame that supported it, but it was the face that held the gaze of the watcher. It was the face of an old man, but in its intense drawn misery could be read the premature age of pain and overwhelming sorrow. Never had Alan realised such agony as stared back at him from the blank eyes under the scarred and lined forehead, but it seemed as if the stern, set lips were fighting back any feeling of weakness or surrender that seemed struggling to find expression. On the pedestal at the feet of the figure the light gleamed on a metal tablet, and on the tablet Alan recognised a repetition of the first group of characters he had seen at the head of the first stairway. "Evidently," he thought, "the name of that monument of misfortune. Ye gods! what a face! A portrait, beyond doubt. I suppose I'll find the other two figures are labelled with the remainder of these hieroglyphics upstairs at the entrance. I wish I could see them properly." But there was no chance of a proper examination of the other two until he



was able to gain the floor of the vestibule. Both were turned away from him, but he could see that one had an arm upraised and pointing directly at the gleaming splendour of the door in front of him.

The inaction of waiting with the goal in sight was exasperating beyond words, but while that screeching blade remained in motion he must possess his soul in patience. He wondered vaguely how many revolutions it was making each minute that passed. His situation was not very pleasant, sitting cramped on the step that seemed to grow harder as time went on, and, moreover, he realised with a slight shiver that the temperature of the great vestibule was very much below that of the atmosphere of the surface. At last his patience became exhausted, and he determined that rather than sit there in irritated watchfulness he would return to the surface and let that whizzing machinery wear itself out. Alan's previous trips up the winding staircase had taught him that it was not a journey to be undertaken lightly, but to face the climb was better than fretting his patience with compulsory idleness. So off he set, and forced himself to prepare his dinner. Then he selected a book, and by sheer force of will concentrated his mind on it. It was about eleven in the morning when he had adjusted the weights and started the wheels, and he had decided that he would not return until four o'clock. It took a good deal of self-discipline to adhere to his determination. However, he succeeded, but it must be confessed that the author of "The Origin and Development of Moral Ideas" never had a less enthusiastic reader. At last! He flung the heavy volume on the table and hurried to the shaft; then downward. He had noticed in the morning that until he had half completed his ascent he could hear the sound of the flying blade. Now, on the way down he strained his ears to catch every sound. As he went lower and lower his heart beat faster, now and then he paused to listen, and then hope became conviction. Even when he had reached the lower landing and stood before the shadowy figure no sound broke the silence. He hurried onwards, quivering with excitement. As he stepped down into the lower stairway he saw in an instant that the blade had ceased its movement. He took his bar and carefully tested the danger step, but this time without result. His way was clear at last. Even so, he knew the risk of any relaxation in his precautions. He had gained too wholesome a respect for the abilities of the builders in the way of unpleasant surprises to have any illusions that there was nothing more to follow. Treading as delicately as a cat he went down the remaining steps.

At last he stood on the lower floor. The lamp showed up a wonderful pattern of mosaic that radiated from the sculptured group in the centre,

so that he seemed to stand on a vast jewelled carpet. Everywhere the white light fell it was flashed back from a thousand gleaming multi-coloured points of light. It seemed sacrilege to set foot upon it, and Alan felt pleased that his rubber-shod shoes would not be likely to mar its beauty.

His first idea was to examine that strange ball of light that projected its rays through the landing above, and, walking carefully, a few steps brought him before it. The most minute scrutiny failed to show any attachment to the tripod. It looked like the lens from a lantern that had been carefully placed to throw its rays in the desired direction. For a long time he stared, hesitating to touch it. Holding his hand within an inch before it he found not the slightest trace of warmth. "Light without heat," Alan murmured, bending over and gazing into the brilliant glare. He touched the lens with a tentative finger, expecting developments. Nothing happened. Then he boldly closed his hand over it, and without difficulty lifted it from its stand. He turned it over and over, sending its dazzling rays erratically round the vestibule. All he could discover was that behind the lens appeared to be a cavity containing something self-luminous, but whether liquid or gas he could not determine. Set deep in it was a tiny opaque human figure—the origin of that spectre that had caused Dundas his wild stampede. Alan chuckled when he realised the simplicity of the cause of the nerve-racking effect. "Cold; perfectly cold," he muttered. "And yet how many centuries has it been spreading that light? What a thing! Why, the formula for making that light alone would stagger half the world. I wonder how the Standard Oil Company, for instance, would view the idea as a commercial rival. Or the electric lighting companies or the gas companies. No oil—no wires—no pipes—no nuffin, just light. Guess I could retire on this alone. Seems to me I'll have to do some pretty solid thinking before I'm through with this business." He replaced the lens carefully in its original position and turned to the centre of the vestibule, taking his stand beneath the group on the pedestal. From here he saw to the full the wonderful beauty of the place. It seemed with its exquisite soft lighting like a chapel in some cathedral. Each doorway was quite twenty feet in width, and extended almost to the roof. It was hard to believe that the light that filtered through was not the light of day.

He was now able to inspect the remaining figures at his leisure. They were both statues of men, and were doubtless from the same hand as the one he had examined from the stairway. One was represented seated in a high-backed chair, looking down at a strange instrument he held in his hand. His face was one that blended in a high degree both intellect and

benevolence. The features were perfectly regular, and the slight smile that marked the corners of the lips took away any trace of hardness. "I should say," reflected Alan, "that you were a jolly good sport in your time. Fifty if you were a day, and your heart was never older than fifteen. I should like to have had a smoke and a yarn with you, and that's more than I would wish for with the imperial gentleman beside you. Humph! Now, he was never younger than fifty." The other figure stood stiffly erect. His robe fell in straight folds to his feet. His whole attitude was one of overbearing arrogance and command. The right arm pointed rigidly before him in the superb gesture of one who has the right and the power to enforce obedience. The head was held high. It was not a cruel face, but it was haughty and pitiless, without one redeeming and softening feature, but at the same time there was nobility about it that conveyed the idea of unswerving devotion to ideals. As Alan expected, he found beneath each figure a repetition of the other inscriptions at the entrance. He looked up again at the tall, commanding figure above him.

"By Jove!" he thought, "I'd not care to come before you for sentence, my friend; you look as if you'd give a man ten years hard for a plain drunk and disorderly. Shouldn't be surprised if you had a finger in the building of this place, the nasty parts, at any rate." He paused, and followed with his eyes the direction of the outstretched hand. "By Jove! Now I wonder—it does look as though he were ordering me to try that door first." For a long time Alan looked round the vestibule thoughtfully. It was to him a matter of indifference which door he approached first. From where he stood there was nothing to choose between them. There appeared to be no reason for preference and yet, that commanding figure seemed to speak with a voice more eloquent than words. He looked from the door to the figure. "I may seem prejudiced, but I don't like the look of you, my friend. If I try that door I may get a cracked skull or a broken neck or some other delicacy not in season. It looks too easy a solution of my choice. If you'll pardon my discourtesy I think I'll try the opposite one." He turned, and, walking round the group, went slowly towards the opposite side of the vestibule. He trod carefully, feeling each step as he went. It was well for him that he had not relaxed his guard. He was within twelve feet of the door he was approaching, when, without a sound, just as his outstretched foot touched the pavement before him, a great section of it, fully ten feet wide and as long as the width of the door, swung over as if on an axis, disclosing a black gulf below, and then as swiftly returned to its place. It made absolutely no sound or jar in its movement, and the very silence added to the shock that Dundas felt at

the narrowness of his escape. He had thrown himself back at the first movement, instinctively, but even then he was scarcely able to retain his balance. How he had escaped treading on the trap as he walked from the stairway in the first place he could not conceive. He could only have missed it by a few inches. He sat down and wiped his forehead while he recovered from the nervous jolt his latest experience of the peculiarities of the vestibule had given him, and while he considered his position he delivered himself aloud of his whole-souled opinion of the originators of the scheme. He leaned forward and scrutinised the pavement carefully, but, search as he would, he could discover no trace of the line along which it had opened. Then he pressed forwards with his hand until he felt it give again. He had one fleeting glimpse of the chasm below, and drew back more than satisfied with his experiment. "Lucky for me," he murmured, "that it was adjusted so delicately; had it worked the least bit stiffly my exploring would have terminated somewhere in the dark. Whew! What a place!"

He sat up again and looked round. "Well, I'll try the door his majesty commands me to, but I'll do it on my hands and knees. I won't be had that way again. The attitude may be ridiculous, but it's tolerably safe—if anything is safe here." He returned to the pedestal, and in a humble and lowly manner, testing each inch of the pavement before him, he approached the doors on the opposite side. He was so intent in his watch for a repetition of his former danger that he did not notice the progress he was making. His face was close to the floor, and his eyes were fixed on the glittering mosaic, when suddenly he started backward. He had heard no sound, but without the slightest warning a great brightness poured over him. It was as if the midday sun had blazed out suddenly from twilight. An involuntary cry of amazement escaped him. Of their own accord the doors had parted in the middle and swung wide open, flooding the vestibule with light, and disclosing what lay beyond.

# Chapter 1

DUNDAS rose slowly to his feet, and then stood staring straight before him. After the first cry he made no sound, remaining rigid and motionless, so that he might have appeared to an onlooker as if turned to stone. He was standing on the threshold of a great gallery fully two hundred feet in length. It was ablaze with light from end to end, and at first his confused senses could grasp no detail from the glorious mass of form and colour that confronted him. Then, out of the chaos, came slow order. With faltering, half-fearful footsteps, he went forward, oppressed with a sense of awe he had never felt before. Inside the gallery he paused again, while the real meaning of what he saw impressed itself on his mind. "My God! How wonderful! Surely they have gathered here all the beautiful in the universe." His low-whispered words echoed away in the weird silence. Turning slightly, he looked behind him. The light that poured through the open door seemed concentrated on the sculptured figure in the vestibule. With outstretched hand it seemed commanding him to go forward. The thought came to his mind that it was no effect of chance that had placed that figure where it stood. They who had fashioned the wonders around had surely set it there to speak their behest ages on countless ages after death had struck them into silence. Again Alan's eyes turned to his immediate surroundings. He realised that the gallery he had entered was indeed a gallery of art. Everywhere his eyes fell they encountered some new and unexpected beauty.

From floor to gorgeously decorated arched ceiling the height was about forty feet. One of the first peculiarities of the gallery that struck Alan was the fact that the walls, instead of being parallel, were divergent, so that from a width of not more than twenty-five feet at the entrance, at the farther end they were quite double that distance apart. From the walls about halfway up sprang a wide balcony, which was self-supported, for no pillar broke the splendid vista. The whole floor space was taken up by tables and cabinets, arranged with gangways between them in order to give free access from every side, and each and all was the resting-place for some exquisite work of art. From the roof hung

festoons and clusters of globes, each blazing with the same splendid white radiance that had flashed from the lens in the vestibule. Along the walls on every side stood statues, singly and in groups, bearing aloft jewelled vessels of exquisite design that radiated the same glorious light, and wherever it fell it was flashed back and forth from table and cabinet in a myriad splendid rays. It shone on vase and goblet, and flashed from burnished metal, and turned dull gold to glowing fire. It was reflected a thousand fold from the polished splendour of the walls of coloured marbles.

Alan stood as one in a dream scarce knowing where to rest his eyes. On every hand were objects of untold value, the very simplest of which would have been a prize for a national museum. Then he commenced to wander aimlessly, turning as a child would in a garden from flower to flower, as some fresh, strange beauty caught his eye. Even each table and cabinet seemed to have been chosen for its own special artistic merit. Every imaginable material seemed to have been pressed into service for their composition. His eyes alighted on hundreds of articles, the use or meaning of which he could not guess, but in one respect they were all alike—all were beautiful. Once he paused long before a slender pedestal bearing a statuette. It was the reclining figure of a woman carved from a single piece of delicate pink semi-transparent stone. One arm was thrown back behind her head, the other was held upwards towards him. So perfect was the workmanship that it seemed as if the half-parted lips smiled back at him in friendly greeting as he gazed in mute wonder. Alan shook his head and smiled back at her. "Little lady," he said softly, "I wish you were as lively as you look. I'll guarantee those dainty lips could satisfy my maddening curiosity if you could be a fairy Galatea to my Pygmalion. Whose wonderful hands shaped that exquisite form of yours? Whose hands placed you there to rack my brain with their riddles?" He turned away with a slight sigh.

A great flashing goblet on a table near by held his eye. It was perfectly plain and almost spherical, and looked like and was evidently meant to represent a bubble, for the stem it was set on was formed of tiny replicas of the bowl itself. In one light it was perfectly colourless, while in another it seemed to break into a mass of iridescent multi-coloured fire. He held it in his hand, wondering at its delicacy, for the bowl itself was no thicker than paper. It seemed to Alan that if it were filled for use it would break under its own weight. As he turned it over it slipped from his fingers. He gave a low cry of dismay as it fell, expecting to see it shivered into tiny fragments at his feet. Instead, to his astonishment, as it

struck the floor it bounced slightly, giving out a clear musical jingle as it rolled away and came to rest against a cabinet near by. Alan picked it up. It showed neither flaw nor crack. Tentatively he tapped it against the metal edge of the table. Its clear, bell-like tone filled the gallery with music. Again he struck, harder this time, and without result. Emboldened, he brought it down again and again, until at last he struck with all his force, sending splendid clashing echoes round the vaulted roof, but the fragile vessel remained intact. He returned it to its place. "Glass," he murmured, "and yet unbreakable as steel. Indeed, I doubt if any steel we know of would have stood such a hammering without fracture."

Then he came on something he had been looking for. On a stand by itself was a blazing bowl of flowers, such flowers as he had never dreamed of. They were from man's, and not nature's, workshop, although he had to look a long time before he realised the fact. Set amongst the blossoms were tiny globes of light, and these, above all things, were what he wanted to examine. He found he could detach one without trouble. At the first glance he was sure that the light was the same as in the lens in the vestibule. Like it, the tiny globe was perfectly cold, but now he was able to determine that the light emanated from a self-luminous gas with which the globe was filled. Conjecture was useless. With so many hundred other matters that had come under his notice that day, it must remain a mystery, for the present at least.

As he wandered through the gallery with his brain almost dazed by the overwhelming flood of new impressions, he had lost all idea of time until he was overcome by a feeling of intense weariness. The fascination of the place held him in its grip so that he was loth to leave, but nature was too strong to be withstood. Slowly he returned to the great doorway. He had no idea what time he had spent in the gallery, but he knew he had not seen a thousandth part of its wonders. Even a cursory inspection, he knew, would take many days to complete. On his way out he paused a moment, with bent head, before the Imperial figure in the vestibule, doing mute homage instinctively. Then, with aching limbs, he started his weary climb to the surface. When he left the shed it came to him as a shock that night had fallen while he remained below, but until he reached the homestead and found the hour was nearly midnight he did not know how absorbed he had been in his exploration.

The spartan simplicity of his home contrasted oddly with the scene of beauty he had so lately left, and an amused smile played over his face as he thought of the astonishment of Bryce or any other visitor if he

collected only a few of the things from the great gallery below and decorated his humble surroundings with them.



## Chapter 12

IT was a sorely perplexed man who faced the light of the following day. During the night the weather had broken, and long battalions of grey clouds trooped up from the south, and the first signs of the coming autumn were in the air. Alan stood staring over his vines through the soft drizzle of rain. There were questions he must decide then and there, and the principal one was, how far was he justified in keeping the secret of his discovery to himself. For the time being he put the legal aspect of the position in the background. The law of "Treasure Trove" could, and would, look after itself. It was his moral obligation to the world at large that troubled him. He knew that it would be impossible for him to keep the secret for an indefinite time, but the "when" and the "how" of the disclosure was the question. He felt that the wonders lying at his feet were not intended for the individual benefit of the discoverer. At last he came to the conclusion that he would at least make a complete investigation of the place before he came to a decision. This right was one that could not be gainsayed him. Then, again, came the question of his every-day affairs. Fortunately he had earned a reputation for hard-working solitude, and there were very few in the district who could claim to question his absence from Glen Cairn, and with these he felt that he must deal as the situation arose. There was Marian, of course, and it was with a feeling of dissatisfaction and self-condemnation that he thought how entirely the events of the last few days had effaced her from his mind, and how little she counted compared with his present absorbing interests.

Regardless of rain, he strode out across the vineyard, ploughing heavily through the soft, sticky soil. He scrutinised his crop carefully from end to end, making mental notes as to how long it would be before he must take in hand the work of sending the grapes to the winery, a work that meant a fortnight's incessant toil and the necessity of undesirable strangers in the shape of pickers, about the homestead. In the end he decided that he could count on at least three clear weeks. It seemed an absurdity that he should trouble about the matter at all when he was the master of untold wealth, but at present he could not afford to court the

inevitable inquiry that such an extraordinary proceeding would bring in its train.

With his troubles temporarily settled, he returned to the homestead, but before he descended into the shaft, he fixed a strong bolt on the inside of the door of the shed to prevent the possibility of surprise while he was engaged below. He took with him, too, a heavy ebony walking stick to replace the crowbar with which he tested his path.

Leaving his lamp on the last step, he made his way across the now lighted vestibule and through the great doorway. He decided to go right through to the end of the gallery where he had hitherto not penetrated, and then attempt the other doors. On the way, however, he came to the staircase leading to the balconies, and an exploration of these shut his eyes for a long time to his original intention. They were loaded like the main floor with the same bewildering array of beauty. Cases of jewelled ornaments of priceless value stood all about. Strange and wonderful fabrics glittered and shimmered under the blazing light, till his eyes ached and his brain reeled under the strain. It was in pausing to look over the balustrade at the sight below that his eyes alighted on that which quickened his curiosity. At the far end of the gallery behind a tall case he saw a low arched doorway. Only pausing sufficiently to rest the path before him he hurried to the spot. He paused some distance from the door, and looked it over suspiciously. It was not more than eight feet high and three feet wide. On its lintel again he found inscribed the three mystic groups of characters. The whole face of the door was filled by the figure of a man carved in high relief, whose attitude made him seem the guardian of the mysterious beyond. "Well, my friend," said Dundas, "you look as if you were there to warn off trespassers, but I'm going to chance it." He walked slowly forward, taking every precaution against surprise. He was within two paces of the figure when, without sound or warning, the door slid sideways into the thickness of the wall, opening up a corridor that led to the left.

"I wish," said Alan, without moving further, "that this place were not so full of automatic machinery. It's uncanny when the wretched things go off by themselves. Enough to give one the creeps. I seem to have arrived at the back door." He advanced cautiously and peered into the passage. It curved away into an unknown distance, evidently the segment of a circle. It was quite empty, and was lighted from above by tiny clusters of globes. "Looks fairly safe," he said, and, stepping carefully, he walked slowly down the passage. In a few minutes he saw ahead of him the break of another doorway, and when he reached it he found it similar to

the one he had just left. Again, as he walked towards it, came the noiseless movement as it disappeared. From the distance he had walked Dundas estimated that here was the entrance to the adjoining gallery, and the first glance showed that he was right. He had become so used to the absolutely unexpected that by now he would have been surprised to come across anything normal, but the sight that met his eyes brought him to a breathless full stop. "I think I'll pass this." Even from where he stood he could see enough to tell him that to enter the new gallery would test his nerves to the uttermost. In shape and size it was identical with the one he had just left, but beyond that and the matter of lighting, they were as far apart as the Poles. In the one, beauty beyond conception, in the other horrors that were grim and revolting beyond the distorted images of a nightmare. Alan felt a sensation of physical sickness as his fascinated eyes took in the scene before him. It was as if the door had opened on a vast human slaughter-house. Everywhere his eyes fell they fell on severed limbs and tortured forms, arranged in attitudes grotesque and horrible. Instead of a wealth of beauty and encased art, his eyes encountered repulsive fragments of humanity. In the distance, at the far end, he could catch the glitter of steel and glass, and in the balconies above he could see cabinets whose contents sent shivers of repulsion through him. It was some time before his shrinking senses realised the meaning of the sight. To the trained eye it would have been at once apparent, but to Dundas, who had never before encountered such an exhibition, the shock at first deprived him of his reasoning powers. "It's beastly, and it's hideous, but I might have expected to find a biological section in this bazaar. My aunt! How would Dick Barry revel in this butcher's shop. I suppose this would send his soul into drivelling ecstasies. I guess I'm not likely to find any traps here. There can be nothing about the place to keep off visitors that would be any worse than the place itself." Muttering to himself, he stepped forward. "I might as well look round."

A medical man would have found nothing in the gallery that would have repelled him, and would doubtless have found in the modelled horrors matters of intense interest; but to Alan, who was as unused as the average layman to coming into contact with vividly realistic representations of the internal economy of humanity, the experience was both grisly and disgusting. In spite, however, of his physical distaste of the investigation, he forced himself to go through with it. Modelled dissections of every conceivable and inconceivable kind were arrayed through the length of the gallery, and after a little while, even from his elementary

knowledge of such matters, Dundas saw that the whole arrangement had been made in a carefully ordered system. He found that each model was accompanied by a cabinet, and the contents of the cabinets held him for uncounted minutes as he went through them. In each one in a special compartment he found a flat metal case fastened with an easily opened clasp. Each of the cases contained a single remarkable book—a book about eighteen inches long and twelve inches wide, that opened along its width, and not its length. Alan had given up guessing as futile, but the material from which the volumes were made caused him as much curiosity as their contents. The leaves were as thin as tissue, but perfectly opaque, and with a beautiful glossy surface. After a timid experimental attempt, he found that all the strength of his fingers was insufficient to tear or damage them in the slightest. They were not paper, certainly, and Dundas, after comparing them mentally with other material he knew of, put the question out of his mind with a shrug of his shoulders.

Their contents were as remarkable as the books themselves. Each opened page bore on one side a diagram, and on the other a closely printed array of characters, evidently an explanation of the diagram. All the illustrations bore on the model connected with the cabinet. They were done in colours, and even to the inexperienced eye showed exquisite care in every detail. Alan skimmed through gruesome volumes with wondering eyes, picking up here and there traces of the wonderful system with which the arrangement of the models and the illustrations had been made. The remainder of the contents of the cabinets was beyond his ken. He found flasks hermetically sealed full of fluids, coloured and colourless, and jars holding chemicals, some of which he recognised, and others the identity of which he could not even guess at. There were strange knives and stranger instruments, and time went on. He stood for a long time lost in admiration before a series of life-sized human figures of colourless glass. In one the entire nervous system was shown in thin white lines. In another the whole circulatory system down to the tiny capillary vessels was traced in red and blue. He saw the human digestive arrangements completely shown in a third, and he told himself that if ever Doctor Richard Barry, his especial pal, gained entrance to that gallery, he foresaw that nothing short of dynamite would ever get him out again.

It was when he had arrived at the other end of the gallery in front of the great closed doors that he came on another mystery that racked his brains. Set fairly in the middle before the doors was a replica of the seated statue in the vestibule, and in front of it was a small circular table.

The table was covered with a glass dome set in a rim of metal, and under the glass rested an instrument similar to the one the statue held in its hands. It was a circlet of metal, apparently made to fit the human head, and attached to it on either side were wires, the other ends of which were attached to a small cylindrical box some four inches in length and an inch in diameter. One end of the cylinder was metal-covered, the other was filled with some transparent substance that appeared to be a lens, and that was all he could make of the device after a long and careful examination. He attempted to raise the glass dome in order to inspect the instrument more closely, but it resisted his efforts. Whatever its use, simple as it appeared to be, Alan came to the conclusion that it must be of prime importance in the gallery, both from the position in which it was placed and from its association with the statue. As it was evidently not meant to be interfered with by inexperienced hands, Dundas desisted from his attempts. He felt that by tampering with the exhibits, a novice might do irreparable damage, and he left the solution of the problem to wiser heads.

Throughout his wanderings he had pursued the policy of touching nothing without replacing it exactly where he had found it, and in many instances he restrained his curiosity to handle unknown objects from fear of disastrous consequences. Afterwards he made his way to the balconies. His visit was short and somewhat startling. Science is no respecter of conventions, and Alan was still able to blush, and after a brief and breathless inspection of its astonishing exhibits he fled below to the milder atmosphere of diseased and dissected humanity. On the foot of the stairs he paused and addressed a figure of a gentleman who had discarded his skin and was dressed somewhat unattractively in his muscles.

"By gad, sir! If I had a maiden aunt, I'm blessed if I'd take her up there with me. It's no place for innocence like mine."

He paused a while, and then made his way to the great doors in search of an exit, but try as he would they defied every effort to open them, and after wasting an hour in fruitless search he wandered back to the rear doorway.

Standing in the curved corridor outside the entrance to the biological gallery, Alan paused some time to consider his position. Before him, in the direction in which he had come, the corridor curved away out of sight. Mentally reviewing his exploration up to date, he came to the conclusion that the six galleries all radiated from the central vestibule, and were connected at their further end by the passage he was then in, estimating the length of each gallery at two hundred feet, and the vestibule at

sixty in diameter, it meant that the passage would form a circle of about four hundred and sixty feet in diameter or roughly fourteen hundred feet round. The calculation brought the magnitude of the subterranean building home to him with renewed force. Before going any further he paced slowly back to the entrance of the art gallery, and walked past it in order to find if the corridor was continued further in that direction. Sixty feet beyond he found himself faced by a blind wall that showed no sign of break or opening. Dundas looked the wall over, and accepted the situation philosophically. Evidently it was intended that he should continue on in the direction from which he had started. Then he retraced his steps past the medical gallery, prepared for further discoveries. As he expected, he came on a third entrance equi-distant from the other two, and exactly similar.

His past experience prepared him for what followed, though he relaxed none of his precautions against unpleasant surprises. As before the third door slid gently out of sight, leaving him free ingress to the gallery beyond. Alan stared into the new section, whistling softly. His capacity for astonishment was being dulled by surfeit. "Just so," he said to himself, breaking off in the middle of a bar. "Art, biology, and now, if I'm not mistaken, this exhibition represents science, and I suppose I won't be able to begin to understand a thousandth part of it. By Jove! What a joy for investigators, born and unborn, before they get to the bottom of this little lot." He stood inside, looking round with uncomprehending eyes. For glitter and splendour the sight was almost equal to the art gallery. Everything round him gave evidence of the same systematic grouping he had observed before. There was a difference, though, that he did not observe for some time. The walls were furnished with shelves that almost covered them, and the shelves were closely packed with the flat metal cases that he had found in the biological gallery containing books. Without removing them he examined the cases, and found each marked with characters inlaid in enamel on its visible edge.

"Not much help to me," he commented, looking over the mighty array. "And not much to anyone else, I'm afraid, unless there is a key somewhere, and even the ingenuity that was responsible for this can hardly have worked that out." He turned to look over the shining array in front of him. "That's a cock-eyed-looking spectroscope, anyhow—that is, if it is a spectroscope. Apparently this is the optical section. That may be a microscope, but what the deuce the picturesque-looking contraption beside it is I don't know"—(a pause while he stared into a cabinet close

by)—"Humph! Lenses, I should say; but what a collection. Now, what's the meaning of this?"

"This" was a highly-polished metal plate affixed to the cabinet. It bore, inlaid in white enamel, a number of dots in rows. There was a character inlaid in red opposite each row. There was one dot to start with, then two, and so on up to ten. Alan studied the plate for a few minutes, and then an idea came to him.

"By Jove, this looks like a decimal system of numeration. The red characters are their figures from one to ten. The tenth line has two characters. The first the same as the one on top, and the second a new one."

Below, in bright blue inlay, were three characters together. Alan compared them with the red in the upper portion of the plate.

"If my idea is correct, and it looks like it, this cabinet is numbered eight hundred and thirty-two. Now, why numbered at all?" He looked around, and his eyes fell on the book shelves. "Of course! They have the reference library on the walls, and the marks on the books are numbers!" He had no pencil, but with his pocket-knife he scratched a copy of the numerals on the polished stick he carried and went to the book shelves. He was delighted to find that his surmise was correct, and that without difficulty he could read the mystic characters. Before long he came to those he sought. On ten successive metal cases he found the marks corresponding to eight hundred and thirty-two. The volumes he extracted from their cases were similar to those he had examined before in the adjoining gallery. As he had expected, each of the volumes he looked into were undoubtedly, from their illustrations, connected with the case of lenses. A closer examination of the objects around him showed that each was numbered, and from the numbers he proved his theory by finding the volumes that bore the number of each exhibit. In some instances a single model had as many as twenty volumes of reference—volumes of absorbing interest even to his untutored mind. Alan wandered through the bewildering array, bitterly bewailing his woeful ignorance of all but the most elementary ideas of science. It was tantalising beyond words to know just enough to stimulate his curiosity to bursting point. There was one consolation, however. He was sure that no individual professor of physics or natural philosophy would be very much better off than he. The range of subjects was too wide for the brain of any one man to be familiar with. Chemistry, electricity, optics, geology, metallurgy, he recognised, but there were scores of other matters that were to him as Hebrew or Sanskrit would be to an infant. Alan summed the matter up, leaning over the balustrade of the balcony and looking down on the dazzling

scene beneath. "It will take fifty commissions fifty blessed years to learn a fiftieth part of the blessed things. But what they do find out will be worth the work. This gallery will make the scientific world hum like swarming bees and by George, I'll be here to hear it hum." He paused reflectively. "Anyway, if I stay here till I grow grey, it's a moral that I won't by any wiser by myself." He roused himself and looked at his watch. It was nearly three o'clock. He had been too absorbed to notice how the time went. He felt hungry, but his curiosity was stronger than his appetite, and he resolved to try the remaining three galleries that day.

He hurried from the gallery to the exit, and turned again down the corridor to the left. He felt so certain of finding the next door where he expected it that it caused no surprise when he arrived at it. There was a sub-conscious wonder as to the contents of the next gallery. "Art, medicine, science, and now—" He stepped towards the closed door. "Quite so," he went on, as the door vanished into the wall. "Quite natural and proper. We have now arrived at the machinery section of the blessed exhibition, and of course, I know just about as much of machinery and engineering as I do about the other things. Alan, my son, you are beyond doubt a monument of blithering ignorance. Pshaw!" He passed through the doorway. It was an impressive sight under the white rays of the swinging lights, as they flashed on crank and shaft and wheel, and were reflected back from a forest of mechanical wonders. Some of the machines he judged were models, and others were the real thing, but as to their meaning or purpose his mind was a blank. There were intricate monsters and delicate exquisitely-wrought models side by side. The dislike of the ordinary mortal for interfering with unknown contrivances was strong upon him. A desire to see the wheels go round was curbed by the thoughts of unknown consequences. That the wheels would go round if properly treated he had no doubt, but as to his own ability to supply the proper treatment he had no illusions.

Alan took out his pipe, and smoked thoughtfully as he went down aisles and gangways. He peered curiously amongst cranks and levers, and speculated idly on the reasons for what he saw, admiring the wonderful workmanship and finish. One fact that he had noticed before was impressed on his mind with renewed force. Whatever metal work he came across was perfectly free from speck or tarnish. Every least part was as free from corrosion or rust as on the day (how immeasurably far back!) it left the hands of the craftsmen. It seemed as if these long-dead workmen had learned the secret of rendering their work imperishable. If the metal these great monsters were built of was for the most part steel,



as he imagined, then it was a form of steel such as our world knew nothing of. Again, too, throughout all the galleries he had explored there was a total absence of dust. This, too, impressed him greatly. It gave the whole wonderful place the air of having been daily swept and tended with scrupulous care. Wherever Dundas went this spotlessness brought with it a feeling he could not shake off of some ever-present but invisible caretaker. As he put it to himself, as he wandered through the galleries he expected at each turn to find some uniformed attendant demanding that his stick should be left at the entrance, and offering to sell him a catalogue for sixpence.

Alan spent a long hour wandering through the maze of machinery, every minute of which went to convince him more forcibly than ever of his colossal ignorance of engineering. Finally, he decided that he would rack his brain no longer, and, if possible at least, take a glance at the other two galleries before ending his investigations for the day.

However, he was not destined to leave the gallery without an adventure, and it was one that gave him a practical illustration of the un wisdom of meddling with unknown forces. A few yards from the rear doorway, on his way to the corridor, he paused to look at a machine that had previously attracted his attention by its apparent simplicity. It consisted solely of a burnished shaft of metal protruding from a cylindrical casing, the whole being mounted on a plain, but apparently strong stand. On one side of the casing was a lever, terminated by an inviting-looking grip for the hand. There was nothing about it to show rhyme or reason for its being there, still less to show its possible utility in the scheme of things. It looked more like an unfinished portion of a machine than the completed article, and was certainly the least complex-looking in the gallery. Standing behind it, Alan's hand fell unconsciously on the lever. He attempted to push it away from him, but it resisted the effort. Then he drew it towards him, only slightly—so slightly that he had reason to believe afterwards that he owed his life to the lightness of his touch. There was no sound from the machine itself, but in the corridor opposite the open door came a crash as of a bursting shell that echoed through the gallery like the crack of doom. For a moment the view was obscured by dust and smoke, and the concussion sent Dundas reeling backwards... When he had recovered from the shock the smoke cleared somewhat, and through the thinning mist showed havoc. The corridor and the doorway were partially blocked by masses of broken cement, torn down by the invisible force he had liberated, and the thickness of the wall showed a great irregular gaping hole, large enough to form a small room. Alan

examined the damage with no small concern. His previous experience had taught him the adamant strength of the material of the structure. "What power was this," he wondered, "that could deal so terrible a blow?" The wall was torn and riven like so much clay, and he realised that he had again been very close to a fatal ending to his exploring. He scrambled out into the passage inwardly registering a vow that in future nothing would induce him to lay his hand on any contrivance without the absolute certainty that it would be harmless.

It took him a little while to recover from the effects of his adventure, and to decide that for the time being it was useless to attempt to clear the passage. Then he made his way along to where he knew the next door would be found. A few minutes later Dundas was standing in the entrance to the fifth gallery. His recent scare was completely forgotten, and the joy of discovery was in his heart. Gallery number five was a library. From end to end in splendid array it was filled with book shelves, all closely packed with metal cases similar to those he had examined before. The shelves stood about fifteen feet in height, and covered the whole floor space with the exception of the spaces left for access, and where room had been left at regular intervals for tables. The lighting was the same as in the other galleries, but so arranged that no shadows fell in any of the narrow gangways between the shelves. Alan walked from one end of the gallery to the other, whistling cheerfully. He tried the great doors leading to the vestibule in a perfunctory way, and, as he expected, they were immovable. One thing puzzled him. He could see no ladder nor any apparent means of gaining the higher shelves beyond his reach. It might have been an oversight, he thought, but if it were it would be the only oversight he had so far come upon. He approached the nearest book shelf and examined it closely.

Equi-distant from the two ends, and about five feet from the floor, was a small metal disc set in the framework. On the disc were two small buttons, one red and the other white.

Alan looked at them thoughtfully for some time, then, summoning up his courage, he pressed the red one with tentative finger. Nothing happened. Then he tried the white. The instant his finger touched it the whole case subsided silently, but quickly, until the disc was on a level with the floor. The movement was so swift that he had no time to step back before the case had come to rest, but so perfect was the controlling mechanism that there was not the slightest jar when the motion stopped. "By Jove!" he muttered, "no need for ladders here. Ripping idea. There's another disc in reach now. I'll try it again." Obedient to his touch, the

case again subsided, and when it came to rest with the second disc on the floor level, he found that the top row of books was within easy reach. "Good business," said Alan aloud, cheerfully. "Now it follows logically that the shelves will come up again, and if I'm not mistaken that is what the red button is for." He stooped and put his theory to the test. In a moment the case rose in answer to the pressure of his finger to its original position, leaving him lost in admiration at the wonderful skill that had carried out the idea. In spite of the temptation to examine the books, he curbed his curiosity. It was growing late, and he determined, if possible, to have a glimpse of the last gallery that day. Closing his ears to the siren call of the close-packed shelves, he paced slowly back to the corridor. At a rough estimate that gallery must have held a million books, and he smiled grimly at the thought of an attack against such odds, backed, as he well knew, by the fact of their being indecipherable. The thought of the latter fact brought forth a sigh of irritation. "All the care for nothing—all the work lost. What light on the dark places of the world's knowledge lay buried there." He put the thought from him impatiently.

Perhaps after all there would be a key. Surely the vast intelligence that had planned it all had left some connecting link. The idea eased his mind, and he turned in the doorway with hopeful eyes on the array of silent witnesses.

Six o'clock. For a while he hesitated in the corridor. Then he made up his mind. At least he would take one look at the last gallery. Turning, he walked down the corridor, fully expecting to find the last entrance similar to the others, but his hopes were banished abruptly.

Round the curving corridor from the library door the passage terminated in an unexpected obstacle, a wall pierced with a doorway and a closed door. It was the door itself rather than the unexpected ending of the passage that brought an astonished ejaculation to his lips. The door was not large, but was set deep in the massive wall. It was made of metal of some kind, and on it was carved or moulded the figure of a man, and in the figure Dundas recognised the domineering presence of the statue in the vestibule. There was the same fierce relentless face staring into his, and the whole attitude of the figure standing with folded arms seemed to warn the explorer against further progress. On the lintel above again occurred the three sets of characters which he had come to regard not only as the names of the figures in the vestibule, but also as a danger signal. "Now, whatever in the name of all that's wonderful is the meaning of this? From the look of it I should say that the last gallery will be the most interesting, and, if I'm not mistaken, the most exciting. But, my

regal-looking friend"—here he nodded familiarly at the figure on the door—"I don't propose to start asking you for admittance at this hour of the day. I'm too tired and hungry to tackle the riddles you are likely to ask, and I guess I'm likely to want all my wits about me when I do start. So if you'll pardon my very brief visit I'll leave you until the morning."

Alan was not altogether disappointed. As he scrambled over the debris in front of the machinery gallery he told himself that he was more tired than he realised. The final climb up the winding stairway to the shed convinced him of this, and when he at last locked the door behind him and stood in the fading daylight he felt he had done a good day's work.

How little and insignificant his house looked after what he had been through, and yet, he thought, if he chose to speak now, that home would become for the time being the centre of the whole world. The eyes of every nation would be turned on it, and its name and his would be on every tongue.

# Chapter 13

EARLY next morning Dundas returned to the absorbing mystery. The extra precaution taken to guard the sixth gallery assured him that it contained something that would compensate him for the trouble he expected in gaining access to it. His first visit was to the doorway he had discovered on the previous evening. In spite of an heroic resolution that he would make his way to the spot with his eyes closed to the allurements of the galleries he had already investigated, the attraction of the various wonders he had to pass proved irresistible, and the journey, which should have taken no longer than two minutes from the vestibule to the corridor, occupied two full hours instead.

Arrived at his destination, Alan made a cautious and exhaustive examination of the door and its surroundings. An hour spent in a minute scrutiny of every inch of its surface left him without the slightest inkling to its secret. There was nothing in its appearance to indicate which way it opened or to suggest that it was only a blind to induce the unwary to waste time and temper over. He sounded the surrounding wall with painstaking care, in the hope of finding a device similar to that which had first given him entrance from the surface, but without success. Whatever mechanism existed for gaining the mysterious beyond, it was a mechanism that so far he had not encountered.

Another hour went by, and leaning against the wall of the corridor, Alan told the fierce-eyed image on the door just exactly what he thought of the methods used by him and his friends to keep the gallery inviolate. The outburst of temper relieved him somewhat, and was received with perfect equanimity by the image. The futility of his anger made Dundas smile in spite of his irritation. He told himself that, brave as he was in the face of the graven image before him, such a demonstration before its original in the flesh would have been quite another matter. "I'm quite prepared to bet that even his most intimate friends, if he ever had an intimate friend, wouldn't have cared to take a liberty with him." After a pause, he went on, still regarding the figure with a frown, "Yes, your Majesty, you have exhausted my resources at this end for the present, at any rate.

The only thing to be done is to return to the vestibule and try the main doorway, and I doubt if I'll get much satisfaction out of that."

Since the day of his narrow escape in the vestibule, he had trodden only a carefully marked course from the foot of the stairway to the entrance of the art gallery. He felt there was no use in taking any unnecessary risks with that beautiful but treacherous pavement. Now, however, he determined to examine it thoroughly. Working his way from the centre, he carefully approached the door of the sixth gallery, which was the one next to the art gallery on the right. He was not long in finding he had need for all his care. As in the previous attempt to find a path for himself, a noiseless chasm opened at his feet under pressure from the stick he carried with him. Alan stepped back alarmed.

After considering the situation, he again sounded the floor before him, with a view to ascertaining the extent of the trap. The device, he found, consisted simply of a nicely balanced section of the pavement that occupied the whole front of the doorway, with a margin of about three feet on either side. By working round one end of it he found that it tipped either way, and that it came so close to the doorway as to leave only a bare three inches of firm footing. Even if by a lucky jump he could reach this doubtful coign of vantage, he would be able to do very little in the way of testing the door, and, further, would find it almost impossible to reach firm footing again. There was one hope—a bridge. In spite of his dislike to face the weary climb to the surface he came to the conclusion that he must make the journey to get material to span the gulf. It cost him over an hour, and no little perspiration, before he arrived in the vestibule again with a plank about twelve feet long, and some ten inches wide, with which to make the experiment. It was an experiment that occupied at most some sixty seconds, but they were full of unpleasant incident. Standing close to the edge of the trap, he lowered the end of his plank so that it would fall nicely on the firm edge against the door. The instant the weight of the plank reached its goal a mighty metal curtain crashed down from above, closing the doorway completely, and jarred the arms that held the plank so unmercifully that Alan, perforce, let go. The trap in the pavement completed the wreck of his hopes and his bridge by swallowing every vestige of them. Only a few jagged pieces of timber protruding from under the metal curtain remained to mark the event. The net result of the attempt was to increase the difficulty of obtaining entrance, and to leave Dundas with both arms plentifully garnished with splinters as souvenirs.

He regarded the scene of his labours with angry eyes. His only consolation was that it was better for the plank to have been under the falling curtain than his body. "I can take a hint," he muttered, "as well as the next man. I presume that beastly shutter was meant to warn me to confine my attentions to the back door. Well—we'll see." He turned to the art gallery, in order to get a better light, and spent ten minutes picking splinters from his tingling arms. Then he made his way to the corridor to recommence his investigations on the closed door. For the rest of the day he tried every imaginable means of finding the key to the problem, but in this instance he found himself faced by a riddle that could not be solved by chance. Somewhere he knew, probably within reach of his hand, was the mechanism that would give ingress, but so cunningly hidden that the closest search failed to disclose it. At the day's end he confessed himself beaten, and returned to the surface an angry and baffled man. In the days that followed he was to learn patience, and learn it thoroughly. Day after day went past in never-ceasing search. All the wonders around him were as nothing compared with the one absorbing idea that now beset him. For a while the temptation came to him to publish the news of his discovery, and obtain aid in pursuing his search, but he put the thought away. To him alone belonged the honour of solving the mystery, and until he had done so he determined to keep his secret. In his ardour for his self-imposed task he almost forgot the lapse of time, and how long it was since he had last been to Glen Cairn. So deeply had the mystery eaten into his soul that he came to regard that part of his life as something too distant to worry about. The only thing that did trouble him was the approaching necessity for harvesting his crop, and this he put off as long as possible.

One evening he had a visit from Bryce. It was a visit that left Hector a much puzzled man. Alan had never been a frequenter of the township, but still his absence of over three weeks had been noticed and commented upon. At last Bryce, urged by Doris, who scented a hitch in her plans decided to hunt him up. He found Alan seated at his table studying a plan that looked like the section of an orange. Alan greeted his old friend warmly, but Bryce was not slow to notice a reserve that was foreign to his friend's nature. Alan looked a little run down, and there were some lines in his forehead that Hector had not seen there before.

When the first general talk was over, Bryce, who was really concerned, told Dundas flatly that he was not looking up to the mark. "Fact of the matter is, old chap," he went on, "you're overworking yourself; and not only that, I suppose your baching means tinned meat, and no cooking.

It's enough to kill a horse. You'd better get a housekeeper. Let Doris pick one for you. I know she will be only too glad to help."

Alan met the charges with a slow, friendly smile, "Hec, I'll plead guilty to the tinned food. But, believe me, that has nothing to do with my not being up to concert pitch. I'll admit that. As for overwork would you be surprised to hear that for nearly a fortnight I've not done a stroke about the place? I'll start picking on Monday, as I want to get it over. To be as honest with you as I can be, I'm worried." Bryce looked at him keenly, and hesitated a moment. "So far as I can help, Alan, call on me. I won't ask any questions, but I'll admit you have aroused my curiosity." There was a long silence, while the younger man sat with his chin on his hands, staring blankly in front of him. Bryce could see that there was a mental conflict going on, and forebore to speak. At length Dundas broke the silence. "Bryce, you are the only man I could or would discuss the matter with. I know you will believe me when I tell you it's a problem that I must work out for myself, and until I have solved it I must keep my own counsel. I've been on the point half-a-dozen times of going to you. Perhaps I may before it's over."

"Tell me one thing," put in Bryce. "Is it anything financial?"

Alan laughed lightly. "I could almost wish it were. In that case I'd simply turn the matter over to you, and sit with my hands in my pockets until you had untangled the knot. No; I can tell you this much. It has nothing to do with my private affairs—or—" and he emphasised the words with meaning—"with anyone we know of."

Bryce felt an inward relief at the latter part of Alan's speech. For a while he had begun to think that his wife's match-making plans were at the bottom of the trouble. "Well, old man, we'll leave it at that. Only let me help, if I can or when I can."

"There's one thing you can do for me, and no one better, Hec—though I'm afraid you find me dashed mysterious."

"Hang the mystery—every man has a right to his own secrets. What do you want me to do?"

"This. Until I have fixed this matter up to my own satisfaction, I am chained to the vineyard. I want you to choke off any inquiry about my movements—at the club, for instance. And if you hear of anyone contemplating looking me up, choke him off, too. One thing I'll promise you, Bryce. So soon as I'm able to talk to anyone about it, and, believe me, it's the biggest thing you've ever heard of, you'll be the first man I'll come to."



Hector willingly promised to aid as far as he could, and, seeing Alan was not disposed to discuss his troubles further, tactfully let the matter drop. For an hour the two yarned with their old freedom. Dundas declined an invitation to the bank, pleading his problem, and asked Hector to make his peace with Mistress Doris, a task he was warned, which would be no light one.

After a final whisky, Bryce drove off. He knew enough of Alan to feel sure that whatever he was up against, it was nothing he need be ashamed of. But, after being for many years a kind of father-confessor to his friend, he was sorely puzzled as to the nature of the mystery that had come, so to speak, from a blue sky.

However, if Hector was puzzled, Doris was more so. She had seen and talked with Marian Seymour, and had learned enough without asking any questions to satisfy her as to the result of her plans. But Alan's behaviour entirely upset her calculations. Two and two in this instance made anything but four. In her own mind she considered that Dundas deserved to be shaken, and otherwise treated to feminine marks of exasperation.

Dundas had for a while at least to leave the great mystery to itself. He was obliged to engage his pickers, and get his grapes off the vineyard, and for nearly a fortnight, from sunrise to sunset, he tramped about with his men, indulging in amateur slave-driving to ease his irritation at the delay. As the free and independent grape-picker does not, as a rule, take kindly to a slave-driving process, he gilded the pill by offering a bonus that made the free and independent ones submit philosophically to his constant spurring. One man, who was an exponent of the popular system of "slowing-down," and who preached it to his fellow-workers, received the surprise of his lifetime. Alan detected the move in the hour of its birth, and promptly "fired" the mutineer. The mutineer, having received his money, challenged the "boss" to put him off the place. Whereupon his fellow-labourers in the vineyard were treated to an exhibition that gave them a topic of conversation in many a camp thereafter. The astonished picker was turned into a lightning-conductor for days of pent-up wrath. After five lively and bewildering minutes, he lay where he had fallen, with a vague idea in his head that the "boss" had four arms instead of two, and knew how to use them all with devilish effect.

"Get up," snapped Alan. The man rose slowly, and prepared to take up his swag. "Wait—now you can stay on if you like." He was loth to lose a man, and could not afford the time to procure another. "But if you stay I

promise you a hiding you will remember for a lifetime if I have any more of your damned nonsense." The mutineer recognised two things promptly. One was that here was a man whose leg it was not safe to pull, and the other that the pay was better than was offering elsewhere. So, putting the best face he could on the matter (and it was not much of a face, even after it had been bathed copiously), he accepted the offer. After that episode the work went with a swing.

At last the final dray left, and Alan paid off his unwelcome help. Never was a vine-grower more disgusted with such a bounteous crop. It was the reward of a year's hard work, and at another time would have been the source of unbounded satisfaction. Now he anathematised it as a bar to his one absorbing interest. Alan wrote a note to Bryce, asking him to collect his cheque from the winery, and enclosing an order. Then with the vineyard finally off his mind, he felt himself free for the great work at last.

A week of exasperating and futile search for the missing key followed the return of Dundas to the task. As day followed day without result, his despair of success changed into a grim determination to continue until he had mastered the riddle. However, as it eventually happened, his victory came from the least expected quarter, and at a time when he had temporarily relaxed his efforts. Until the day in question, he had been in the habit of returning to the homestead for his lunch, but his dislike for that one-hundred-and-sixty feet of treadmill gave him a brain-wave. He reflected that it would be a good plan to take some food with him, in order to save himself the climb. About midday, therefore, he looked about for a comfortable seat on which to rest while eating his meal. He found the fragments of cement that had been detached by the explosion from the machinery-room too "nubbly" for his liking, and he wandered into the great library.

He seated himself at the table nearest the door and ate his food. When he had finished, instead of immediately returning to the corridor to continue his search, he filled his pipe, and leaning back, looked idly round him as he smoked. Since the day he had at first discovered the library, he had scarcely entered it, although it had really a greater fascination for him than any of the galleries. Now, however, the thought came to him that he might at least glance at a few of the books. It was whilst considering which of the shelves he would first give his attention that his eye was taken by a variation in colour of one single book-cover in all the rows within range of his vision. While every other shelf in sight showed dull,

metallic covers uniformly, one the nearest to the door, was broken by one single volume cased in bright white metal.

The distinction was so great as to invite attention, and Alan knew well that there was some special object in the alteration. Without hesitation he rose from his seat, and having obtained the volume, he returned to the table. He slipped the book from its casing, and spread it open before him. The first glance at its contents galvanised him into quivering excitement. The page he had opened showed what was undoubtedly a sectional plan of the whole of the subterranean building. With trembling fingers he turned to the beginning, and went from page to page with burning interest. As his eye scanned each plan in turn, he found each section, from the entrance door at the surface onwards, marked, with its means of entrance set out in detail. Finally, he turned to the page showing the closed door in the corridor. It was pictured in minute detail so as to be quite unmistakable. On the opposite page was a picture showing part of the interior of the library. It was the rear wall containing the small entrance. Each of the great bookcases against the wall was clearly shown in detail, even to the white-cased book he was holding in his hand. There was this difference, however; in the far left-hand corner in the diagram was a small square of books blocked out with a red blot.

Carrying the book with him, Alan went to the corner but could see nothing unusual in the spot indicated by the red mark. Comparing the diagram carefully with the shelves before him, he attempted to draw from its place one of the marked volumes. For a moment it resisted his efforts, until with a stronger tug he pulled not the book, as he intended, but a small door about two feet square, which had been made to imitate the surrounding books. Even the closest examination failed to indicate its existence until it was actually opened, so carefully had the imitation been carried out. With a cry of pleasure Dundas looked into the secret cavity. "At last! At last!" he said to himself, again and again; for let into the wall at the back of the recess was a short, heavy lever. Without waiting to consider results, he grasped the handle before him, and drew the lever down in the slot that held it. As he did so there came a deep metallic boom from the corridor outside, and Alan scarcely waited to push the book he held back into the open cupboard before running out to see the effect of his act. When he had arrived at the passage, and gained the scene of his weeks of tormenting search, his delight found vent in a loud hurrah. The metal door had disappeared into the pavement beneath, and the path was open before him.

Taking his stick, he stood in the doorway and surveyed the new territory with eager eyes. Beyond the wall the corridor widened out into a vestibule about forty feet square. It was empty except for an object that Alan looked at with very little satisfaction. It was another statue of the domineering figure in the outer vestibule. He had looked at it too long and too often on the door to have much admiration left for it. Bare as it was, the new chamber had a beauty that was indescribable. Walls, floor, and ceiling were composed of the most exquisite coloured marble and precious decorative stone that were ever gathered together. The great lustrous globes that blazed from the ceiling were reflected from thousands of multi-coloured surfaces. The whole effect was one of barbaric splendour, but so perfectly had the blending of the colours been carried out that in the whole wonderful decorative scheme there was not one inharmonious note. As his eyes drank in the beauty of the chamber before him, Dundas became aware of one feature that drew his attention from the gorgeous colouring around him. The left wall of the chamber was broken by an arched doorway that differed from all the others he had yet seen. In the first place it was quite double the size of those opening on to the corridor, and again it was already open. From where he stood he could see that, instead of a door, it was closed by a curtain of some beautiful scarlet shimmering fabric that cut off the view of the gallery beyond. Everything seemed to indicate that his way was now open to the solution of the final mystery, and Alan would have accepted the position as such but for the presence of the forbidding statue that stared at him from its pedestal with an intensity that was almost hypnotic.

Testing the pavement as he advanced, Dundas walked slowly towards the figure in the centre of the chamber. When he reached it and paused beneath it he was standing with the curtained archway right before him. So far so good, but he knew now from experience how little reliance could be placed on appearances, so he advanced with unabated caution. Prepared as he was for surprises, the one that overtook him was perhaps the one furthest from his thoughts. Without a sound or warning, and with overwhelming suddenness, he found himself in total darkness. It was not the misty darkness of night, but a dense impenetrable rayless blackness that could be almost felt. It was overpowering in its intensity. The shock of its coming held him motionless and petrified. On the instant he realised the peril of his position. He felt for his matches, and as he did so remembered they were lying on the table in the library where he had eaten his lunch. Holding himself well in hand, he tried to recollect his bearings from the entrance in order to try to regain the corridor.

But even as he stood—and it could not have been for more than a few seconds— something else happened. Close beside him, so close that he almost cried out in amazement, was the sound of a long, deep human sigh. He swung round. Again it came, this time further away, but intensely real. Then he stood straining his senses in that horrible black stillness to catch the sound again, and, waiting, he realised that his movements had made him lose his bearings for the corridor.

How long he stood there he could not afterwards remember. It seemed ages until the crowning terror came and wiped all sense of time from his stricken mind. Suddenly the air about him seemed full of tremulous palpitating sound. It seemed as if, all about him, thronged a whispering ghostly multitude. For a little while the sound rose and fell, and seemed to die away in unmeasured distances. Then again came a little space of silence. Then the stillness was broken by a sound so awful that Dundas felt a cold sweat break out over his body. It was a shriek, inhuman and evil, that cut into the darkness again and again. The sound broke off suddenly, and was followed by a burst of horrible laughter. Then came a trampling and scuffling of feet around him, bestial snarls, shouts of laughter, and again silence. Alan stood with clenched hands fighting back the cry that rose to his lips. He dared not move. A single step in any direction might mean death, and yet he knew that his racked nerves could not stand the strain much longer. Again there came the sound of movement in the darkness, this time at a distance. Voices whispered tensely in some strange unknown tongue, and then came a sound more awful than anything yet. It was a groan of agony as though wrung by damnable tortures from some straining body. Somewhere near by a hellish work was being done. Some pain-racked creature writhed in hideous torment. There were guttural ejaculations, the clank of metal, then scream on scream pierced the paralysed listener through and through. He realised that the sounds were coming closer. The horrible darkness seemed full of bestial obscene ravings. He felt as if a legion of fiends surrounded him. Then close behind him the scream rang out again. The strain snapped, and sheer panic seized him. With a cry he rushed blindly away in the darkness, to be stopped by charging into a wall. Scarce feeling the shock of the impact, he ran forward again, heedless of where he went, for the scream had changed into a diabolic howling. Once more his wild rush was stopped. Reckless with fear, he blundered forward again. Then as he ran something soft and clinging enfolded him for a moment. With a wild shout he flung it away from him.

His knees gave way beneath him, and with out-flung arms he fell to the floor.

Then came a great wonder. Even as he fell the sounds ceased, and the light burst out again, and, panting and half sobbing, he found himself lying with trembling limbs spread out on the pavement of the sixth gallery.

# Chapter 14

FOR a long time Alan lay face downwards, with his head resting on his arms to recover his scattered senses. That he had been the victim of a fiendish device he now realised, and the realisation that his panic was due to nothing but a trick did not serve to heighten his self-esteem. He told himself that he might have expected some such assault on his imagination. That it had been deliberately planned to break the nerve of the discoverer he felt sure, and, lying there, a nebulous idea came to his mind as to how it had worked. He felt very little consolation in the reflection that not one man in a thousand would have kept his head and his courage. "That's twice I've been scared stiff by nothing in this dashed museum. What a beastly nightmare it was while it lasted. I suppose if I had not been in such an infernal hurry to get in I would have found a warning in that book in the library." He sat up with a sigh, and looked round him. "Well, I'll be hanged if there seems to be much to make such a fuss about. Good Lord! Are they real?"

Alan pulled himself to his feet slowly and stood staring down the gallery. The great room, large as it was, was slightly shorter than the others—probably by as much as the width of the ante-chamber. Its contents were few in number, but as Alan looked them over he found they lacked nothing in interest. The whole of the far end nearest the main doorway from the vestibule was occupied by what appeared to be a small temple built within the gallery. It was about thirty feet wide and sixty feet long. The architecture was somewhat Grecian in design. Two steps the whole width of the front led up to a portico supported by two pillars at either end, and the middle of the front was filled by a closed doorway. Fairly in the centre of the gallery, and about twenty feet from the steps of the portico, was set a heavily built chair with a low back, and it was so placed that anyone occupying it would be seated squarely facing the temple. It was neither the temple nor the chair that had drawn the startled question from Alan's lips, and brought him to his feet.

The portico was occupied by three nude female figures. One stood leaning beside the doorway, with her arm outstretched, beckoning him

forward. Another was reclining on the pavement near her feet, leaning on her elbow, with her other arm upraised. The third was seated on the step of the portico. One hand was clasped about her knee, while the forefinger of the other was pressed to her smiling lips with a gesture of mischievous mystery. Fascinated by their glorious beauty, Dundas walked slowly towards them. Each figure was the embodiment of perfect grace and loveliness, and the supreme craft that had moulded them had endowed them with all but life. What made the deception more perfect was the fact that the figures were tinted in such a manner that even when he stood close beside them he could scarcely realise that art, and not nature, had given them being. Alan looked from one smiling face to another. The spirit of mischief that animated the three found reflection in himself, and he raised his cap and bowed ceremoniously.

"Upon my word, girls, I don't wonder at your fuss when you heard me coming. If you'd only sent me word, I'd have waited until you had completed your toilet, although it looks as if you had been locked out and your raiment locked in. A most embarrassing situation, I'll admit." He looked up at the door in front of him. Across the lintel was blazoned a word in half a dozen characters of burnished gold on the black background. "Now, can either of you tell me," he asked, "whether that is the name of the cottage or the name of the owner? At the same time you might tell me how the deuce you managed to raise such an infernal (pardon the expression) row, and also which of you turned out the light? I don't think it was a friendly action, though it speaks more for your modesty than your sense of humour." His eyes roved round the gallery inquiringly. "I think, for my own peace of mind, I had better investigate those beastly noises first. Ah!" For the first time the peculiar appearance of the walls attracted his attention. There was no balcony here to detract from their height. They rose from floor to arched ceiling for forty feet unbroken. At the first glance they appeared to be covered with a vast perforated metal screen. Dundas walked up and down, and examined the screen closely. Then he gave vent to a long whistle. The perforations were circular and varied in size from a foot in diameter down to less than an inch. They were closely set, and occupied every visible inch of space. Through their whole arrangement there ran a carefully carried-out series of artistic designs. What caused the whistle of enlightenment from Dundas was the discovery that the perforations were really the larger ends of innumerable metal funnels or horns. "I'm afraid Edison wasn't the first man to make a phonograph," he muttered, "and if I'm not mistaken the originators of this exhibition have improved on it somewhat. Ye Gods!



but they took a rise out of me with it. We'll just experiment a little." He walked back to the curtained entrance, and, standing on the threshold, smiled to think how his rushing blindly into that curtain in the dark had completed his panic.

The ante-chamber looked as beautiful and free from guile as when he first saw it from the corridor. With his eyes on the lights above, he took two steps on the polished pavement. As he did so the globes flashed upward into the ceiling, and he found himself in darkness, and with the darkness came a horrible howl from behind him. Even though he was prepared for it the sound sent a shiver through his body. Without waiting to hear more, he darted back into the gallery, and the comforting light blazed up again. "By Jove! I guess when I leave this place I'll cross to the corridor with a record sprint. I should say that the D.T.'s are a maiden's sigh compared with a spell in that infernal place." He turned and walked back to the "temple." First, he went right round it, but, save for the doorway in the portico, he saw no sign of an entrance. The only new light he gained on the subject was that it was built of metal, and was evidently of enormous strength. Obviously he must seek from the portico for admittance. Then there was the chair he had noticed standing so conspicuously before the steps. It was heavily built, with arms and a low back, but was perfectly plain. It had no legs, and was really more like a box furnished as a seat. Beyond the fact that it was made of metal and immovably fixed in the paved floor, there was nothing that looked either interesting or dangerous about it. It was for that very reason that Dundas declined the very obvious invitation to sit in it. Instead, he looked it over critically, and shook his head. "Not much, my friends. I don't think I'll take a chair just now. It may be quite harmless, but I have my doubts." He returned to the portico, and seated himself beside the laughing statue on the first step.

"By Jove, Flossie, or is it Gertie? No, I think it must be Flossie. Pardon my familiarity, but you and your friends are just a little— well—you know. I'm not a stern moralist like MacArthur or Pook, for instance, but I'm sure Mrs. Grundy would not approve of you. She'd write letters to the papers about you. You are so lovely that she would call high heaven to witness that you have a demoralising tendency. I suppose the three of you know what's inside this remarkable edifice and how to open the doors. I shouldn't be surprised if you had the secret hidden about you somewhere." He paused and looked the three figures over inquisitively. Then he went on. "Though I'm bound to admit I may be doing you all an injustice, for if you have the secret in your possession you must have

swallowed it. May the devil admire me if you have any other means of concealing it." He stood up and paced to and fro before the "temple," reflecting on his next move. The idea of another weary search for the entrance to the last secret of the galleries was not one to consider with any relish. A thought of the book he had left in the library came to his mind, and he decided to examine it with a view to finding some solution to his last problem.

The journey to and from the library did not occupy much time. Alan crossed the ante-chamber, after carefully measuring the distance and direction with his eye, with one wild dash. His flight took only a few seconds, but brief as it was it was sufficient to fill the darkness with unholy noises.

Returned to the sixth gallery, Dundas seated himself on the steps of the portico, and searched the volume he had brought with him for light on the subject in hand. In the end he slammed the book shut with an exclamation of disgust on finding that the last definite information was that which opened the way to the antechamber. Remained only the chair. He examined it closely. It appeared to be solid and immovable and free from any signs of hidden trouble. The gorgeous pavement in mosaic that it was resting on gave no indication of pitfalls. Alan pressed it here and there with negative results. "Well," he said to himself at length, "a chair is intended to be sat on, and I don't suppose this is any exception. But—I suppose if I do sit on it the darned thing will play some dirty trick on me." He looked round at the silent figures on the portico. The three seemed to be convulsed with suppressed mirth. He shook an admonitory finger at them. "You girls ought to be blushing for yourselves instead of laughing at me. Upon my word, you huzzies, I feel embarrassed every time I look at you. I'll risk it, anyhow."

This last to the chair. He seated himself gingerly, his whole body on springs ready to fling himself clear in the event of trouble. He was agreeably surprised, if somewhat disappointed, that nothing unusual resulted. However, he wanted to think, and the chair was more comfortable than the steps, so he remained where he was. For ten minutes he sat with his chin resting on his hand deep in thought. Suddenly he started and looked round. Then he lapsed again into reverie, only to sit erect again with nervous expectation. He felt that some almost imperceptible change was taking place. Not a whisper of sound broke the intense silence of the vault-like gallery. And yet—it was uncanny. There was some subtle alteration. What it was he could not at first determine. For a moment he felt inclined to spring from the chair. The thought gave place to a

resolution to stick to his seat at all hazards. Sounds might come, but now that he understood their origin they might be unpleasant, but at any rate they were harmless. Leaning back with every sense on the alert, he waited developments. It was the strange quality of the silence that surrounded him that puzzled him. There was something tense and strained that woke a memory. Then it flashed across his mind. Years ago he had stood, one of a horror-stricken crowd at a great fire, and saw human beings leap to death from the flames, and back to his brain came the memory of the hush that fell on the throng. A hush of expectation. The same feeling came upon him now. The strained silence was the silence of a waiting multitude listening for the coming of some great event. The air was pregnant with mystery and expectancy. Alan closed his eyes and gripped his chair with whitening knuckles. He felt that he was in the midst of a great silent concourse of humanity.

There came a rustle and a suppressed whispering wave. It was unreal, and yet terribly real. Suddenly he sat erect, quivering in spite of himself. It took every scrap of resolution he possessed to restrain his movements. From a great distance came the sound of voices chanting. The sound was so faint that at first he could only catch it in fragments. Gradually it grew in strength—nearer and nearer—a triumphal song from some great processional choir. He listened, lost in awe and wonder. Never had he heard anything more entrancingly beautiful as the magnificent torrent of sound that rose and swelled through the gallery. It filled the great building, as it filled his whole soul, to overflowing. Every earthly memory seemed swept from his mind. He sat motionless, intoxicated with the glory that thrilled him through and through. How long it lasted he could not tell. In regular cadence the mighty sound rose and then died away to silence as it had come. Something told Dundas there was more to follow. He realised now, without the slightest apprehension, that the lights of the gallery had slowly faded with the sound, leaving only a dim subdued glow. Then it came. One single perfect voice that broke the throbbing stillness in a wonder of glorious harmony. It told of life and love, and of death and war. It told of love splendid and passionate, of deeds that fired the blood to frenzy, and through it all was a note of terrible overwhelming sadness. The glow had faded completely. Dundas sat in utter darkness. The tears he had tried at first to restrain came to his eyes unchecked. It seemed as if the hands of the invisible singer had swept the chords of his very heart.

At last the glorious melody faded, and while the air still quivered with the dying notes, a soft light broke from within the portico. Dundas

watched it unmoved. He was still too deeply under the spell of the music to heed. The light increased. It came from above and behind the figures, flinging their shadows in a dark splash across the pavement to his feet. Suddenly he pulled himself together with an exclamation. He noticed that the shadowed arms of two of the figures converged, and the hands met at a point in the pavement immediately in front of him. In a moment he was on his knees. Quickly pulling out his pocket knife, he tried the spot where the shadows converged. It was the centre of one of the mosaic designs. Instead of being diamond hard the place was as soft as putty. As he worked eagerly the shadow faded, and as imperceptibly as they had died away the lights of the gallery blazed up again.

It was not until long afterwards that Dundas learned that the mechanism within the chair was so delicately balanced that the warmth of the body of anyone occupying it would set it in motion. He would have felt more keenly excited, too, had he known, as he did later, that, though the music could be repeated, the mechanical adjustment was such that the shadows from the figures on the portico would not be thrown on the pavement a second time. Once, and once only, was the chance given to the discoverer to read the riddle of the "temple."

He soon found that the spot he was able to cut out with his knife was not more than four inches in diameter, and on penetrating an inch the blade came into contact with metal. Less than fifteen minutes' work cleared the whole of the soft cement away. The metal plate beneath felt loose as he worked, and by inserting the point of the knife along its edge he quickly raised it from its place. As he looked into the cavity beneath he gave a little exclamation of pleasure. It contained a small button protruding from the middle of a burnished saucer. Alan looked at the button, and from it to the portico. The three figures laughed back with provoking mirth. For a while he hesitated, his finger hovering indecisively over the button. What would it be, this end of his long search—this mystery that had been guarded so jealously? What could there be more wonderful than he had already found? Now at the supreme moment he lingered. At last he made up his mind. With his eyes fixed on the massive doorway, and his heart thumping against his ribs, he pressed his finger to the button. The touch was answered by a sonorous, deep-toned thunder as the mighty doors parted in the middle and disappeared slowly into the wall on either side, and when the booming echoes died away the path was open at last.

# Chapter 15

DUNDAS stood up and stepped towards the portico. Across the now-open doorway there hung a magnificent curtain that hid the interior from view. From lintel to step it hung in heavy shimmering lustrous folds of gorgeous colouring. Awed and expectant, he approached, then, with a hand that shook, he drew the veil aside and looked within. For a long time he stood motionless, a prey to a thousand surging emotions. Then, obeying an instinct he could not have explained, he bared his head, as, drawn by a resistless fascination, he crossed the threshold. His feet made no sound as they sank into a soft carpet. His eyes were blind to the exquisite wonder of his surroundings, where the roseate glow from the ceiling was shed on a scene of indescribable beauty. With fast-drawn breath and half-fearful steps he advanced to the middle of the temple, and there halted beside the one thing within it that held his gaze to the exclusion of all else. Midway from each end was placed a great crystal dome fully ten feet in diameter. It was set in a rim of dull gold that rose about twelve inches from the floor. Beneath the dome was a low couch of wondrous workmanship, and on the couch reclined the form of a woman.

Minute after minute passed while Alan stood staring down through the crystal at the figure before him, as motionless as the figure itself. The only sound that passed his lips were the words that came as though torn from his soul: "My God! My God! How wonderful!" Through his brain raged a mad tornado of thoughts. He did not dare to let his mind dwell on the idea that flashed through it as he stood. It was mad, incredible, fantastic, beyond the realms of the most insane imaginings. His mind had perforce accepted the reality of every other part of the discovery, but was stopped by the vista that lay before it now. Long ago he had arrived at the certainty that the origin of the galleries in point of time could not be counted in thousands of years, but in millions. He had accepted the idea of the preservation of matter, organic and inorganic, but this—"No! No! a thousand times No!" The words came from his dry lips in a hoarse whisper. Yet as he uttered them, the wild thrill of hope that went

through his heart seemed to give the lie to the words. He pressed his hands wildly to his eyes as though to shut out and crush down the hopes and the longings that were struggling for expression. His arms dropped heavily to his sides, and he looked once more at the wondrous form before him. As he did so, the certainty that this was no work of the craft of man came upon him with stunning force. He knew beyond all shadow of doubt that the glorious being before him was indeed human, and had lived. For the rest he dared not think.

She was lying with her head pillowed on a large white cushion, that was almost hidden by the masses of deep gold hair that surrounded her face, and flowed downwards across her shoulder and bosom, and veiled almost to her knees the sapphire-coloured covering that was thrown across her body. Her arms, bare to the shoulder, lay straight beside her. Where the heavy waves of her hair parted on her shoulders Alan saw that she was clothed in a robe of palest blue, that came almost to her throat. The lapse of time had moulded the delicate fabrics that covered her to every line and contour of her form. But it was the face surrounded by its surging golden cloud that held his gaze entranced. It was not merely beautiful; it was lovely, with a loveliness that was not earthly. The dark shade of her straight, delicate brows, and the long lashes that rested on her cheeks, formed a strange and wonderful contrast to her gleaming hair. From her low, broad forehead to the smooth, polished curves of her chin and throat each feature was perfect and faultless. The hand of Venus herself might have fashioned the curves of the sweet alluring lips, and her wayward son might have wrought for years to place that sweet, shadowy smile upon them. It was a face that all the gods in Olympus might have held council over, to blend all their wisdom, mystery, majesty, and beauty, and mould them into the still countenance of the woman who lay enthroned beneath the crystal canopy. Yet the face seemed veiled, because the drooped lids hid the eyes that would light it into life. Over all was a pallor, but it was not that of death. There was a faint trace of pink on the smooth white cheeks, and a deeper tone on the soft, curving lips. It seemed like a spark of life that a touch might either extinguish for ever or build into an immortal flame.

As his eyes wandered over the noble lines of her recumbent figure, Alan noticed that her body was worthy of the head it bore. Extended full length as she lay with her head slightly raised, she seemed far taller than the average woman, but perfectly proportioned. The sleeveless robe she wore was fastened on each shoulder with a plain, knotted ribbon of the same pale blue shade. About neither the throat nor the marble-white

arms was any trace of jewel or ornament. There was no need for art to enhance the perfection of nature. The deep sapphire gold-fringed cover that trailed its lustrous folds to the floor on each side of the couch covered her body but little higher than her waist, and on it rested beside her the slender, delicate hands, and Alan's eyes, drinking in their white beauty, thought a man might well risk life and limb to press them to his lips but once.

It was long before he was able to rouse himself from the trance that had fallen upon him, to turn his attention to anything besides the figure before him, or to bring the tumult of his thoughts into orderly array. Even when, in a measure, he was able to control his mind to working conditions, and try to make a closer examination of his surroundings, he was drawn again and again from his work to stand transfixed before the glorious mystery beneath the crystal dome.

The dome itself was well worth attention. It appeared to be composed of the same remarkable substance as was the goblet in the art gallery that defied his efforts to destroy it. Its shape was that of a perfect hemisphere, and it was so fragile and delicate in appearance that it seemed as if the lightest touch would shatter it. Indeed so clear and limpid was it that it appeared as if a great bubble had floated down and settled on the gold rim that surrounded the couch. Inside the rim itself the pavement was uncarpeted, and the space showed an exquisite jewelled mosaic, more beautiful than any he had seen throughout his exploration.

Alan walked slowly round the dome, and on the opposite side from where he had first stood he found a short heavy lever that evidently controlled some mechanism attached to the rim. He refrained from touching it for a score of reasons that came to his mind. He also found in convenient positions four grips that had evidently been fitted for the purpose of lifting the dome from its setting.

When he was able to draw himself away from the enchanted spot he made a survey of the "temple," for "temple" it would always be to him, and as his eyes roamed round it, he admitted that the setting was truly worthy of the jewel. The builders seemed to have lavished on its interior decoration and fittings every refinement of the wonderful art they possessed. It was quite sixty feet long by thirty feet wide, and its walls rose to a height of twenty feet, so that the dome itself occupied comparatively little space. It appeared as if the craftsmen had taken the interior of a pearl shell and the pearl itself as the keynote of their scheme. The walls were a glorious blending of pinks and blues, with panels of flashing iridescent opal, and the rosy glow from the myriad of clustered lights on

walls and ceiling warmed the whole into palpitating life. About the great room were set chests and cabinets of wonderful workmanship, but all built to harmonise with the general scheme. The floor was covered with a thick soft carpet of pearly whiteness, through which was worked a delicate pattern in pink, from the very palest to the deepest coral. There were soft, inviting lounges and great deep chairs to tempt his weary limbs, but worn out as he was with the varied emotions of the day Dundas could find no ease but in restless wandering about the enchanted chamber, ever and again pausing to gaze once more into the crystal canopy.

On one wall close to the curtained doorway Alan found a cabinet that contained what appeared to be a switchboard covered with tiny keys set in glittering rows. As he wandered restlessly from spot to spot he discovered that only this one of the many cabinets set about the place was open for inspection, or in any way revealed its contents. He tried them one after another, but no pulling or coaxing of doors or twisting of handles would satisfy his curiosity. At length he came on a large square table set at the far end of the chamber from the doorway, and on it rested a massive metal chest decorated with a wonderful design of interlaced figures in high relief. He looked it over idly. Doubtless it was sealed like the rest. On the front of it near the top was a knob formed like a grotesque face. He reached forward and turned the knob tentatively. There was a sharp click, and the whole front fell forward, disclosing the interior.

Here, at last, was something definite, perhaps some clue to the mystery. Previous experience had taught Alan for what to look, and eagerly he drew forth the flat case that he knew contained a book. As his eyes fell on its cover he gave a low cry of excitement, for blazoned across it in red enamel was a replica of the characters he had seen on the lintel of the "temple." With trembling hands he drew the volume from its case, and as he turned his excitement grew to a fever, for here it seemed as if his wildest dream would be realised. He turned from the book at last, and paced the chamber from end to end again and again, walking with wide, fixed eyes, like one drugged. Again he returned to the book, poring over each page with awed fascination. The first page showed the figure of the woman beneath the dome of crystal. Likeness, colour, and detail were perfect to the minutest point. Then came diagrams of the lever set in the rim, showing it moved from the perpendicular position to the horizontal. Then the figure again with the dome removed. The next picture showed two objects, one a flask filled with a vivid green fluid, and the other a



curiously shaped syringe. A quick search through the chest revealed both of the pictured objects.

Alan handled them with delicate care and after replacing them returned his eyes to the book. The next leaf showed a picture of the right arm of the woman on the couch, and just above the elbow was drawn a circle, that was shown again enlarged on the opposite page, and with it was pictured a short, keen-bladed lancet. Again a picture of the arm with a long, deep incision laying bare the brachial artery. Then followed in exact and most minute detail the operation of injecting the green fluid from the flask. Then was shown an hour-glass, and as Alan came across each new object he checked it by its original in the chest. First the glass was shown, with its upper bulb full, and then the lower. Again there was pictured a flask, the contents of this one being of a deep ruby colour, and for the second time was shown an injection of the fluid into the artery. This second injection was followed by an elaborate and detailed closing of the incision and its subsequent dressing. A careful examination of the contents of the chest showed Alan that every article from flask to bandage was in duplicate, so great was the evident care to guard against accidents. The last page of all showed, wonder of wonders, the figure on the couch sitting up and looking with smiling eyes from the page. And the eyes were a deep and wonderful grey.

At last Dundas closed the book. The story he read there was too plain for any doubt to exist in his mind as to its meaning. Here indeed was the key to all the hidden knowledge of the galleries, and the deep significance of it all weighed down on his soul like lead when he reflected on the terrible responsibility he had assumed in keeping the secret to himself. On him and him alone rested the burden of deciding what course to take now. He realised that there was another hitherto uncounted factor in the problem. Whatever course he took he must later answer for it to the unknown being who had through countless ages waited his coming. As he stood beside the crystal canopy with every pulse thrilling with a new and unknown emotion, he knew that for weal or woe his life was forever bound up with that of the woman before him. He was no longer captain of his soul. That and his whole existence was henceforth in the keeping of another.

Since he had set his foot across the threshold Alan had lost all count of time. Now he suddenly became aware of an overwhelming sense of weariness. In spite of it, however, he could not tear himself away from the regal loveliness of the figure before him. A fear came upon him that if he left her for an instant some harm might befall her, and it was only

with difficulty that he reasoned himself into a saner frame of mind. Finally he decided that he could not bring himself to grapple with the problem in the present distracting surroundings, and that until he had rested he was unfitted to deal with so weighty a matter. With a lingering look at the still, glorious face, he turned resolutely away and passed through the curtain into the outer gallery. But it was a different man from the one who had entered the "temple" who now stood on the steps of the portico glancing round him with indifferent eyes.

It says much for his state of mind that Dundas walked through the pitch-black ante-chamber with even step, scarce heeding the demoniac raving that his presence caused. The sounds that a few hours before had driven him to unreasoning panic he heard unmoved. The hellish riot that surrounded him in the darkness only brought forth a grim smile of satisfaction. It would be a bold intruder, who, if he chanced to escape the pitfalls of the vestibule, would penetrate to the sixth gallery during his absence.

When he reached the surface at last he found with a detached feeling of surprise that it was black night, and on entering the homestead, the watch he had left behind him in the morning showed him that it wanted but a few minutes to midnight. He took a little food, forcing himself to eat from a sense of duty, and then turned towards his bedroom. As he passed the door leading to the verandah something white on the floor attracted his attention. Stooping he found that it was a letter, evidently put where he had found it by the man who had brought his stores from the township. Alan replaced on the table the lamp he was carrying, and tore open the envelope without glancing at the handwriting on it. The note it contained ran:

"Dear Mr. Dundas,—Why this utter desertion of your friends? Mr. Bryce tells me that you are reading hard for some absurd examination (it must be absurd or it wouldn't be an examination). He and Doris are having dinner with us on Sunday. I hope you will be able to join us, and, as this is only Wednesday, you will have ample time to think up some reasonable explanation. I told Doris I would be writing to you, and she asked me to tell you that you were a heartless wretch, and to be sure and spell it with a capital W., but I absolutely refused to convey so rude a message. Please come.—Yours sincerely, Marian Seymour."

Alan read the note through to the end, and then let it slip unheeded through his fingers. There was a faint smile about the corners of his lips, as through his mind there flashed the memory of a certain night, was it a

century ago, when he took counsel with a caterpillar. He had an answer to all his questions.

# Chapter 16

DUNDAS woke next morning with a clear consciousness of the weighty matter he was called on to deal with, and as a preliminary he emptied his head of his difficulty until the time came for him to grapple with it in earnest. But though he could put problems from his mind for the time being, he made no attempt to turn his thoughts from the central figure in the case, nor could he have done so even if he wished. He set about his house work with a light heart, and for the first time in many days gave it more than perfunctory attention. He cooked for himself and enjoyed a good breakfast. Then having cleaned up his kitchen, he filled his pipe, and, pacing the verandah with his hands deep in his pockets, took counsel with himself.

He knew he had reached a point when he must obtain assistance from outside. Not for an instant did he question the certainty that the now inanimate figure beneath the crystal dome could be called to life by following the directions in the volume in the casket. The trouble was that he knew himself to be incompetent to carry out the necessary operation. Obviously that was a task for a surgeon. He felt a deep satisfaction in the thought that the surgeon he wanted was at his call and was, moreover, a lifelong chum whose fidelity was beyond question. This was, however, the least of his troubles. The real question revolved round the point of what was to be done with the lady of his dreams when she had been recalled to life. He could trust Dick Barry absolutely with his secret, but it was another matter to have to disclose it to some woman or other. He feared now, and not without reason, that once the knowledge of the existence of his discovery became public property constituted authority would step in and assume control of the situation. That he might be deprived of any right to control the contents of the galleries was of small moment compared with the fear that he might be separated from the woman whom he looked upon as his by divine right. He might, of course, get assistance from Doris Bryce or Kitty Barry, but deeply as he admired those two virtuous wives of his friends, he doubted their ability to control events sufficiently to keep their counsel until he was ready to

proclaim his discovery to the world. Moreover, there came to add his difficulties the fact that his bachelor establishment was an impossible hiding-place for his secret. Every way he turned, the position bristled with notes of interrogation without one single feasible answer.

In the end he cut the knot of all his problems by deciding to lay the case before Barry, and induce that aspiring physician to perform the operation, and thereafter let events shape themselves. He had an idea that the central figure in the question would probably take the final decision out of his hands. "Anyhow," he said aloud to himself, as he tapped the ashes from his pipe. "Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof. I guess I'll give Dick Barry something to think over before the day is out."

It was characteristic of Dundas that, in spite of his absorbed interest in his own affairs, he did not forget to pull up at the only confectioner's shop in Glen Cairn. Then he handed over Billy to the groom at the club, and made his way to the residence of his friend. A brass plate of dazzling brilliance announced that Richard Barry, B.Sc., M.D., might be consulted there between the hours of 10 and 11 a.m., and 8 and 9 p.m. As it was just after 11, Alan knew that he would catch Barry before he left home on his rounds. The moment he entered the gate a joyous infantile squeal announced his presence to the mother on the verandah, who was unevenly dividing her time between sewing and entertaining her exuberant offspring. Alan heaved Barry, junior, to his shoulder, and joined Kitty, who had called out, on seeing who her visitor was, that she was not at home to strangers. Dundas deposited the wriggling infant at his mother's feet, and protested that his call was purely in honour of her son, who did not harbour horrid conventional criticism.

"Honest Injun, Madam Kitty, I've been working myself to death, and instead of sympathy you give me nothing but abuse. Too bad! Other pocket, you rascal; you'll only find gloves in that one." This to the infant image of his hostess, who was foraging for the result of his visit to the confectioner.

"Not only do you shamefully neglect us, Alan, but you add to your misdeeds by spoiling my baby. Give them to mother, Dickie," said Kitty, looking accusingly at Dundas, and then coaxingly at the infant, who was cuddling a big bag of chocolates. "You stick to them, Coeur-de-Lion," advised Alan cheerfully. "Mummy will gobble up the lot if you don't." Kitty glanced scornfully at her visitor, while she arranged a diplomatic compromise with the babe, Alan looking on the while in amused silence. When the child waddled off appeased, along the verandah, she turned to Dundas seriously. "You know I sometimes think that Dick does not

know as much about babies as I do. He says to let the little demon (demon, indeed! a nice sort of father!) eat anything he wants. What do you think?"

Alan chuckled. "Can't say that I'm up in the subject myself. Anyhow between the two of you the 'demon' looks in rattling condition, but I'll say this, if ever I want medical advice I won't come to your man for it."

"Alan!" in pained surprise from Kitty.

"You see, Madam Kitty," he went on unmoved by her protest. "Dick's been itching to get to work on me for many a day. I've pulled his limb so often in various ways that he says he is just waiting for a minor operation on me without anaesthetics. The bloodthirsty villain is looking forward to getting a bit of his own back that way."

Kitty smiled at the explanation. "I don't wonder at it, you scamp. I'll ask him to give you an extra prod for me when he gets the chance. What's this story about your working for an examination? Mr. Bryce said that was the reason why you had not been in to the town for nearly two months, and I might tell you that George MacArthur has elaborated the statement by saying you are going in for holy orders."

Alan blessed Bryce inwardly, but regretted that he had not arranged with his friend as to the exact course of study he was supposed to pursue. "I should imagine that Mac had made that statement for the edification of John Harvey Pook. Well, I'm not going to tilt the reverend gentleman out of his pulpit just yet. It's only that I wanted to finish some work that I had taken in hand that caused me to lie low. I'm pretty nearly finished now. Where is Dick? I hope he isn't out. I've come to consult him."

Kitty looked at him anxiously. "Oh, Alan, I hope—"

Dundas stopped her with a laugh. "Do I look like an invalid? No, it's a professional matter, but it is not for myself."

A smart motor swung round the drive and came to a standstill before the front door. "That looks as though he were ready to take wing. I hope he will have time to see me."

Kitty reassured him on that point. "I know that at present Dick has nothing pressing to attend to. He was saying only his morning that his round would be a light one for a while. Here he is." As she spoke her husband appeared. Barry's face lit up with pleasure at the sight of Dundas. He was a big, wholesome man, red haired and blue eyed. He was by no means handsome, but his face was one that won the way of the man straight to the hearts of every one with whom he came into contact. Women trusted him implicitly, and children and dogs took possession of

him on sight, while men voted the "Doc" a rattling good sort. Therefore his paths were pleasant in the land.

"Dun, old man, I thought you had entered a monastery or something of the sort. The committee of the club is going to inquire into your conduct. What's the very latest?"

"The very latest is," put in Kitty, "that he has not been here ten minutes, and he has tried to make your son sick with sweets, and disobey his mother, and further he has been casting reflections on your professional ability."

The two men laughed at the indictment. "It's a distorted version of my proceedings, Dick, with a vapoury substratum of truth. I really came to have a professional yabber with you, if you can give me the time; but it will take an hour at least." Barry sent a swift glance over his friend; then, turning quickly, he called to his man to take the car back to the garage. "I've time and to spare, Dun. Come along to the surgery." Alan looked at Kitty. "You'll excuse me, Madam Kitty."

"Of course, provided you'll stay to lunch."

"I rather surmise that Richard Barry, M.D., etc., will have other views, so I can only give a provisional promise," was the answer, as the two men turned into the house.

In the surgery Barry pulled up a chair for Alan, and seated himself at his desk. "What's the trouble, Alan?" he asked seriously. "Not yourself, I hope. Though you are looking a bit tucked up." Dundas shook his head. "I'm as sound as a bell, Dicky, but—the fact of the matter is I hardly know where to start." He rose and commenced to pace the room slowly.

Barry, versed in human nature, forbore to question. "Take your time, Dun."

Alan came to a standstill before the desk. "Look, Dick! If I hadn't known you since we were shavers together, I wouldn't tell you what I'm going to tell you now. It is not only a professional matter, but God only knows what else depends on it. Under ordinary circumstances I would not insult you by asking you to give your solemn promise that under no circumstances shall you divulge what passes between us without my express permission."

Barry looked at his friend closely. "Alan, my boy, if anyone else but you asked me for such a promise, I'd feel it incumbent on me to boot him off the premises. However, in your case, I'll say that I'll give the promise, though it isn't altogether necessary."

"Don't get shirty, Dick; you'll understand presently. Now what I want you to do is to come out to 'Cootamundra,' and perform a delicate operation on a young woman... "

Barry rose slowly, and with his hands on the table leaned towards Alan. There was a glint in his eyes as he spoke. "You ask me me to come out to 'Cootamundra' to perform a delicate operation on a young woman. Well, Dundas, here's my answer. I'll see you damned first." He spoke in a low, even tone, but he emphasised his answer by bringing his clenched hand down on the table with a thump that made it rattle.

Alan looked at his friend open-mouthed at the outburst. Then sudden comprehension came to him, and he rocked with derisive laughter at Dick's grim set face. "Oh, Dicky! You evil-minded old bird. It's my turn to get snake-headed now. So you thought that I—Richard, I blush for you and your estimate of human nature."

"Human nature be hanged!" growled Barry, sinking back into his chair mollified. "An intelligent fly on the wall of this room for a month would learn more about it than you would in a lifetime. Crank up again."

"My fault for beginning at the wrong end," said Dundas, still smiling reminiscently. Then he dropped into a chair, and leaning forward on the table commenced his story. For a while Barry listened in silence, but at last unable to control himself, broke in.

"Great Scott, Alan, is this another leg-pulling expedition, or have the bats got into your belfry? Do you mean to tell me that when you got to the bottom of the stairs of this place there were lights burning?"

There was a choleric gleam in his blue eyes. Alan looked at him thoughtfully for a while. He remembered that what had come to himself gradually and in very fact, was coming to Barry all at once and verbally, and he felt that allowances must be made. "Dick, old man, I don't know how to put it to you," he said seriously, "but I want you to believe that I was never more in earnest in my life than I am now. I want you to listen and hear me out. Then I will answer every question you like to put up to me. Only this, mad as it may seem, every word I am speaking is true, and of that I will convince you sooner or later—sooner if possible."

Dick settled himself back in his chair. "Sorry, old man. My imagination isn't exactly cast iron, but then again it hasn't altogether gaseous elasticity. I won't interrupt again."

Nevertheless, as Alan went on with his story, Barry's mind alternated between fits of excitement and cautious estimates of Alan's mental state, until in spite of himself his chum's sincerity and elaboration of detail carried conviction. The relation of the discovery of the Biological Gallery



brought him to his feet. "Dun, if that's not absolute fact, I'll murder you for opening out a fictitious vista of paradise. Glory! What a place to get loose in!"

"Dicky, I'll promise you a free run of it, but I doubt if you'll ever want to look at it at present when you hear the end," said Alan, smiling at the fire he had kindled in his friend. Then he picked up the thread of his story. There was no fear of disbelief now, a few of the details he had given convinced Dick that no layman could have concocted the story. From that out he followed the story with breathless interest, until Alan, now warmed up, came to the story of the opening of the temple and the figure on the couch. Then he could contain himself no longer. "Good God! Alan," he whispered, with his voice trembling, "is she—is she"—he could not frame the word.

"Dick, old man," said Dundas solemnly, "I know as certainly as we are both living that she is living. It's no guess. All these ages, God alone knows how long, she has been lying there waiting for the hand that will call her back to life. Lying there in state, in all her wonderful, glorious beauty. Dick, when you see her you will understand my raving about her. Old fellow, if I could have done what is necessary myself, I could find it in my heart never to allow another man to set eyes upon her, But you will help, Dick. You must. I can trust no one else."

Barry had risen to his feet, and started pacing the room with quick, nervous steps. "Man! Are we both mad? It's incredible—monstrous. Alan, I don't doubt the rest, but in this you must be mistaken. If she be human there can be no life. She may be a masterpiece of consummate art, but human, never!"

Dundas followed the restless movements of his friend with his eyes without moving from his seat. "Dick," he said quietly, "if she be what you think, then, I have lost my heart and soul to and effigy. No, old man. Wonderful as they were, these old builders of wonders, they could not have built such a wonder as she is. Think of the infinite craft and skill with which she was guarded. The whole plan of the place was arranged for her protection. Dick, will you do it?"

Barry came to a standstill in quivering excitement. "Will I do it? Good heaven, man! I'd sell my immortal soul just to look on. Man, it will be the biggest thing—it's gigantic. Think of a paper to the 'Lancet' or the 'B.M.J.' Think of reading it at the next medical conference—"

"Think of the promise you made me," put in Alan coolly. "Dick, I don't want to deprive you of the honour and glory, but you must wait my time. For the present, Dicky, this is a strictly professional engagement.

We'll work it on your own terms, but you come out to 'Cootamundra' as my medical adviser until such time as I am ready to disclose everything. After that you can write papers and read papers till the cows come home."

The reminder brought Barry down from the clouds. "You are right, Alan. I was so excited that I forget. You say I may name my own terms. All right. My terms are the free run of the Biological Gallery. In return I'll operate, and take charge of her professionally, so long as she requires my help."

"Done, Dicky. When will you do it?" asked Alan excitedly.

Barry glanced at the clock on the mantelpiece. "Twelve-fifteen. I can finish my work, and be out at 'Cootamundra' by two-thirty. I'll give Walton a ring, and ask him to look after anything urgent that may turn up. That's the best of being on good terms with a hated rival. But, by thunder, Dun, he'll shoot me on sight, and I'll deserve it, for not calling him in as consultant. Rotten treatment for a brother brush, but it can't be helped." He turned, and busied himself at an instrument cabinet. "You won't want any tools, Dick," said Dundas, looking over his shoulder. "I'll bet that there's a better collection of hardware out there than you ever laid your eyes on."

"Oh, well," answered Barry, slipping a couple of cases into his bag, "I'll take them on the off-chance. You'd better come with me in the car."

"I think not," said Alan. "I'll get out ahead of you and get things ready. Tell Madam Kitty I'll give you a feed out there. Goodness only knows how long you'll be—Hold on, Dick, what about food for her? She'll want something of the kind."

Barry knitted his brows thoughtfully, and then went to his desk. "The deuce of it is there's no precedent for such a case. Got any milk out there?" he said, taking up his pen.

"I can get some; I don't use it myself."

"Good! Get a quart or two, and take this down to the chemist," said Dick, scrawling over a sheet of prescription paper. "It's a list of a few things that may come in handy." He paused thoughtfully. "Do you know, Dun, I shouldn't be surprised if they have made all arrangements for the correct nourishment. Some of those locked cabinets you were talking about."

Dundas took the list, and Barry caught up his bag. "While you are waiting for me, time that hour-glass with your watch. It will be better to know the time we will have to wait between the two injections. Ready? Come on, then," said Dick over his shoulder.

Madam Kitty, used as a doctor's wife to the domestic disruptions of her husband's profession, received the news of the immediate flight of both guest and husband with resigned philosophy. Stipulating that Dick would really have something to eat with Alan at 'Cootamundra,' she waved the two on their various ways, wondering a little at Dick's undoubted excitement, though he tried hard to suppress it, and at what urgent call Alan could be mixed up with. For, dutifully, she never even hinted at a question that impinged ever so slightly on her man's work.

## Chapter 17

DUNDAS made his purchases from the chemist, and then, without further delay, had Billy harnessed, and turned homeward, covering the twelve miles in an hour. His first care was to prepare a meal for Barry, and having accomplished this, he made his way to the shed. Since his first discovery he had, for his own convenience, placed steps in the outer shaft, so that his visits were carried out without the exertion of scrambling in and out. Eagerly he descended the winding stairway to the vestibule, and hurried to the sixth gallery. Everything was as he had left it. Even now he could not cross the threshold of the "temple" without a feeling of awe for what it contained.

In accordance with Barry's instructions, he proceeded to time the hour-glass. After starting it, and carefully noting the time, he turned to the crystal dome, and stood gazing enwrapped before the figure beneath. The wonderful alluring beauty of the woman seemed to appeal to all his senses with renewed force. There was something pathetic in her very helplessness that drew from his manhood a feeling of reverence. She could have not been very old, he thought, as he stood watching; not more than twenty-four or five when the life had been stilled. His mind almost reeled when he tried to realise how long she had lain there awaiting his coming.

The world had been born again, and the history of humanity had been rewritten since those white lids had closed upon her eyes. Through all our known time she had waited there in the silence and solitude. No detail of the picture escaped his searching eyes. He found himself wondering whether the radiant masses of her hair had increased while she was lying there. He wondered, too, whether there was a reason that one white delicate hand lay open, palm down, beside her, while the other was closed. Whose hand was it that had drawn that shimmering sapphire covering over her, and composed her limbs for the long sleep?

Then an unconquerable restlessness seized him, and an anxiety he could not repress took possession of him. With nervous steps he paced the chamber from end to end, pausing now to glance at the receding

sand in the glass, and again to rest his eyes on the still figure. At last it was finished, and when Alan snapped the case of his watch he knew that the interval between the two injections would be one hour and fifteen minutes.

By now Barry would be due, so Dundas made his way to the homestead, in order that he would be there in time to receive his friend. However, there was no sign of the doctor's car on the distant road, and, with growing impatience, he roamed in and out of the house. Then a thought flashed across his mind. He went into his bedroom, and looked himself over critically in the glass on his dressing table. Beyond the care of the average neatly-dressed man, as a rule he took little heed of his personal appearance. Now, however, his scrutiny of his reflection seemed to give him little cause for satisfaction. He frowned discontently at the blue serge clad figure, and then looked about the room for inspiration. Presently his face lit up. He remembered that he had a brand new suit of tennis flannels, and, hastily discarding the despised serge, he proceeded to array himself in white. He was deeply immersed in the problem of whether a dark blue or dark red tie would look the better, when the toot of a motor-horn outside announced the arrival of Barry. Hastily deciding for blue, he called out to Dick to make himself at home, and finished his toilet. He appeared before his guest looking not a little self-conscious for his change of raiment, a fact that was by no means lost on that graceless friend of his youth, who proceeded to roast him without mercy, and, for a wonder, Dundas was dumb before the attack. At last he blurted out: "Oh, stop rotting me, Dick! I'm all nerves and jumps. I'll own up that I got into these togs with the hope of improving my appearance. I don't want her to think that all the men in the world are like you. Don't you ever realise that our modern, every-day clothing is the most damnably ugly and inartistic that mankind ever wore." Barry went off into shouts of laughter. "When did you find that out, Dun? I've heard you say that blue dungaree was good enough for anyone."

Shameless now in his fall, Alan faced him without flinching. "I found it out about half an hour ago. Tell you what, Dick. If I had an eighteenth century rig-out of blue satin and gold lace, I'd wear it now. Hanged if I wouldn't. Now you had better have something to eat, for Providence only knows when we will be finished."

In spite of Barry's remonstrance, Alan declined to join him, protesting that he could not swallow a mouthful if he tried. When the doctor had satisfied his hunger the two set out for the shed, carrying with them

bottles of milk and other concentrated and nourishing preparations that Barry had suggested, and also the bag containing the instruments.

Both men were now in a state of suppressed excitement. Alan because he stood on the verge of realising his wildest hopes, and Dick at the thought of penetrating to the mysterious discovery so vividly described by his friend. When they entered the shed Alan carefully locked the door, and lit an acetylene lamp. Then he handed the basket to Barry, and the two descended into the shaft. As they entered the doorway to the landing, Dundas cautioned his companion to follow him carefully, and led the way downward. For a while they descended without speaking, the only sound being caused by the tread of Barry's boots, multiplied weirdly by the echoes of the shaft, until at last the impression of the ghostly crowd of followers became too strong for his nerves, and he paused irresolutely.

"Dash it all, Alan," he said, speaking almost in a whisper, "is there much more of this? It's enough to give anyone the jumps."

Dundas looked up at him. "We're not half-way down yet, Dickie. If it's any satisfaction to you, it gave me the jumps to some tune the first time I came down. I'll tell you about it later. You might notice I'm wearing tennis shoes." His voice reverberated in uncanny echoes. Then Barry broke in. "Great Scott, man! Don't let us stand here talking, the place seems full of beastly spooks. I wonder you didn't funk it."

"I did," replied Alan shortly, "but I went through worse, and so will you, my boy." He turned, and they resumed their noisy progress. At last they came to the lower landing, and, in spite of the warning Alan gave, Barry almost dropped the basket he was carrying when his eyes fell on the shadow on the opposite wall. Alan paused and gave Dick a brief but lurid account of his flight for the upper air at his first encounter, and, in spite of the shock he had just undergone, his friend could not forbear to laugh, though he admitted he would have done the same thing.

As the two came to a halt at the head of the stairway to the vestibule; Dundas turned to his chum. "Now, listen, Dick," he said seriously, "before we go any further, you have to understand that when we get to the end of the next steps there are more kinds of sudden death about than you have the faintest idea of. There is only one thing for you to do, and that is to follow my footsteps exactly. If you try to find a track for yourself you will in all probability die very suddenly and very unpleasantly."

"Cheerful sort of place you seem to have strayed into, Dun. Anyhow, you don't need a promise from me to stick to you like a leech. I hope you know your landmarks!"

"Pretty well by now, but there may be a few surprises left that I haven't come on, so keep close behind me, and let nothing tempt you to break away. I'll bring the lamp with me; we may want it later. Come on now, but remember."

With Barry at his heels, Dundas descended the last stairway to the vestibule, pausing on the way to show his friend the place where the blade had blocked his path, and how he had overcome it.

From there onward their progress was punctuated by wrangles. Barry, awe-stricken and enthralled by his surroundings, desired only to linger and satisfy his curiosity, while Alan, impatient at every moment's delay, attempted to hurry him forward. Familiarity with its wonders had to some extent blunted Alan's interest in the Art Gallery, and it had been completely overshadowed by his latest discovery in the "temple," so that it was with a feeling approaching irritation that he urged Barry forward. In spite of bullying and badgering, the journey through the first gallery occupied a quarter of an hour, and finally Dundas swore by all the gods that if Dick would not consent to go direct to the sixth gallery he would call off the agreement and engage Walton for the work. The threat had its intended effect, though as they passed the door of the Biological Gallery, Alan had to move behind him, and was only able to get him past the zone of attraction by resorting to violence.

At length they arrived at the entrance to the antechamber. In his narrative Alan had made no illusion to this feature of the journey. Pausing at the doorway, while Barry stood lost in amazement at its magnificence, Alan briefly outlined the peculiarities of its construction, so as to prepare his chum for the shock. In spite of this, however, and even with the assistance of the friendly rays of the acetylene lamp, it was a white and sober man who stood beside Dundas when he had reached the last gallery. Even in his excitement Alan could not hide his amusement at his friend's discomfiture. "Dicky, old man, if you ever say another word to me about my attempts at sartorial improvement today, I'll write an article describing how you shied when the howling started."

Barry wiped his damp forehead, and heaved a mighty breath. "By thunder! Dun, if I had known what kind of a place you were bringing me to, I think I would have let you get other medical advice." He had been so much upset for one moment that he had taken no notice of his new surroundings. Then his eyes, following those of Dundas, fell upon the

"temple," and on the realistic group of figures under the portico. From where they were standing it was almost impossible to decide whether Art or Nature was responsible for that unconventional trio. Obeying all his instincts, Barry turned swiftly away, and drew Alan with him. "Good heavens, man!" he gasped. "I thought you said there was only one."

Alan chuckled at his friend's blushing countenance. "Sorry if your modesty is damaged, Dicky, but your patient is inside. The girls on the portico are merely her guardian angels. I'll admit they are not the stereotyped kind." Turning with his hand on Barry's shoulder, the two walked towards the steps. "Those three hussies are a sample of the art of another period of the world's existence, and if they are true to nature, it merely goes to show that Nature has never been able to improve on the female of the species."

"Upon my word, Dun," said Barry, eyeing the figures askance. "I don't mind a fair thing, but these are rather overproof. I'm sure Kitty would hardly approve of my making their acquaintance. They are too blushfully realistic even as ornaments."

"They are something more than ornaments, Dick. Like everything else about the place, they were put there for a purpose. I'll show you why later. Don't let us waste any more time now. Come on." He stepped to the curtain and drew it aside, at the same time motioning Barry to enter. As the curtain fell behind them the atmosphere of mystery that prevailed in the "temple" gripped them both in its thrall. They bared their heads mechanically and as Dundas led the way to the crystal dome their voices fell to a whisper. Standing beside the glittering canopy, Alan looked from the face of the glorious figure beneath to that of his friend. He knew that Barry's calmer and trained judgment would prove or dispel his hopes at the first glance. It was with a wild thrill of happiness, then, that he saw the blank look on Dick's face give way to amazement. Like a man in a dream, he sank to his knees, pressing his face closer to the transparent cover in an attempt to peer more closely at the still form on the couch. For a few minutes he remained motionless. Then, without turning his head, he spoke in an awed whisper. "It's true. My God! It's true." A moment later he rose suddenly and caught Alan's arm. "Dun, you were right." His voice trembled with excitement. "Even to the last I thought you were bringing me to a tomb. Dun, do you understand what it means? She's alive. She's alive!"

"I was sure of it, Dick," said Dundas quietly, looking from his friend's face back to the couch. "I don't understand anything except that. Dick, do



you think that we can... " His voice failed from anxiety, but the mute question in his eyes said more than words.

"God only knows what's behind it all, Alan," answered Barry soberly. "If the life has been kept in the body so long by some wonderful means, then perhaps by means as wonderful it may be renewed." He broke off and turned again to the canopy, and studied the figure there with searching eyes. Then he looked up again. "Old man, I can well understand why you are so anxious, but, for God's sake, don't hope for too much. Alan, there are so many things that may have gone wrong since she was laid there. The drugs may have deteriorated. They may have been a time limit. We are working absolutely in the dark."

Dundas shook his head. "Somehow, Dick, I think they have left no chance for an error. The whole thing rests with us, or rather with you."

Barry stood for a while without speaking, then he braced himself together. "Show me that book, Dun. After all it all rests on that." Without a word, Alan led the way to the casket, and, drawing the book from its case, he placed it on the table before Barry. Then he drew up two seats. For half an hour they sat in absorbed silence, Barry intent on the pages before him, and Alan watching without comment as the other turned from the book to the casket. He compared each article in turn with the diagrams, and handled them deftly and precisely. Dick was first to break the silence. "Did you time that glass?" He jerked out the words without looking up.

"Yes. One hour and fifteen minutes exactly." Barry nodded and picked up a syringe that lay on the table before him, and examined it intently. Presently he put it down, and looked up suddenly. "Anything wrong?" asked Alan anxiously.

"No, nothing wrong, but that syringe is something new of its kind. I couldn't get the hang of it at first. It looks simple enough, but did you notice those valves?"

"I can't say that I did particularly," answered Dundas, glancing at the instrument.

"Well," went on Barry, "the trouble in an injection of this kind is the risk of injecting air as well as fluid, and it plays the very devil if it does happen. Now, that syringe is so made that the fluid can pass and the air cannot. It simplifies matters for me. No, Dun, old man They were not taking any risks. Now look what do you make of that?" He turned to a page in the book and passed it across to Alan, who shook his head when he saw it.

"I couldn't make head or tail of it when I saw it before. It's heathen to me."

Barry took a flask of colourless fluid from the casket, and compared it with the diagram on the page. "Notice how they have made the flasks all different shapes, so that there can be no mistakes apart from the colour. Follow carefully. See, both the spot where the incision is to be made and the knife itself are to be rubbed with this fluid. It's an antiseptic solution, I imagine. You see, too, that the bandages themselves are hermetically sealed. I've got the hang of everything now. Everything is perfectly simple and straight sailing, though I wonder why the injection is to be made in the artery and not the vein. Still, it's a case of obey orders if you break owners. I think we had better start at once. The only thing is, how are we to open these flasks?" He took up one containing the green liquid. It was not closed by a stopper of any kind. The wide neck had been drawn out to a point, and fused, so that evaporation was impossible, and the only method of gaining access to its contents would be by breaking the neck. Dick rose and went to his bag and returned with a pair of pliers. Holding the flask firmly in his hand, he tapped lightly on the neck with the pliers. At the third stroke the glass snapped in a clean-cut line, about half an inch from the body of the flask, evidently as it had been intended to. Alan watched the proceedings with anxious eyes. An accident to the precious vessels meant irreparable disaster. When he saw the success of the experiment, he heaved a sigh of relief. "Risky business, Dick," he said. "You had me on pins and needles then." Barry was too absorbed in sniffing at the contents of the flask to notice the comment. "What's it smell like?" Dundas queried, watching Barry's face as he alternately inhaled with closed eyes, and then stared fixedly at the ceiling, groping for mental inspiration.

"Hanged if I know;" was the brief reply. Then, after a moment: "Doesn't smell like any smell I've ever smelt before. I think that I had better put a stopper in until we are ready to use it. I should say it's pretty volatile." He plugged the mouth of the flask with a tightly-rolled wad of cotton-wool, and returned it to the casket. "Now, Dun, we'll get that glass-case thing away. I suppose that lever merely locks it on."

The two advanced to the crystal dome. "There would be no sense in locking it, Dick, if they left the key in the lock. I think the lever has some other purpose. Anyhow, here goes." He knelt down, and taking a firm hold of the handle, drew it towards him. The action was followed instantly by a loud hissing, like the escape of steam, that died down in a few seconds. The two men looked at one another in silence a moment.

"What was that, Dun?" asked Barry perplexed. Alan stood up and looked into the dome.

"Only could be one thing, Dick. There was a vacuum under the cover, and the lever let in the air."

"Vacuum be hanged," said Barry scornfully. "Why, man, the outside pressure would have shattered that glass to dust, it's as thin as paper."

Dundas shook his head. "You are wrong, Dick. It's not glass—at least of the kind we know anything about. I've tested some of it before, and it's tougher than steel. The pressure must have been tremendous, but it helped to keep the cover fixed on the rim. I expect we will be able to move it now easily. Go to the other two handles." Barry obeyed, and at a word from Alan they lifted together. The great dome came away with an ease that surprised them. Had it been really made of paper it could not have been lighter. Where they had expected to find only the glass dome removable, and that the foot-deep metal ring would be set in the pavement, it came as an extra surprise that the cover was all in one piece, and was merely let into a circular groove surrounding the couch. They lifted it with infinite care in order not to injure the still figure beneath it, and carried it well out of the way and placed it on the floor. Then, moved by one impulse, they hurried back to the couch. Standing on either side the two bent over. Guided by professional instinct, Barry's hand sought the wrist that lay beside her. For a little while he held it, then broke the strained silence. "Not a trace of pulse, Alan. Not that I expected it." He said in a low voice: "Look." He lifted the open hand slightly. "The joints are as flexible as if she were sleeping. Give me my bag, will you, old man?" When Dundas turned to the couch again Barry had just re-closed an eyelid which he had raised. "Dick, you won't do anything outside the fixed routine, will you?" said Alan seriously, as he passed over the bag.

"Honour bright, Dun, I wouldn't take a shadow of risk. I only wanted this." He snapped open the bag as he spoke, and drew out a stethoscope, and fixed the tubes to his ears. Kneeling down, he adjusted the instrument over the heart, and remained motionless. He stood up at length and shook his head thoughtfully. "It's no use professing to account for anything in her condition, for I'm absolutely at sea. The only thing to do is to go on as directed."

Dundas, who was standing by, a prey to acute anxiety, nodded his head without speaking. He obeyed Barry's directions mechanically, and assisted in moving a table close to the couch. Then he arranged the contents of the casket on it in the order in which they would be required. Dick looked at Alan's shaking hand grimly, as he proceeded to open the

flask containing the antiseptic. "Better let me do that, Dun, if you can't pull yourself together. Great Scott, man! I must have help. Are you going to fail me?" was a carefully regulated ring in his voice that stung Alan into steadiness.

"Dick, I'll do what I can, but I'm not built of steel. Must I stand by? It seems sacrilege to me."

The professional interest in Barry had overridden all other sentiment now the moment of action had arrived. The grand training of his order asserted itself. Brain and nerve had brought hand and eye to disciplined subjection, He proceeded with the work of sterilising both instruments, and the spot on the arm where he would have to operate, with perfect coolness. There was nothing in his demeanour as he answered to show the intense excitement he felt. "Listen, Alan. I can do without your help, but it would be taking unnecessary risks. You needn't look unless you like, but you must be here in case I want anything." As he spoke he filled the syringe with the emerald-coloured fluid, and handed it to Dundas. "Now, hold that, and the moment I ask for it, put into my hand." Then he turned and knelt beside the couch, taking the glittering lancet from the table as he did so.

Alan turned his eyes away, staring fixedly at the curtained entrance, and tried to engage his thoughts by tracing the intricacies of its pattern. So tense was the silence that he could plainly hear his own heart beat. "Now, Dun! The syringe!" came Barry's sharp voice, and Alan placed it in the outstretched hand. There was another space of silence, and then Dick rose to his feet. "Exact time, Alan?" he asked. "Four-ten," answered Dundas, placing his watch on the table.

"Well, so far so good. Now we will have to wait until five twenty-five before the next. Old man, it's going to be a mighty long hour and a quarter." Alan moved restlessly. "There's no reason why you shouldn't look if you wish, old chap; I've covered the mark with a piece of dressing."

Dundas stood beside the couch, his soul in his eyes as he looked down.. There was a dull feeling of surprise that as yet no change showed on the calm face on the cushions. Barry read the meaning of his look. "Don't be disappointed; I don't expect any alteration until after the next injection," he said reassuringly. "I think we might reconcile ourselves to that!" Then after a tentative test with the stethoscope, he went on: "Do you know, Alan, there was not the slightest trace of haemorrhage? It's a fact that may not appeal to you as a layman, but it fairly ties my existing ideas in a knot."

"The details don't worry me much, Dick," answered Dundas. "The key to everything lies in the result of your work. I wish to God we knew for certain how it will turn out. The strain hurts." He sank into a seat near by, and drummed nervously with his fingers. Barry, to distract his thoughts, began questioning him about his adventures from the beginning. He had time now to note the exquisite beauty of the interior decoration, and succeeded in drawing Alan into a closer examination of their surroundings. When they came on the strange keyboard near the entrance, Dick's hand went impulsively towards it, to be hurriedly checked by Dundas. "Dick, for Heaven's sake, don't touch anything like that you may come across. You don't know what kind of hell you may start off. The whole place is a mass of damnable machinery," and in a few sentences he told the result of his meddling in the machinery gallery. Barry, properly impressed, sheered away from the too attractive keys and when he had finished a brief examination listened with breathless interest to the story of the opening of the "temple."

Then the two discussed in whispers the course to be adopted in the event of success. Finally Barry agreed, if somewhat doubtfully, that Alan's idea of allowing events to shape themselves was the best policy to pursue. For the last quarter of an hour scarcely a word passed between them. Barry busied himself with his preparations for the final injection, while Alan, to occupy his time, made ready the milk and the other nourishment under his friend's directions.

At last the slow-moving hands of the watch indicated the appointed time. Without hesitation, Dick turned to the work in hand. In spite of his repugnance, Dundas watched the completion of the operation with fascinated eyes. It was over in a few minutes, and with deft and steady fingers the bandage was adjusted, and fastened into its place. "Now," said Barry, "if there be any foundation for our belief, I think we will know it very shortly." Standing on either side of the couch the two watched with fast-beating hearts. Minute after minute went by. Once Alan looked up at Barry, and saw that his gaze was fixed intently on the face of the woman. His lips were set in a straight line, and there was a look of intense concentration in his eyes. Again the long, strained silence. Then suddenly a low exclamation broke from the doctor's lips. In a moment he was bending over with the stethoscope in his hand. Then he straightened up. "By God, Dun!" he stammered out. "No doubt now—distinct pulsations. Watch!" Trembling with excitement the two bent closer. As they did so the pale lips parted slightly, showing a gleam of milky white teeth, and there was the scarce-audible sound of a drawn breath in the

silence, and a distinct, though slight movement of the fabric above the breast. Both men stood rigid, as if suddenly petrified. Beneath their awed eyes a miracle was being done. Slowly as the dawn a faint flush of colour spread over the pale cheeks, and a deeper hue to the perfectly curved lips. But with the flush of pink came something more, that seemed as if a veil that had rested on the pale features had been drawn aside. It appeared as if a soul had entered, and found a resting place. After the first sigh followed slow, regular respiration, and the swelling bosom beneath the clinging robe heaved gently in unison. Beautiful as she had looked before, they realised now, with the flush of life throbbing through her veins, that the woman they had first looked on was but a shadow of the one that was blossoming, like a flower, into glorious life.

Suddenly Dundas touched Barry lightly, and whispered: "Dick—we ought not to be so close. We may frighten her if she opens her eyes suddenly." With a nod, Barry acquiesced, and the two moved silently away, and stood together at a little distance. "I think it will only be a question of minutes now, Alan, from the rate those drugs are working at. Good God! What a wonder!" This from Barry, in a tense whisper. He did not know then, so fascinated was he by the spectacle, that Dundas held his arm as if clutched in a vice, and left an imprint of his straining fingers that lasted for many a day. "Look, Dick! Look! The hand!" he muttered, and as he spoke the white hand stirred restlessly, and fell across the golden cascade of her hair. A moment later came a deeper sigh than before, and the head turned slightly on the cushion. Another sigh like the first waking breath of a child, and the long lashes trembled on her cheeks, and the white lids fluttered ever so slightly, and then—The gasp of rapture that rose to Alan's lips was checked swiftly by Barry's hand. Slowly the eyes opened, glorious deep, grey orbs—then closed, and were again unveiled. It seemed to both the watchers that the moment she lay, while dawning consciousness entered her eyes, would never end. Then it seemed as if the realisation of external things came to her like a flash. The white hand was flung upward to her forehead, then she raised her head, and looked around, and in doing so her eyes fell on the two silent watchers. A little cry broke from her lips, and she half raised herself on her elbow, looking them over with frank amazement, but utterly without fear. For a little space they remained so. Neither man could find a word to say, nor make the slightest movement, while the woman seemed unable for the moment to realise the import of their presence. Then sudden comprehension dawned in those soft, shining eyes. With a quick, graceful movement, she flung the cover from her, and sat up on the edge of the couch,

but never for a moment did her gaze leave them. For a while she sat thus, then, as if in recollection flashed into her mind, she opened her closed hand, and looked long and earnestly at a brown stain on the pink palm.

Relieved for the moment of the intensity of her gaze, Barry whispered wildly: "For God's sake, Dun, speak to her; say something, do something." Alan pulled himself together with an effort, and stepped forward a little with outstretched hands. How he got the strength to control his voice he never knew, but control it he did, and said quietly and evenly, "Do not fear us, please; we are friends, and would like to help you." At the sound of his voice she looked at his outstretched hands, and then into his eyes, and again her gaze fell to the dark stain on her palm. Very slowly she rose, and looked about her. Her glance swept the room from end to end until it rested on the table beside the couch, with its array of flasks and instruments. As if divining their purpose, she looked at the bandaged arm, until now unnoticed, and touched its wrappings with anxious fingers. Without taking the proffered hands, she passed Dundas slowly, and moved down the room to where the keyboard was fixed. Both men stood back as she passed, and watched her movements anxiously. Even in their perplexity they could not fail to note the graceful regal bearing of her figure as she moved. With definite purpose she touched key after key. Once an answer came in the deep musical note of a bell.

Whatever her reason was for this procedure, her perfect self-possession gave no signs as to whether the result was expected or unexpected. Without further hesitation she turned away, and, crossing the chamber, she stopped before one of the cabinets that had defied all Alan's efforts to open it. In an instant, at a touch from her fingers, the carved front slid down and outward, exposing a case in which were set a number of dials, each bearing a pointer, and ringed with hieroglyphics. For a few moments she studied these intently, and then for the first time she showed evidence of deep feeling. Whatever she had learned from the contents of the cabinet seemed to move her greatly. When she turned towards the two men, who stood silently watching her, her face bore an expression of incredulous amazement. Again and again, as if to convince herself against her own judgment, she turned her eyes, first to the group of dials in the cabinet, and back to the faces of the men. "What do you make of it, Dun?" whispered Barry eagerly.

"Appears to me as if those clock arrangements had told her the length of time she had been asleep," answered Alan without turning his head.

"If so, it's no wonder she's astonished. Dick, I'm going to try and speak to her again." As if she understood what had passed between them, she left the cabinet and moved slowly towards the two. As she approached she completely regained control of her feelings. There was not the slightest look of apprehension in her face. Her grave grey eyes that turned from one to the other were full of curious interest. Alan advanced slightly to meet her, and Barry could not help noticing how well he looked with his square shoulders and fine athletic frame. "Jove!" he thought, "Dun is looking his best. I don't know what kind of men she's been used to, but she's meeting one of the best specimens of ours now." Within a pace of one another the two paused, and Barry watched the meeting with keen relish. For a moment they regarded one another seriously, and then a slow, sweet smile came to the lips of the woman, which instantly drew a responding smile from Alan, and his hand went out impulsively. This time there was no hesitation, for her hand immediately met his frankly, and so they stood for a few seconds, looking into each other's eyes, but no word passed between them. Then, as if reluctantly, their hands fell apart, and she looked past him to where Barry stood with a smile of amused interest on his face.

There was a moment's pause; then Dundas took the situation in hand. Turning towards Dick, and indicating him with a wave of his hand, he said slowly and distinctly, "Richard Barry."

Without the slightest hesitation she repeated the name softly, and walking forward she held out a hand to Dick, which was immediately taken. Then she turned and looked inquiringly at Alan, who stepped to her side, and touching himself, spoke his own name. This, too, was repeated, not once, but several times, and to Alan's enchanted ears never was human voice more perfect. "Dun," said Dick, with a short laugh, "you're a winner—I'm a rank outsider. Congratulations." Alan's face flushed crimson. "Shut up, you blithering ass," came the answer savagely. But Dick, hedged by the presence of the woman between them, went on: "No need for the blue silk and gold lace, old man. However, don't you think it would be polite to offer the lady some refreshments." Murmuring threats of vengeance, Alan went to the table and poured out a glass of milk. While he was doing this the woman watched every movement intently, and immediately saw his intention. As he held up the glass she approached without the slightest hesitation, and took it from his hand. Then she raised the glass to her lips, and drank the greater part of its contents before setting it down, shaking her head in the negative when he offered to refill it. The two men watched for her next



movement with the greatest interest. For a while she stood by the table in deep thought. Then she looked from one to the other as though she had come to a resolution. Taking her stand beside one of the seats, she looked at Dick, and then, calling his name, she motioned him towards it. Obediently Dick answered the call, and her evident wish for him to be seated. Then she pushed another seat close in front of him, ignoring Alan's polite attempts to assist. When she had placed it to her satisfaction, she laid her hand gently on Alan's arm, and drew him towards the seat, placing him face to face with Dick, and so close that their knees touched. The two men looked blankly at her, and then at one another. "What on earth's the game?" asked Dick, somewhat anxiously. "I haven't the faintest idea," replied his chum. "Only I'm perfectly certain that she knows what she is about. I'm going to follow her lead blindly."

"Oh, well, if you're satisfied, I suppose I'll have to be," said Barry, resignedly.

While they were talking the woman listened, and, as if comprehending their perplexity, she smiled reassuringly. Then she bent forward, and, taking Dick's right hand, she placed it in Alan's left; then she joined the other two hands in the same manner. The pressure of her soft fingers made Dundas quiver, as if he had touched a live wire. "Seems like a new parlour game, Dun," said Dick, grinning into his friend's puzzled face. "Sit tight, Dick, and hang on to my hands. There's more in this than meets the eye. Now, what?" As he was speaking she placed herself behind Barry's seat, and drew him gently back until his head rested on the back of the seat. Then she spoke a few soft words, and placed her clasped hands across Dick's forehead, looking down at Alan as she did so. "Keep quite quiet, Dick," said Alan, in a whisper. "Let her do as she wishes."

A few moments later Alan saw a strange look come into Barry's eyes. "What's the matter, Dick?" he asked, hastily. It appeared as if the other tried to answer, but before he could frame the words his eyes closed, and his whole frame relaxed. For a moment Alan made as if to rise, but a quick, warning glance from the grey eyes held him steady. Then the woman began to speak, looking all the time straight into Alan's face. Alan listened fascinated. She spoke slowly, uttering the strange words in a soft, liquid voice. After a moment she paused, and the instant she did so Barry stirred restlessly under her hands, and commenced to speak. His voice came in a low, monotonous monotone, but very distinctly. "Alan Dundas, I speak to you through your friend, Richard Barry, and through

him your thoughts may be made known to me. Will you answer the questions I ask?"

"I will gladly answer," said Alan, instantly. Then, to his amazement, the unconscious Barry spoke a few words in the same strange tongue that he had heard the woman use. She smiled at him gently over Dick's head, and then spoke again, and so the dialogue went on through the unconscious interpreter.

"Who gained entrance to the great sphere?"

"I did, but I did not know that it was a sphere." There was a puzzled look on her face as she put the next question.

"Why did you not know? Could you not see?"

"No, the place we are in is buried beneath the ground. I was digging, and discovered it."

She paused reflectively, and went on. "Did you alone find your way to my resting-place, or did others help you?"

"I alone. I live at a distance from any others, and kept the secret to myself."

"Then who besides yourself knows of my existence?"

"Only one other—Richard Barry, my friend. When I gained entrance to this place I knew I had not the skill to call you back to life, and so I called on him for help; but first I made him vow to be silent, until it was my wish that he should tell of the discovery. In this matter we will obey your will." Alan watched the glorious face before him keenly while the unconscious Barry translated his words, and it gave him a deep thrill of joy to see that his answer had given her unmistakable pleasure. The dazzling smile he received was more than payment for all the weary work and risk.

"For that I thank you, Alan Dundas. Now tell me are there many people in the world?"

"Very many millions. How many I do not know, but the world is very thickly populated."

"Can you tell me how far back the history of the human race is traced by your people?"

"Roughly, we have a clear record for two thousand five hundred years. Beyond that we can trace it for three or four thousand years, but not clearly."

His answer seemed to interest her deeply, for it was some little time before she spoke again. "What you tell me causes me great grief, for you tell me of a great calamity of long ago. Of that you shall hear later. You wish to be my friend?"

"Indeed, I do," and there was no doubting the sincerity of his answer.

"Then tell me if you can keep my existence a secret until I wish it to be known?"

"That, indeed, I can and will do. I can answer for Richard Barry, as I can for myself."

"Then, Alan Dundas, that is my wish. Further, I desire to remain unknown until I am able to speak your own tongue. Is there more than one language spoken in the world?"

"There are very many languages, but the one I am speaking is the most widely known. That I will teach you gladly."

"Then I will trust you, for I know well that I may. Until you have taught me to speak your language I will remain here. The reason I will tell you hereafter. There are many things I must learn, too, before I can go amongst the people of the world. These things you must teach me."

"Everything in which I can help you I will gladly do." Alan spoke from his heart, and another smile was his reward.

"Now I must bring your friend to himself again; it is not good to hold him so."

"Wait," said Dundas eagerly. "You have not told me by what name we may call you?"

"I am called 'Earani.' The name means 'The Flower of Life.'"

Alan repeated the name softly, and she nodded at each repetition with a faint smile of amusement.

"Truly, you are well named as a flower," he ventured.

Her eyes challenged his over Barry's head. "But there are many kinds of flowers."

"But none more beautiful than the flower of life." He risked it with a beating heart.

A slow flush came to her cheeks, and Barry stirred restlessly under her hands. For the first time her eyes fell slightly. "See, we put too great a strain on your friend." She moved her hands a little.

"One moment more. You have not told me about food for you. I must arrange for that."

"There is no need for you to trouble. There is food and all else I require for many years within reach."

"May Richard Barry come and see you and help in the teaching?"

She divined his thoughts. "Yes, he may come, but I will not speak to you again until you have taught me how. Now we must stop. First, though, tell me is it night or day?"

"The day is just closing."

"Then you will tell all that has passed between us to Richard Barry? Afterwards you will leave me here and return while the morning is yet young?"

"I will do your wish, but I do not think I will tell Richard Barry everything. I will omit a little part of it." There was a look in his eyes she could not fail to interpret.

"If you have spoken nonsense I do not think your friend would care to hear it." Then, without giving him time to answer, she removed her hands from Dick's forehead, and, coming quickly round, she separated their clasped hands.

Almost immediately Dick, who had been lying limply in his seat, opened his eyes in a dazed and sleepy fashion, and looked inquiringly at Alan, who sat smiling before him. "What happened, Dun? I feel as if I had been drugged." He pressed both hands to his eyes. Earani, who had been standing beside him, passed her fingers lightly over his forehead, and in a moment, he sat up, looking from one to the other for a solution of his perplexity.

"I never saw it done before, Dick, but you've been mesmerised, and through you I have been told the wishes of Earani."

"Mesmerised! Well, I'm blessed." He stood up. "And if the conversation was not absolutely confidential, I'd like to know what I've been saying."

"No use getting shirty, Dick," answered his unabashed friend. "I didn't know what was going to happen, but if I had known I wouldn't have warned you. It was most interesting." And he proceeded to give the mollified Dick an account of his involuntary interpreting. While they were talking Earani had returned to her couch, and, seated at the foot of it, she watched the two with grave interest. With movements that showed an utter lack of self-consciousness she drew the shimmering cascade of her hair on either shoulder as she sat, and with deft fingers twined it into two arm-thick braids that fell below her waist. To Alan, who could not keep his eyes from such a fascinating picture, it seemed as if she were twining some part of himself in to the golden mesh, and, to Barry's huge disgust, the narrative became almost incoherent. "It seems to me, Alan, my boy, that I'm not the only one that's been mesmerised," he said testily. "Go on, man; what next, after she said her name was Earani?"

"Oh, nothing much, except that she wants us to clear out of here, and leave her until to-morrow. Dick, isn't she wonderful?"

"Not as wonderful as your behaviour; you're positively gaping. Didn't you ask her how they worked the suspended-animation business, or what those drugs were?"

"Oh, we'll get that in time, you one-eyed drivelling old body-snatcher. Dick, I'm going to teach her English. Think of that."

"My sacred aunt! Then, if that's a specimen, she'll have a dazzling vocabulary. Didn't you even ask her about food?"

"Of course, I did. She says she has enough to last her for years."

"I'd like to see it," said Barry, whose professional curiosity had outweighed all other interests.

The two approached the table, and proceeded to put it in order, and Barry, who was determined to gain one point at least, opened a small jar of concentrated meat and showed it to Earani, who was watching their movements curiously. She took it from him, and examined it with keen interest, then she replaced it on the table, and went to one of the huge chests. She opened it without difficulty, and took out a small phial, containing about a dozen white lozenges. She shook out two or three on the table, and, taking one, she placed it in her mouth. The two men hesitated a few moments, but Earani picking up two more with her dainty fingers, held them out, and dropped one into the hand of each. Alan put his into his mouth immediately, but Barry examined his curiously, and then looked up.

"What's it taste like, Dun?"

"Can't say—a little saline. Try your own."

"I think I'd like to analyse it. It may be a whole meal," answered Barry.

"I hope it is, then. I haven't had anything since morning, and that seems days ago. Talk about my behaviour, do you usually analyse what refreshment your hostess offers you?"

Dick chuckled. "I'm a married man, Dun, but I'll risk it. I wish I had your simple faith, though," and he followed Alan's example by putting the lozenge into his mouth. "Now, Alan, my son, it's seven-thirty, and I think we had better say good-night to Madam or Mademoiselle Earani. I wonder if that wound is right, though."

He pointed to the bandages inquiringly. Earani touched it lightly, and shook her head with a smile.

Barry snapped the clasp of his bag, and took up his hat, and Alan, seeing no excuse possible for lingering, followed his example. Divining their intention, Earani walked with them towards the curtained doorway. Alan lifted the curtain, and she passed out into the portico, and walked to the spot before the chair where Dundas had discovered the hidden

button. She stooped and examined the place for a moment, and looked up at him smiling. "You had plenty of luck to find the right spot, Dun," was Dick's comment.

"Not luck, dear chap—brains. Earani knows it, too." As if though to confirm his own estimate, she stood up and held out her hand to him, with a few soft caressing words that made Alan's heart thump as he took her soft fingers into his.

"Look here, Dun, I'm not going to stay here all night while you teach your foundling English. Kitty will be worrying herself to death," and Dick turned to walk towards the antechamber. Earani called his name softly and brought him to a standstill; then beckoning them to follow, she led the way, not to the antechamber but round the back of the "temple" towards the great translucent doors that led to the vestibule. They followed in silence. Arrived before the closed doors Earani bent down and pressed with her fingers on a spot in the mosaic pavement near the wall, and instantly the great doors silently slid apart. This disclosed the metal curtain that had crushed Alan's hopes of entrance by that means, and incidentally his plank bridge, by which he had hoped to span the trap before it. The look she gave Alan showed that she quite understood what had happened, but, not the slightest disconcerted, she crossed over and pressed the pavement again on the other side of the doorway, and with a deep booming the curtain ascended, opening the way at last directly to the vestibule. "By Jove, Dun! No wonder you said the place was full of machinery. This saves a long walk, though I'd like to have another look at that Art Gallery." He was stepping forward, but Alan caught him back.

"Steady, Dick; 'ware sudden death!" Dick balked and looked from Dundas to Earani inquiringly. The latter, who understood Alan's action thoroughly, stood in the doorway a moment, and with deft fingers manipulated part of the moulding in the frame. Then without the slightest hesitation she crossed the threshold and stood on the trap itself, which remained firm as the surrounding pavement. In a few words Alan told Dick of the hidden danger beneath their feet, and Barry gave a terse and caustic opinion of the place and its construction in return.

The three paused at the foot of the stairway, and Alan with a sigh realised that he now must really lose sight of Earani, for the time being at least. With the two doors now open, the vestibule was flooded with light, and it seemed a proper setting for her regal beauty. Dick, who made the move, for he realised that if he left it to Alan, that dazzled man would linger indefinitely, so bowing to Earani, he held out his hand and

said good-night, and commenced to ascend the stairway. Until he was half-way up Alan waited; then he took her hand gently and whispered: "Good-night, Earani beloved!" That universal language that has no spoken words nor written signs, said more than words or deed, for Earani answered in the same low voice in imitation of his words: "Good-night, Alan Dundas, beloved!" Alan knew that the words to her were words only, but inwardly he registered a wild vow that sooner or later he would teach her their meaning, and hear them spoken in good faith. Meantime the shadow was something, if he could not have the substance. Then he turned and followed Dick, who was impatiently calling from the upper landing.

# Chapter 18

THE two men were obliged to climb the winding stairway in the dark, as Alan, with his wits full of one subject, had forgotten the acetylene lamp, and, in consequence, that weary journey, long at any time, seemed endless.

They emerged at last, breathless, into a cold and uninviting night, that made a keen contrast with the wonderful surroundings they had so recently left. Not a word passed between them as they walked to the homestead. Arrived there, while Alan lit his lamp, Dick dropped back into the cane lounge, and produced his pipe. Dundas adjusted his lamp to his satisfaction. Then he came to anchor in an arm-chair, and reached for a pipe from the rack beneath the mantel piece. Until a cloud of smoke encircled the head of each, no word was spoken. Finally Alan broke the silence with an interrogative "Well, Dick?" Even then it was some minutes before Barry answered. "I suppose I'm awake, Dun. I'll take it for granted that I'm sane, but upon my word, I'd almost doubt it if my legs didn't ache so infernally from climbing that everlasting corkscrew."

"It took me a long time to get over that feeling," then after a pause, "Man to man, Dick, say what you think."

Barry eyed Alan over the bowl of his pipe thoughtfully before answering. "Do you know, Dun, that it is by saying what one thinks in abnormal circumstances, that a man runs the risk of losing a pal, even his best. I'd like to sleep on it."

"Tosh, man, get it out! I'm not a kid, and this is no subject for a kindergarten." He smiled at Barry's wrinkled forehead. "Counsel for the prosecution will now address the court."

Dick smiled, in spite of himself. "All the same, old man, it's the least humorous situation I've ever steered into. Do you consider the possibilities?"

"I've done nothing else since I first set feet on the floor of the vestibule. Dick, I've argued myself into imbecility, and finally found that the only thing was to let matters take their course. At any rate, for weal or woe, we are committed to secrecy."



"Speaking from a purely personal point of view, I'm not sorry," said Barry reflectively. "To tell a yarn like this in cold blood is inviting comment on one's mental state. On the other hand—" He broke off, and stared blindly at the blue smoke over his head.

"Well, on the other hand?" queried Alan.

"We may," went on Barry, slowly, "be committing the greatest blunder, if not the greatest crime against society the world has ever known."

"It's a crude way of putting it, Dick, but I'll admit something of the kind has struck me before, but would trumpeting the thing to the world at large improve matters? I doubt it."

Barry sat up straight on the lounge, which creaked under his weight, and waved his pipe largely. "By thunder, Dun," he broke out, "you ask me to speak man to man, and I will. Apart from Earani, there is enough in those galleries to start the nations raiding. Even from the merest superficial knowledge you have how, you must see the possibility of powers there that will make the individual or nation that possesses them supreme in the world, and absolute supremacy for man or nation is the worst thing that could happen to him or it or the world. Do you think for an instant that a government would let an individual get hold of those powers? Or do you suppose that other nations would let one government keep them if there was a ghost of a show of stealing them? Dun, there is enough potential trouble under our feet to make this place of yours the storm centre of hell itself."

"On your own showing, Dick, secrecy is the better plan," put in Alan.

"Well, is it?" went on Barry. "Remember it's bound to come out some time. But I said at first, 'Apart from Earani.' Dun, old man, without the slightest personal reflection on her, I believe she is the greatest danger of all."

Alan laughed good-humouredly. "Dick, old man, without the slightest personal reflection on yourself, you've got rats in your garret," he mimicked.

"Maybe," answered Dick, laughing. "An affair of this kind is apt to breed that kind of rodent, but I'm not blind, Dun. God knows, no one could blame you, whoever laid eyes on her." He spoke very soberly. "I've heard of the fatal gift of beauty. A medical man is supposed to see a patient and nothing else, but when I saw her lying there the sheer glory of her almost took my breath away. Thank God, I'm safely anchored, but there are men who would knife you for a word from her."

"I'll believe you there, Dick," said Alan grimly, "there is not much I'd stop at for her."

"Just so, Dun, I understand; but that's not all. Judging from appearances, she is as highly endowed mentally as she is physically, and if I'm not mistaken there is nothing in those galleries that she does not understand. Why does she want to remain hidden? Simply to get a working knowledge of our world and then to use her own knowledge for her own purposes. God send that those purposes are benevolent and not malevolent."

Alan listened with half-closed eyes to Barry's words. For a while he remained silent. "Granted everything you say is right, Dick, we can alter nothing now. Suppose I gave you permission to speak, if you got anyone to believe you, do you think the course of events could be altered? I doubt it. We lost control of everything the moment Earani rose from the couch. No, Dick, arguing is no good. We've just to go on. I can't believe that a creature so perfectly beautiful can do anything but for the best."

Barry sighed and knocked the ashes from his pipe. "I'll keep in touch, Dun, and do what I can. Apart from everything else, I'm starving to get at those galleries again."

"Great Scott, Dick!" said Alan, jumping up, "you must be starving for food, too. You must have something before you go."

Barry laughed. "What about yourself, Alan. I thought you said when we tried those lozenges you were feeling famished?"

Dundas paused with a surprised look on his face. "Well, that's queer. It's nearly half-past eight, and I've had nothing since eight this morning, and before I took that lozenge I felt positively hollow, and now—well, I'm feeling quite comfy, and well fed. I wonder?"

"My symptoms exactly, Dun," returned Dick, "but I've been watching for them myself, and watching you, too. Under normal conditions you would have gone straight for a feed as soon as you came back. Instead, you sat down for a smoke. It seems to me that we had a meal in tabloid form."

"It's a mere detail, I suppose," said Alan from the cupboard. "I'm beginning to accept that sort of thing as perfectly natural. By Jove! Dick, what a field we have before us." He placed two glasses, a sparklet, and a decanter on the table. "Since we've dined, this is the only kind of hospitality that occurs to me."

"Oh, well, a small one, then, and I must be off. I promised Walton I'd look in at the hospital when I got back."

"Oh! That reminds me," said Alan suddenly. "I must write a note. Will you post it for me? I won't be long."

"Fire away, old man; I don't suppose ten minutes more or less will make any difference now," and Barry resumed his place on the lounge with his glass in his hand. Dundas took writing material from his drawer, and for a few minutes scribbled industriously. He felt it a relief, as things fell out, he had but little time to reflect on what he had to write. There was an uneasy feeling at his heart that he was not altogether playing the game. However, this was the note that Barry presently put into his pocket for the mail:

"Dear Miss Seymour.—It was indeed kind of you to think of inviting me to dinner, and I am more than sorry that I am at present not altogether master of my own movements. That I am not is doubtless my own fault. However, as things fall out I am tied to 'Cootamundra,' and am likely to be for some time to come. The work I have undertaken, although successful, carries with it the penalty of absolute retirement, so I trust you will forgive my refusal, which at a later date will explain itself. If you should see Dr. Barry I have no doubt that he will assure you that I have no idea of taking holy orders.— Yours very sincerely, Alan Dundas."

He sealed the letter without reading it over, and handed it to Barry.

"By the way, Dick, Bryce has kindly spread the fiction for me that I am studying hard, to account for my absence from Glen Cairn. He does not know a single fraction of what has happened. He did it blindly for me. I hope you don't mind keeping it up for me if you are asked?"

Dick chuckled. "Not altogether fiction. If anyone can claim to be studying hard, you can. I might also say you have started a school, but I won't. Dun, I envy you, that's a fact. I do ask, though, that you'll let me share when you can."

Alan walked with him to the car. "I'll expect you out every time you can get a chance. I'll want someone to talk things over with. Another thing. Tomorrow will you order a selection of all the child's alphabet and picture books and first readers, and anything of the kind you can see, to be sent out? You know the sort of thing I want. If I'm starting a school I might as well do it properly."

Dick promised to do his best, and the two shook hands. "God send we are not doing anything we'll be sorry for, Dun," said Barry soberly, "and for you especially I hope things will turn out well. I don't want to croak, but we are taking devilish big risks. Good night, old man."

"Good night, Dick. Remember me to Madam Kitty. Tell her that I kept you, and make my apologies." Dick sent the clutch home, and the car skimmed off into the darkness, and until the glare of the headlights

disappeared round the track Alan stood watching it thoughtfully. Then, regardless of the chill night air, for a long hour he paced the verandah, with his thoughts in a golden cloud. And, ever as he walked, before his eyes rose a vision of starry eyes set in a face of heavenly beauty.

Alan was astir early next morning. He made his toilet with unusual thought and care for his personal appearance. Then he set about his household work with a light heart, and for the first time for many days his voice, raised in song, boomed through the old homestead. He prepared his breakfast and washed up, and went through all the rest of the domestic routine with his thoughts full of the day before him. When all was finished and his house in order he went to his book-shelves and busied himself over the selection of half a dozen volumes best fitted for his requirements.

It took him a long time to make up his mind, for comparatively few of the books in his library were illustrated. First he put aside a fine atlas. His next choice fell on an old school prize illustrated with photographs of the world's famous and historic buildings. Then, after much inward debate, he selected four volumes of travel that contained pictures showing the world in its most varied aspects. By the time he had completed his task it was nearly ten o'clock, so, deciding that he might reasonably pay his first call at this hour, he strapped the books together and made his way to the shed, having first procured a second lamp from his dog-cart to supply the place of the one he had left behind the night before.

Light of heart and quivering with expectation, he made his way into the depths. Arrived at the first landing, he extinguished his lamp, and descended into the vestibule, alert for any sound that might indicate the presence of Earani. At the foot of the stairs he halted. All was as he had left it on the preceding evening. The great vestibule was flooded with light, showing the statued group in the centre in strangely lifelike guise. Not a sound broke the stillness. For a moment his heart fell. Could anything have happened to her, he wondered. For a while he listened motionless, and then to warn her of his coming, he called her name aloud, "Earani! Earani!" And then almost instantly his heart gave a bound of joy—for the words had scarcely died away when in answer came the clear, sweet voice, "Alan Dundas," and followed by a few words in her language.

Again calling her name, Alan hurried to the sixth gallery without further hesitation. As he came to the portico of the "temple" he saw her standing on the threshold, holding back the curtain with one hand, and as his eyes fell on her he stood stock still, with one foot on the step. The

glory of her beauty came on him with overwhelming force. Truly she was the same woman he had seen lying in silent majesty on the couch, the same as he had seen flush back into glowing life, but now there was an added freshness to her loveliness. It seemed as if the few hours of new life she had lived had added something to her; she seemed to radiate vitality. The gown she had worn before was changed for one of pale gold that fell from her neck and was caught at the waist by a pliant, glittering metallic band. Over it was a cloak of deeper hue, held in place by an iridescent clasp on either shoulder. As she stood looking down on him, with a smile of friendly welcome on her lips, Alan felt that no man of his race had ever before gazed on such a picture. So they stood for a moment, and the man, safe in her ignorance of the meaning of his words, said softly: "Oh, beloved, beloved; God send that I may teach you all that is in my heart or my life will be of little value to me hereafter." Perhaps it was the ring in his voice or the adoration in his eyes that lent meaning to his words, for, though her eyes never left his, he saw again, as he had seen before, a deeper flush come over her face as he stepped forward and took her outstretched hand. Then she drew aside the curtain, and they entered side by side.

At the first glance Alan saw that Earani had used the time at her disposal to effect certain alterations in her surroundings. Across the far end of the "temple" and cutting off about one-third of its length, there hung a gorgeous curtain that divided the place into two compartments. The couch still remained in its place, but nearly all the other furniture had been rearranged, and for the moment Alan found time to wonder how her unaided strength had enabled her to move the various pieces that had before tried his strength to the uttermost. He noticed, too, that she had adorned her quarters with several objects that he recognised as coming from the art gallery, and he was deeply impressed by the taste and discrimination with which the alterations had been carried out. It appeared as if she had done everything possible to make her surroundings harmonise with her personality. As he approached the table they had been using the night before he saw lying on it a number of the cased volumes that had doubtless been brought there from the library. It was apparent that Earani had been struck with the same idea on the matter of communications that he had and it was with no little pleasure that Alan found she evinced the deepest curiosity in the volumes he carried with him. No sooner had he removed the straps than she eagerly took possession of them, skimming through them quickly one after another, all the while keeping up a running comment in her melodious tongue.

It was not until she came on the atlas that she paused seriously. At the first sight of the map she gave a little gurgle of pleasure, and, drawing up a seat to the table, she motioned Alan to do the same. Her manner was perfectly natural and free from affectation, and the interest she displayed was evidently no mere feminine curiosity, but a deep and sincere desire for information.

With the atlas before them, she pushed it before Alan with the intention that he should act as instructor, and it was with wonder that he found how little there was he could show her that she did not immediately comprehend. When he turned to the Mercator's projection and the pages showing the hemispheres, she pored over the maps long and thoughtfully, here and there running her fingers along a coastline, murmuring to herself the while, and again turning to him with some quick question. Alan found it increasingly difficult to devote his attention to the book with the overpowering distraction of their intimate proximity, and his eyes were oftener on her white hands than on the map, and his thoughts were more of her eyes than of the division of the globe into land and water. For some time she appeared to be trying to make him understand some point in which she was interested, until at last Dundas arrived at the idea that she wanted their own position, shown. Taking his pocket knife (which was immediately carefully examined by her and handed back) he marked the point on the map of Australia where 'Cootamundra' would be, and then turned to the detailed maps to show her the more exact position. After a close study of the place, turning from map to map, she stood up, and motioning him to remain seated, ran lightly from the room. She was only a few minutes absent before she returned, breathless from her hurry, bearing in her hand a volume from the library, and spread it open beside the atlas. It was Alan's turn to mutter exclamations of surprise now, for Earani turned from page to page, showing him charts of the world that were new to his eyes and yet in some details strangely familiar. They showed land in some places where he was used to seeing water, and the continents in some places took strange outlines. But with it all was one great difference. The whole scheme of things seemed altered with regard to latitude. Masses of land that he recognised in outline as belonging to the southern part of Australia were placed near the equator, and there were other displacements and dislocations that set up between the two a chatter of inquiry. It was evident to Alan that Earani understood the reason of his perplexity, and held the key of the puzzle, and seemed only too eager to impart her knowledge; but after a vigorous comparison of the two maps Alan was

left as much as ever in the dark. In the end Earani laughingly took the two books, closed them with a bang, and put them aside.

Then she turned to the works of travel, and here they were on more even ground, and it was from the pictures that Alan started to give his pupil her first lessons in English.

If you ask a person whose lot it is in life to act as instructor to the ignorant in any subject, his or her opinion of teaching as a profession, in ninety-nine cases out of a hundred the answer will be that the calling is one of hopeless drudgery. To Dundas, who was now undertaking it for the first time, his role of instructor appealed to him as the most fascinating and delightful experience of his life. He could sit side by side with his pupil, and look into her eyes as he talked to her, and laugh with her as her red, sensitive lips framed words that were new to them. He illustrated the words he taught her practically, and ever as they talked deep in their work, her ready wit met his half way or more. Even in the first hours of their intimacy Alan came to recognise that the intelligence of his pupil was of no mean order. Her memory was phenomenal, and rarely, if ever, did a word once given her escape her mind. The pictures they had before them proved a splendid ground for study, and Alan was never tired of watching her face light up with each object of interest that came under her notice.

Growing tired of the books at last, she led him out into the gallery, pausing, much to Alan's trepidation, to add to her store of English, by an entirely self-possessed and unconcerned analysis of the anatomy of the three figures in the portico. From him she had quickly picked up the phrase, "What is it?" and this was ever on her tongue, and before they had resumed their walk she had mastered the names of every limb and joint in the human frame, with a total unconsciousness of her teacher's uneasiness. They passed down to the marble ante-chamber, and here Alan found that by some means, best known to herself, she had overcome the trouble of the outrageous noises that made it such a nerve-racking ordeal to cross. He had paused as they came to the doorway, but she had gone on unconcerned, and turned and beckoned him forward, smiling. She stayed for a few minutes before the statue, looking at it thoughtfully, and then passed to the corridor till they came to the spot outside the machinery gallery, where Alan's curiosity had ended in such startling results. Here a surprise awaited him. Every vestige of the masses of cement torn down by the explosion had disappeared. He had long before cleared away the lighter pieces to make a convenient passage, but there were larger pieces that had defied his attempts to move them. How in

the few hours at her disposal she had managed to complete the work was a mystery that no amount of chatter between them could, for the moment, clear up. That Earani understood the cause of the wreckage was evident from her leading him directly to the innocent-looking machine that had caused the trouble. There Alan showed her in pantomime what had happened, and from her concerned air, he realised that the danger that he had escaped was greater than he suspected. She motioned him to stand aside, and for some time busied herself with the machine, which showed itself to be more complex than it appeared. It was not until her deft fingers had removed the lever that operated it that she was satisfied with her work. To Alan, who stood by, absorbed in her every movement it was patent that she was thoroughly familiar with its mechanism.

The task completed, they wandered through the gallery, and ever as they went the words, "What is it?" came with a ceaseless repetition that strained his knowledge of mechanics to the breaking point. When they arrived at the great doors leading to the vestibule Earani immediately operated the mechanism that opened them. In this, as in everything else that she did, Alan was struck by the assured certainty of her movements. There was no hesitation or pause for thought, although, in this instance and that of the remaining three doors which she afterwards opened, the key was concealed with marvellous skill in different parts of the doors themselves, so that their discovery would have defied the closest search by anyone ignorant of their secret. Another matter that was subject of attention was the pitfalls in the vestibule, which were visited in turn and secured by Earani against danger to life and limb by much careful adjustment of concealed mechanism.

Amongst other things she visited the stairway, where the hidden blade had been in action, and here the weights, still hanging on the step, told their own tale, a tale that she was quick to read and appreciate.

And so they wandered on from gallery to gallery, and everywhere she added new words to her store. Dundas tested her memory again and again at every turn, and in each instance the correct answer to his question would come without hesitation or mistake.

When they arrived at the Biological Gallery, Alan showed some repugnance at entering, but Earani's white hand placed on his arm drew him forward with his scruples banished. Without pausing to examine or question him on the gruesome exhibits, she walked with him directly to the statue at its entrance from the vestibule, and came to a stand before the table that bore the instrument that had excited his curiosity in the hands of the statue. He had endeavoured before to remove the cover



from the table, but without success, and, after the first attempt, had abandoned the idea. Now, however, at the touch from her fingers on the frame of the cover, Earani raised the glass shade, and removed the instrument. Alan watched her with the deepest interest. With her eyes she questioned his knowledge of its use, to which he pleaded ignorance with a shake of his head. Standing close in front of him, Earani raised the metal circlet in both hands, and set it on his head. It fitted closely round his forehead, without discomfort. The wires attached on either side held the small cylinder suspended dangling to his waist. Taking the cylinder in her right hand, she placed the open end against her left wrist, and, looking up at Alan, she closed her eyes. Dundas watched the performance with lively curiosity, and took advantage of her momentary blindness to feast his eyes anew on her face. In a moment she opened her eyes, and, laughing softly, shook her head in mock anger, and repeated the word "eyes" several times. Then, as he could not guess her meaning, she dropped the cylinder, and her two soft hands went up to his face, with a touch that made him quiver. Then she quietly pressed down his eyelids, and, understanding what her wishes were, he kept them closed.

He could feel her move the cylinder again, then suddenly he started back with a cry of astonishment, and stood looking down in amazement at her wrist. Earani still held the cylinder in her hand, and regarded his astonishment with evident amusement. He had ample cause for his surprise, for when he had closed his eyes, and only then, because the impression ceased as soon as they were opened, it appeared as though the wrist of Earani had become transparent, and showed with perfect distinction every tissue, muscle, and blood vessel as if formed in glass. He could see the blood pulsing through every vein, and every movement of the tiny valves as it passed through them. It was only a fleeting glance, for, so soon as he realised what he saw, he started back. The sensation was a curious one, for every surrounding object was out of range of vision, and it seemed as if he had looked down a cylinder into her wrist.

Still smiling, Earani placed the cylinder in his hand, and indicated his own wrist, and, urged by his curiosity, Dundas repeated the experiment on himself, and, for a long time, stood with closed eyes fascinated by the wonderful mechanism revealed by the apparently simple cylinder. As he stood he felt Earani's gentle touch on his hands, and all became dark. Opening his eyes, he saw that she had removed the instrument from his wrist. Then approaching more closely, she placed the lens against his neck. Obeying her mute orders, he again closed his eyes, and Dundas realised to the full how fearfully and wonderfully we are made, by the

vision of pulsing torrent in vein and artery, and the perfect harmony of movement in muscle and tissue revealed. Unused as he was to such things, his great wonder at what he saw overcame his repugnance, and when he finally opened his eyes he dimly realised how much this wonder he held in his hands deserved its place of honour in the gallery.

Earani returned the instrument to its place, and together they wandered into the great vestibule. Here Alan, indicating the stairway, invited her to ascend, but, standing at its foot, she shook her head, and many days passed before she finally ventured into upper air. Instead, they returned to the "temple," and Alan continued his tuition.

The day was far spent when he finally left her, more desperately fascinated than before by her beauty and charm. It was the first of many such days, and time for Dundas fled on golden wings. Barry was a constant visitor to 'Cootamundra.' He had carried into effect Alan's wish for books, and the short interval between each visit he made was marked by a progress in the pupil that was a constant source of astonishment to both men. They were not long in discovering that the intelligence of Earani was of no common order. Her phenomenal memory was the least of her powers. Whatever was given to it was retained clearly and accurately, but what was more remarkable was her ability to apply unerringly and unhesitatingly the lessons that Dundas gave her in the rules that governed the language. In a fortnight she was able to make herself understood clearly, and at the end of the month she had a command of English that anyone who was unaware of the circumstances would have judged had taken a year or two of study to absorb. In addition to this she had learned to read and write. Not easily, it is true, but with a proficiency that left her two tutors in a constant state of wonder. Where another would have tired with the constant strain of the work involved, the progress she made only seemed to whet her appetite for more, and when she had mastered the elements of her task Dundas discovered that when he left her at the day's end, as she always insisted, she enlarged on her lessons when she was by herself.

On one point, however, Earani was adamant in her resolution. She had decreed that until she became mistress of the language she would tell them nothing of the mystery that surrounded her, nor would she allow them to penetrate the secrets of the galleries. She told them both that her reason was that until she could unfold her story fluently, and without fear of being misunderstood, she would not touch upon it at all, and no attempts on the part of either Alan or Barry could make her waver.

With such a reward in sight, Dundas strove with her to reach the desired point of proficiency, and the task involved far more than he had expected. Command of the English language was not all she demanded. An outline of the world's political history and its social customs was a minor part of the rest. She wanted a knowledge of government, ancient and modern, of laws new and old. Her demands on Alan's scientific knowledge strained his slender resources to the breaking point. It was a fascinating task for Alan, apart from the delight he took in being constantly in her society. That wonderful memory he had to deal with made the work very easy. Nothing that was ever given to it was lost or mislaid. There was no feeling for the right word when once it had been stored in her mind. In eight weeks she could read almost anything that was given to her, and once she had gained this point her progress increased by leaps and bounds. Alan selected her books carefully from his library, and alternatively they read aloud to one another. In accent and inflection she imitated him exactly, and more than once some phrase or expression of Alan's falling from her lips caused Barry to smile in spite of himself.

Apart from the pleasure that both took in instructing their pupil, there were occasional flashes from the hidden depths of her mind that gave them food for reflection. One day Alan had given her an outline of the history of the Constitution of Great Britain, and a general survey of the Empire and the Imperial idea, and from that had drifted to the Constitution of the Commonwealth. She had absorbed it all, making very little comment, as was her custom, merely interposing with an incisive query on any point on which she was not quite clear. "That is as it should be, Alan," she said at the end. "It is well that the people should choose their own lawmakers, and, of course, the people are wise and choose the greatest and noblest minds amongst them for a position so high." It was a comment rather than a question as she said it, and as Alan felt disinclined at the time to enter into a lecture on the party system he let it go at that, with certain mental reservations.

However, on the next day he found that a weekly journal had published a double page, giving portraits of the whole of the members of both the Federal Houses. As a matter of interest he brought her the journal, and showed her the portraits. For a long time Earani sat absorbed, and watching her, Alan saw that her eyes went from face to face and stayed for a little while with each. In the end she looked up at him. "Alan, my friend, but you jest with me. These are not the lawmakers of a nation." Alan shrugged his shoulders, and glanced round at Barry, who had come in while Earani sat absorbed in the portraits. "It is true,

Earani," said Barry; "those are the men that the people have chosen to rule them." She sat in silence for a space, staring doubtfully from one to the other. "Why do you doubt it, Earani?" asked Alan, smiling at her serious face. She answered quietly, "I have the gift of reading the faces of men, and in that I cannot fail. You show me rogues and fools, and you show me some who are both. Amongst them all there are few whose faces bear the marks of the nobility that should alone fit them for such an office, and yet you tell me that these are your lawmakers chosen by your people." She stopped and picked up the page that had fallen from her lap, and spread it on the table before her. "Look," she went on, and the two men stood beside her as the condemning finger passed from face to face. "You see it printed there—lust of power; avarice; a rogue—another. See this one with a mind a little better than the beasts. Could he weigh good from bad or right from wrong? Could this one foresee or gauge the effect of any law?" And so on from face to face, summing up each in two or three caustic words. Once she paused. "Though they are not all the same—here is one—this is a leader and a man. Were they all like this the people had done well. What is his name, Alan?"

"He is known as Sir Miles Glover, and he is the Prime Minister of the country. He has been honoured by our King for the work he has done for the country," answered Alan.

Earani looked at the clear, clean-cut face and nodded while Barry put in, "Sometimes they call him Cold Steel. He has few friends, but those that don't love, trust him."

Earani spoke. "That is likely. Such a man does not make friends easily, especially amongst such people." She waved a contemptuous hand over the legislators. "I will remember the name. Later I shall have use for him." The two men looked at each other over her head, and Earani tossed the page aside. "Are your people mad, or is this the best the country can get for the work? Of them all only two or three are fitted for it."

Barry chuckled with delight at Alan's irritated face. "Come, Dun, give Earani the history of Party Government, and tell her of the wisdom of democracy." And Alan, half amused and half angry, explained how the candidates were selected and finally elected.

"So that," said Earani at the end, "if there are only two parties in the State there are only two candidates?"

"Generally speaking, that is so," answered Dundas.

"Even supposing one were a great and good man, and the other but a tool for the party leaders, would not the people choose the better man?"

Barry interposed. "If the greatest statesman who ever lived opposed a nominated hod-carrier, with the brain of a chimpanzee, the statesman would not be elected in some of the constituencies; in fact, in most of them. The preference of the people is for the party's nominee."

"The preference of swine for offal," was the terse comment. With her hands on the table before her, Earani stared in front of her with unseeing eyes, unheeding Barry's huge delight at her words. Presently she spoke in a low voice, and as one thinking aloud. "Ah, there will be a great killing—a great killing." Then she stood up. "Come, Dick, there are things you must tell me before you go," and she led the way to the Biological Gallery. On both her hearers the few absently-spoken words left a deep impression, and although more than once Alan attempted to learn her meaning, she deftly turned the question aside.

In these visits to the Biological Gallery, Barry was in his glory. Once her brain had mastered the scientific nomenclature, Earani proved herself to be versed in the subject to an extent that staggered the doctor, and at times left him breathless with a hint at theories undreamt of in his philosophy.

Since he had been shown the wonders of the cylinder, he had been made Earani's abject slave by the promise that when the time came he would be allowed to reveal it to the world. Alan's part in these demonstrations had been that of a subject or an onlooker, and in his own mind it was difficult to decide which role he liked least. For on the first day it had been put into his hands, Barry raved deliriously on its wonders and its revolutionary effect on medical science. "See what it means, Dun, dear boy. No more blind groping in the dark. No more summing up of symptoms and guessing at causes. Man alive, think of it! I can fill you up with drugs and note the effect on every organ just as it occurs. We will be able to watch the progress of every disease under the sun." He had delivered himself, so, kneeling over Alan's prostrate form, pausing now and again with the cylinder pressed to his body, and muttering incoherently with closed eyes. Earani stood by, smiling at his enthusiasm, which she brought almost to a tearful climax by showing him how to adjust the instrument in order to get microscopic results.

With Alan as a not altogether willing subject, Earani and Barry would join in demonstrations over his body with a detachment from his personality and a disregard for his feelings that called forth a storm of protest from their victim. Barry's compliments as to his perfect physical organisation were no compensation for the treatment he received, although he realised that so far as he was concerned neither one nor the other was

aware of his existence for the time being apart from the subject under discussion.

He had revenge on Dick, however, when that worthy came into conflict with Earani on technical subjects. Beyond their outline Alan was at sea as to their importance, but he could not fail to observe Dick's indignation at her calm and assured smashing of some of his most revered theories, or her smiling disregard for the argument he adduced to support their tottering fabrics. It was with huge delight that Alan saw expressions of amazement give way to blank dismay at some carelessly dropped remark from Earani. Neither man could help feeling that her positive statements were made by reason of an assured knowledge of her subject. To Alan there was only a mischievous delight at Barry's defeat, but for Barry her voice stirred a veil that no man of all his order had hoped to approach, and vaguely he foresaw the opening of vistas undreamt of by the world.

It was not long, however, before Barry recognised the master mind and, eagerly sought her wisdom, and if he was eager in seeking, Earani was not slow in giving. So it came about that at times, Alan listened to staggering discussions. He was no prude, but there were moments when he felt his cheeks grow hot while Earani and Dick argued on matters Krafft-Ebing and Havelock Ellis have merely whispered. He need not have worried: it but needed a glance at the calm, dispassionate face of Earani to know that to her the subject was one that caused her no reason for self-consciousness.

Often she quietly referred some astonishing phase of the matter to him with as little embarrassment as if she had mentioned the state of the weather. And they realised that questions that scientists discussed in the dead languages and at long range were to her matters for everyday discussion rather than ones to be avoided.

These visits left Barry in a strange state of perturbation. One evening when Alan chaffed him over some recent defeat at Earani's hands, he turned on his tormentor. "Dun, my friend, you wouldn't be so festive on my account if you realised as much as I do the meaning of it all. If I were to propound one fraction of what Earani leads me to believe or hope for, my brethren in the profession would first tear me to pieces, and then fling the bleeding fragments into a lunatic asylum."

"Knocked some of your precious theories out, Dicky?"

"Pulverised them," answered Barry shortly. Then he went on: "And believe me, Alan, I've an idea that biology is not her strongest subject. I

firmly am beginning to think that there is not a single thing in those galleries she does not understand."

Dundas smiled incredulously. "Oh! come off, Dick. Why she's only a girl. On your own showing she knows more about medicine and surgery than you ever dreamed about. How could it be possible that at her age she could have given time to any other subject?"

Barry was putting on his gauntlets, and turned, flapping the empty fingers at his friend. "You remember last week, when she let me inspect her brain through that cylinder, and you so rudely refused to follow my lead?"

"Of course I do," answered Alan; "it seemed to me to be a beastly idea. Even you, from your expression, didn't like it."

Barry regarded his friend thoughtfully. "You misread my expression, Dun. I got a shock, and I'll admit it, but not the kind you imagine. Her brain, my dear boy, is the most astonishing organ I ever beheld. It is as far in advance in development of mine or yours as ours is in advance of an ape's. Apart from anything else. I should say that its weight is half as much again as my own, and in other respects—well, as a layman, you wouldn't appreciate the difference; but if I described it to Walton, for instance, he'd say I invented the yarn, and I wouldn't blame him, either."

"Then from your point of view she's as perfect mentally as she is physically?" said Alan.

"Just so," answered Barry, and then, after a pause: "Did you ever find out what she meant by 'a great killing' in reference to our noble legislators?"

Alan laughed. "Surely you don't take that expression literally, Dick?"

"Not quite," answered Barry, stepping into his car. "Although we could spare a good many of them. Still I'd like to know what she meant."

"Perhaps Earani was merely thinking of a reform in our legislative system. She didn't seem to take kindly to the present state of affairs."

"Humph. In that case she will have one enthusiastic supporter, at any rate. Good night, Dun," and the car hummed off into the dusk. In spite of his calm acceptance of Alan's comment, Barry's thoughts were very sober as he sped homewards. Vaguely in his mind was the thought of a great shadow that overhung the world.

# Chapter 19

AS time went on Alan came more and more under the dominance of Earani's bewildering personality. His constant association with her added fuel to the passionate love he bore her. Barry was his only visitor, and he seldom left his vineyard. From early morning to late in the evening he spent his time with her in the galleries. Dick viewed with concern his friend's growing infatuation. He had an uneasy feeling that the association could only lead to calamity for his friend. Deep as their friendship was, he dared not speak to Alan on the subject. In his heart, too, he felt that even if Dundas would permit a warning, such a course would be useless. He realised to the full the effect that Earani's glorious beauty and charm must have, and more than once, to his own self-shame, he felt himself thrill under a glance from her soft, grave eyes or the light touch of her hand, and did penance for his involuntary disloyalty to Madam Kitty. So he could only watch.

In some respects Alan was happy. He enjoyed to the full her constant society. In spite of her over-towering mind, he found her exquisitely feminine. She was, however, no creature of moods. Under all circumstances she displayed the same unruffled calm, and always there was the same womanly softness in voice and bearing. Sometimes, as they sat together, she would call a halt to their lessons, and by the power she held over the keyboard in the "temple" she would fill the great gallery with immortal music—music that lifted Alan's soul to paradise with its glory. These were days to remember, and feel thankful for the joy of living. On the other hand, away from her presence, he was beset with forebodings as to his fate. In his soul he felt his absolute unworthiness to be the mate of this radiant being. Who was he that he should aspire to the first place in her heart? So deep was his reverence for her that he knew that, though the blow would break his life, he knew also that he would accept her decision without a murmur if it went against him. Again and again he crushed back the words that came storming to his lips that would decide his fate. The fear of an answer that would be the end of all things for him kept him silent. In his heart he knew that she would not expect him to



consider that their strange relations should seal his lips from motives of chivalry. Earani was too calmly aloof and too much a law unto herself to be troubled by conventions. He realised thoroughly that when the time came that he should speak, her answer would be given with no other thought than for his and her interests. So he lived on with her, alternating with a hope that left him weak with wild longing, and a fear that crushed his heart to despair.

It was at the end of the third month that Earani began to tell them of the mystery of her being, for she reserved the revelations until Barry was there to hear them. It was one afternoon when the three were seated together in the "temple," and the talk had touched on the subject of geology. Barry had hazarded a second-hand opinion on the length of time that life in any form had existed on the earth. "Ah, Dick, my dear boy, (she had long adopted Alan's form of address), how wildly they guess, those scientists of yours. Come: I will show you." She took Alan's atlas from a table near by, and with it a volume from the library. Then she called them both to the couch beside her, and with the books on her lap to illustrate her meaning, she told them of the world's past. "You remember, Alan, how you showed me this map on the day after you recalled me to life?" and here she turned to the map of the world. "Strange as it was to me then, I knew what it meant, although the chart I was used to was so different. See, here it is," and she opened the other volume. "Before my eyes were closed in the long sleep in which you found me, this was the world I knew. See, although it is so altered, many of the lines are familiar." Their three heads bent over the maps before them, and with her dainty forefinger Earani traced the many places, still almost the same, on both charts.

"Do you mean, Earani, that since you knew the world it has altered so?" asked Alan.

"Indeed, it has altered, this old world. Can either of you wise ones tell me the cause?" She looked smiling from one to the other.

Dick shook his head. "I pass—Alan, I leave it to you."

"And you, Alan?" Her soft white hand fluttered to his arm. "Tell this Dick, who knows everything, how this old world was wrecked to build a new one in its place." She smiled into his eyes.

Alan shook his head in turn, but before Earani could speak again he broke in: "Wait, though. It may be that I can guess. Some of our men hold that at one time the axis of the earth has moved, and that the shock must have dislocated the whole of the surface. I have always thought this theory fantastic, but it may fit."

Earani laughed softly, and nodding her head, she turned to Barry. "Ah, Dick! You see Alan can use his head as well as that great strong body of his. My teacher is worthy of the office."

"Was that really the cause, Earani?" asked both men together.

"That, indeed, is what happened. Ages and ages ago the world was inhabited by a race of human beings just as it is to-day. It was a race that had gone through all the trials and struggles through which yours has passed and is passing. Some day I will tell you of it; at present let it suffice that the race had attained to the greatest heights humanity is capable of when the great calamity befell."

She paused for a moment, as though the picture of the great lost past saddened her. Then she spoke again, and her voice came in a little more than a whisper. "Our people knew of the blow that threatened long before it fell. They were too great to fear for themselves; but they knew that on the ashes of the wrecked world another race would arise. They knew, too, that the new race would have to pass through the same great trials before it won to its own high place. What they mourned was that all the great works of their brains and hands should perish utterly. That their race should vanish was a small thing compared with the danger that all their great ideals should vanish with it.

"Can you think of what it meant to those who had helped in the great work, and the men who knew the value of it? A little perhaps you can understand, but very little, unless you knew the people of the lost world. Oh, so long ago! And yet it seems to me so very near.

Then after a little silence she spoke again. "And so they determined on a desperate effort to preserve their knowledge for the benefit of the people that were to come again. They had but two hundred years in which to work. Little time enough for their work, but it sufficed. On each of three carefully selected spots on the earth they built a great sphere such as the one we are now in. In the building of them they brought to bear every grain of the great lore they had, to win their purpose and make them invulnerable against the great calamity. Into each of them when all was ready they gathered together a specimen of all their art and science. The means of holding life suspended had been known for many generations, though it was but little used. Then it was determined that into each sphere one person should be placed to form the link between the old world and the new."

"Why only one in each?" asked Alan, who was following the story with burning interest.

"The question was deeply debated at the time," she answered. "Although we knew that for any ordinary time the body could be kept in a state of suspended animation, yet there was no certainty that the ages that must pass before reanimation took place, if it ever did, would not cause the attempt to fail. Our people did not wish to condemn more than would be necessary, to the risk of a terrible fate. There were so many and such terrible dangers for the chosen ones to face. So in the end three were chosen."

"How chosen?" asked Barry, eagerly.

"In the first place," she answered, "volunteers were called for. Thousands answered the call. It was no thought of self-preservation that brought them forward. Each one knew that there were dangers to be faced by those who were selected that were worse than the death that the race had to meet, but none of the old race feared death. To them it was but an incident. No; each one was animated by the hope that in the end it would fall to his or her lot to carry the light from the dying race to the race unborn.

"All over the world councils were held, to which the candidates were called, and the most fitted were sent forward to a central council, where the final choice was made; and so it fell out in the end that I, Earani, was thought worthy of the great honour. Why? Fate, I think; for amongst so many there would be but small difference."

"Earani—tell us," broke in Barry. "You say there were three great spheres. The others—what of them?"

She rose to her feet and walked to the keyboard that had been her first thought on the day she had awakened. Turning, she faced them. "The master builders who contrived this work left nothing to chance. This keyboard is in everlasting connection with those in the other two. Only absolute destruction could break the tie. Listen!" Her fingers moved swiftly on one section of the board. Then she stood still watching them. No sound broke the silence. After a moment she spoke. "There is no answer to that call, and so I know that one has failed to stand the strain of the wrecked world." Again her hands fell on the keys, and this time a deep clear note of a bell answered her touch. "You hear," she cried. "So Andax lives and waits for his release."

Dundas and Barry looked at her in silence. The news of the existence of a second sphere affected them both deeply, but in different ways. To Barry, the news that another being of the type of Earani could be brought to reinforce her, increased the feeling of uneasiness that had already gained hold of him. Alan, however, saw in the news only a threat against

his love for Earani. "What," he thought, "would happen were a man of her race to appear on the scene?" Surely he would be her fitting mate in every way? "What chance would he have against such a rival?" The thought sent a feeling of blind jealous rage through him. It was he who broke the silence. "Tell me, Earani—this Andax you speak of. Is it the name of a man or woman of your race?"

Earani left the keyboard and walked towards them. "Andax," she said thoughtfully, as she paused before them. "Well, Andax is a man." She looked from one to the other and smiled. "He is a man, too, who would be difficult perhaps for you to understand without knowing him." She sank into a great carved chair facing them. "When I said that volunteers were called for, for the long sleep, I did not make myself quite clear. It was decided one hundred years before the great disaster fell that one of our race should occupy each sphere, and from that time until the selection was made our race occupied itself with the idea that fitting representatives should be ready when the time came."

"Each generation was watched with increasing care. The welfare of the unborn was almost a religion with us, aye, it was a religion with us. Some day it will be so with you when your eyes are opened. Every rule for the blending of human blood had been laid down long before, and we knew the type of man we wished to breed, and worked for it." She turned in her chair and looked down the "temple," where the curtains were drawn wide, out into the gallery beyond at the statue that was framed in the doorway leading to the antechamber. She waved her hand towards the statue. "That was the man who first laid down our laws of race making, and Andax is directly descended from him. Ah! he was a man, and Andax is an improvement; he is twenty generations of careful breeding better. Alan, why are you looking so angry?"

Alan pulled himself up. "Truth to tell, Earani, I don't like that face; it looks absolutely pitiless."

She nodded slightly. "Yes, perhaps you are right. The breed had little weakness about it. But that breed did great things for our world. All of our best carried the strain. I have it on both sides, not much, but enough to tell, and the blood of the old doctor holds it in check; but in Andax it is almost pure. I grew up with him and know him well. He has intensified in him all the characteristics of the breed. In appearance he has the same high forehead and sparse hair, the thin nose and the wide nostril, the straight, lipless, mouth, and the steel bright eyes." She gave a little laugh. "Not one of the race ever had a heart. They carried an organic pump in the thorax that was no use except to keep their brains alive."

Barry listened with a sense of fear he could not control, but, hiding it as best he could, he said: "Your picture isn't exactly fascinating, Earani; I should imagine he would not be altogether a genial companion."

She nodded. "Andax would not appeal to many people. He tolerated me. He regarded me as a useful fool; in fact, he told me he did. He was my tutor in surgery for my year's course, and afterwards I had two years under him for engineering. He was angry about that. He said that if I would let him graft one lobe of his brother's brain on to my brain he would put me through the course in one year, and I refused." She laughed lightly. "It was then he told me I would never be anything more than a useful fool, and he was furious because I took up law and literature instead of government and domestic science." She paused a little. "Pitiless was perhaps the right word, Alan. Cold, passionless, and calculating, all of them. Absolutely inflexible. They saw one goal ahead, and went straight to it. There was no thought of self-interest with any of them and no desire for power or authority for its own sake. They looked on our world simply as one great experiment for them. They were unflinchingly honest even with themselves. Andax there would have vivisectioned me or anyone else without anaesthetics if he thought the result would ultimately benefit the race, and at the same time he would have sacrificed himself just as surely. And mark you, my friends, there are stories of their doings I could tell you that are not good to hear, but there was never an act of theirs, however terrible, that did not bring a greater blessing in its train."

For a while there was silence; each of her hearers was busy with his own thoughts. The picture Earani drew of the other being awaiting release affected them both deeply. Then Barry spoke. "This other sphere, Earani; you know where it is? Can you find it?"

"Yes," she answered; "there will be no trouble about that. Wait, I will show you." She took the two maps to the table and bent over them. "From your maps and ours I have worked out the alteration of the axis; the rest is easy." She paused now and again with closed eyes, as though mentally calculating. Then—"Yes, that will be about it, roughly, about 74 east and between 36 and 37 north. About here." Her finger indicated a point to the north of India. Alan turned to the map in the atlas and ran his finger over it. Then he gave a low whistle. "Pretty spot, isn't it, Dick? Right in the middle of the Himalayas, about four hundred miles northwest from Simla."

"What kind of country is it, Alan?" asked Earani.

"In the world's greatest range of mountains. Almost impossible country amongst eternal snow, and only partially known. Earani, a search there would be hopeless," answered Dundas, with rising spirits. "Why the sphere might be buried beneath the mountains a thousand feet."

"It is likely you are right," came the unruffled answer. "Indeed, it is almost sure to be so, for before the disaster that spot was a great tableland. Still our work will be simple. Once we reach the locality I can ascertain the position of the sphere with absolute accuracy, and the rest will be easy."

"Even if it were buried?" interposed Barry.

"The depth is of no importance. A thousand feet or ten thousand, I have the means at hand. You will understand later." Her calm assurance left both her hearers hopeless. She dismissed the matter with a gesture of her hand. "Time enough to talk of Andax. First I must be ready to tell him all he will want to know, and believe me, he will be hungry for knowledge when the time comes." Barry looked bewildered, and Earani, noticing his expression, smiled. "Oh, Dick! There are so many things you do not know yet. What troubles you?"

"I was wondering at the moment how old Andax is, or rather was, when he started the long sleep."

"We were born in the same year," she answered. "He is just twenty-five. The twenty-seven millions of years don't count," she added laughing. "I don't look my age, do I?"

The two men gave a gasp. The figures stunned them, but there was another matter that was beyond their comprehension. It was Alan who gave it expression. "How is it possible that at that age he was your tutor in your studies, as you say, in surgery and engineering?"

"It is simple when you understand the mental powers of the man. By the time he was fifteen he had gone through every course of science we knew. For generations his brain had been developed. Perhaps"—she turned quickly to Barry—"you have seen my brain, Richard, and your own. Now I can give you an idea. His brain is comparatively more developed over mine than mine is over yours. If you can realise that you can realise what I mean. A mental effort that would wreck your mind would pass his unnoticed."

Dick nodded. "I see," he chuckled. "It took me six years to go through my medical course. I wonder how long it would have taken him? About a month, I suppose."

Earani looked up. "Indeed, Dick, judging from your brain, you must have worked very hard to do it in the time." The comment was made so

simply and was evidently so free from malice, that Dick joined Alan in the shout of delight that followed it, and for the time being they forgot their forebodings.

It was in this way that Alan and Barry obtained their first knowledge of the past of the dead world, and the glimpse, slight as it was, only whetted their appetite for more.

That evening, before they finally separated, the two men were thoughtfully silent. It was only at the last moment that Dundas said, "Dick, I don't like the idea of Andax. He seems a pretty large order to let loose on the world."

Barry realised his friend's real reason for disliking the idea, but passed it without comment. "I like it even less than you do, Alan, but it's my opinion that our desires in the matter won't be considered. Our only hope is to try and use our influence for the best. For the rest it is on the lap of the gods. Good night," and he passed into the night in an odour of petrol.

## Chapter 20

"IF I tell you the history of the three statues you will have an outline of the history of the race." Earani spoke in answer to a question from Dundas. "Those three men left the greatest marks on its development of all who ever lived, and each in an entirely different way."

"Faith, Earani," said Barry, "from the look of the old gentleman in the rags, I should say the race left some marks on him in return."

"We own it to our shame, Dick." They were standing in the great vestibule before the sculptured group, and from where they stood the face of the statue stared over their heads with its frozen expression of misery and pride. The master hand that had wrought the stone had given all but life to the figure, with its bowed shoulders, weighed down with intolerable wrong and suffering. "Yes," Earani went on, "he was judged and condemned as the greatest criminal our world had ever produced." They turned together, and she led the way to the "temple," and there went on with her story.

"His name was Odi, and until he committed the deed that altered the whole course of humanity he lived unknown as a poor schoolmaster. At the time he lived (you must remember it was about three thousand years before the great disaster) our world had advanced even then beyond what yours is now in development. To a certain extent it was, however, much as yours is today. We were far more advanced in art and science than you are now. We had commenced as you did in ignorance, pestilence, and war. We had been split into groups and nations with as many languages. The groups and nations gradually coalesced, and with them grew up a common language. War had practically ceased, and from that cause and also from the advance of medical science the increase of the population of the world came to be a serious factor in our history for more reasons than one. The great problem, however, was the problem of the coloured races. Mentally and in everything but physical endurance they were beneath us. They could imitate, but not create. They multiplied far more rapidly than we did, and, led by ambitious men, they threatened to exterminate the white races by sheer force of numbers. In



some places, where the two races lived side by side, the position became acute, and everywhere they demanded as a right an equality they were unfitted for. Perhaps you know faintly what I mean."

"We understand, Earani. The problem is not unknown to us," put in Barry.

Earani nodded. "I have read of your problem, Dick, but it was as nothing compared with the one the world had to face then and the one Odi solved. There were at the time over three thousand millions of people on the globe, of whom more than four-fifths were of the lower race. They had all the benefits of our science, and were protected by our laws, but as time went on the bitterness grew on both sides beyond all endurance. They learned the power of numbers, and grew arrogant and overbearing. In one place the mutual jealousy flashed up into a short but fierce and bloody war, the first that had happened for over two hundred years. It was a quarrel over territory; territory that meant existence to one race or the other. That fight resulted in the obliteration of a white outpost of over two million people. Strange as it may seem, very few, except those in actual contact with the coloured races, realised even then the danger to the white." Dundas smiled a little, and interrupted. "I suppose, Earani, there were plenty who preached the doctrine of uplifting the coloured races and treating them as brothers?"

Earani nodded. "That was as it happened, Alan, mostly through the teaching of the priest class; those not directly in contact with them opposed reprisals. They talked evolution, education, and brotherly love, and, I have no doubt, meant it. They argued that it would lower them in their own eyes and in the eyes of the coloured people if they inflicted punishment. 'Why plunge the world again into the crime of war?' shouted the priest class. 'Example on our part will teach them better.'

"But there was one man who read the signs aright. He was Odi, the obscure schoolmaster, living on the fringe of the white nations. All his life he had studied the question in silence. Then it fell out that some of his inventions brought him enough wealth to enable him to live at his ease, and he gave the whole of his time to research.

"It has never been finally decided whether his great discovery was the result of accident or of deliberate experiments with the one object in view. Practically everything he possessed was afterwards destroyed, and his name and the secret of his power alone survived. The secret was afterwards known as the 'Death Ray.'" Earani broke the thread of her story. "What you know as electricity we knew more of then than you would dream now."

"We know precious little about it, anyhow," said Barry.

She laughed and went on:—"That's an honest confession, Dick. There are a few links missing in your chain that I can supply in good time. But to return to the 'Death Ray.' I have often thought of that man, with his terrible secret locked in his heart, and setting about his work absolutely unmoved by the thought of the consequences of his actions to himself or the millions of other lives it involved.

"The first knowledge the world had of his power was that an unknown and appalling disease had broken out amongst the coloured races in the most thickly populated part of the world. At first it started in one city, and from that centre spread in an ever-widening stain. Almost from the first it was noticed that the whites were absolutely immune. But that this was from design never entered even remotely into the speculations of the horde of workers who gathered to fight the plague. Remember that when it once started the disease was no matter of months or weeks in action. It was a question of days. The coloured people, old and young, went down before it with appalling certainty. The unseen death missed none. It swept through the country in an ever-widening wave, the course of which could be marked in a clearly-defined line as it advanced. In vain the whole world fought the growing terror. Every nerve was strained, and every resource of science was used to the uttermost. Fight as the scientists would, the death defeated them. There was not one single instance where a person attacked recovered, and inside the line of the advancing tide there was not one single instance of a coloured person escaping or a white man being affected. I can only make you understand the awful magnitude of the blow that fell by the records of mortality. In the first eight weeks from the outbreak, over one hundred and twenty millions had perished."

The two, who had been listening intently, looked incredulously at Earani. "Why, Earani, apart from anything else, the disposal of such a multitude of dead should be impossible, and delay must have meant an epidemic through the world as bad as the disease that killed the blacks," said Barry.

"That is so, Dick," she answered grimly. "The records of the time showed how fully alive the people were to the danger. Indeed, they left the coloured race in the end to fight for its own salvation in order to cope with the new horror that threatened. Indeed, there were a few small outbreaks, but the world was prepared, and beat them out before they obtained any hold. You must remember, too, that our race was better equipped to deal with such a crisis than yours is now."

"Then a strange thing happened. Just as suddenly as it appeared, the plague stopped, and the world breathed in relief. It seemed as if the danger had passed. There was a month of respite, and then, to the horror of all, it commenced again with redoubled violence in a new quarter. This time in the heart of the territory of the coloured races. What had gone before was as nothing to the fresh outbreak. It swept everything before it, but in the densely-populated districts it killed more swiftly, and spread more widely than formerly. Even now it is difficult to think of that time without a shudder. Five times it ceased and broke out again, and towards the end the word ran through the coloured races that the whites were exterminating them. No vows of innocence, no attempts to reassure the terror-racked multitude, were of any avail, and the horror was added to by a bloody internecine upheaval, in which the doomed race fell as swiftly before the arms of the whites as before the destroying disease.

"The sixteen months that the terror lasted are on record as the most awful period in our history, and when they were passed the coloured races had ceased to exist. Out of two thousand millions, not half a million were left scattered amongst the extreme northern and southern parts of the world, where the disease had not penetrated."

"Good heavens, Earani!" exclaimed Alan. "Do you mean to tell us that this appalling thing was the work of the man Odi?"

"Just so, Alan; his work alone, and even in the end his part might have gone undiscovered but for the determination of a few scientists to probe the matter to the bottom."

"Several remarkable features were recorded apart from the disease itself. In each instance the disease started from a common centre and spread rapidly outwards. When the records were made up it was noticed that in charts of the affected countries its boundaries were a clearly defined circle, except in the later outbreaks where the edges of the circles were broken by already ravaged country. Then again, it was noticed that the intervals between the outbreaks were subject to some regularity. It was by summing up slight details that the investigators came to the conclusion that the intervals would just permit of the perpetrator of the tragedy moving from centre to centre. Even then it seemed a far-fetched hypothesis to assume deliberate human action. Gradually, however, the evidence piled up, and the question became from 'Was it the work of a man?' to 'Who is he?'

"Then Odi spoke up. Openly and fearlessly he announced himself the perpetrator of the deed. Even then the world was incredulous, but in the

end there was no room for doubt. He proved to the astonished investigators beyond all chance of contradiction the means he had used. He had discovered an electrical ray that passed the white skin, and only acted through the pigmented skin of the coloured people. After only a short exposure to its influence, a general paralysis of the nervous system set in, and death ensued in from twenty-four to thirty-six hours. The gradual spreading of the havoc from its centre was caused by a proportionate weakness, according to the distance from the power itself. When he had exterminated all within reach, he simply moved his plant to another site and repeated the process. You see the ray was silent and invisible, and passed through all natural obstacles as if they had been non-existent. It did its work swiftly, silently and undetected."

Earani paused in her story, and Barry broke in: "That was a hellish deed, an infamous act, and yet you say that your people honoured him as a benefactor. Earani, they could not do it."

The woman smiled her soft, slow, unemotional smile, looking at Barry as an elder would look at an angry child. "Not at first Dick. No, they did not honour him. They looked on Odi's deed in the same light as you do now. That is, when they had time. At first they were too busy seizing the vast vacant territories. The few great national confederations were on the verge of flying at one another's throats to see which could seize the most, until they realised that there was plenty even for their voracious desires."

"But Odi!" asked Alan. "What became of him?"

"The fate of the daring reformer," she answered. "What else? From one end of the world to the other the priest class raised the outcry against him. We had ceased to punish crime. We cursed the criminal. He was outcast and branded. The very children baited him in the street. He was shunned, excommunicated in the true sense of the word. His goods were declared forfeit. His name was held up as one accursed. At first he answered his accusers boldly and justified his deed on the ground of the good of humanity. He pointed out that the confederations where the priest caste held the greatest power were those that had benefited most largely already, and in time to come would benefit more. Aye! it was true, but none the less they howled him down—spat upon him. In spite of all they did he held his head high. Poverty and outrage were his lot until the end, but they did not break his spirit."

"And the end?" asked Barry.

"A fitting one for the stormy life. One day he penetrated to a gathering of the priest class and their followers, and there he stood before them and spoke his mind to them. Aye! but it was a speech. Some day I will

read it to you; we have it word for word in our archives, an inspired prophecy, and when he had spoken the children of the peace took the apostle of death and stoned him before their temple. That statue in the vestibule was wrought from the only picture we had of him, and that was taken as he spoke his last words.

"Look, my friends, even as he had said, it happened. After about two hundred years here and there arose an apologist. The world was infinitely more prosperous and infinitely more peaceful. The locked-up treasures of Nature that had gone to nourish the unfit were directed into proper channels. There was room to breathe in what had been an overburdened world, and the world knew and recognised it. At first shamefacedly, and then openly and honestly it was acknowledged that the deed of Odi was the salvation of the civilised races."

Barry rose to his feet and commenced to pace slowly to and fro. The uneasiness in his mind had taken definite shape during the story. "It may be as you say, Earani," he said, "but to my mind the means could never justify the end—no matter if the result were all you say, and more. The crime would be unpardonable."

Earani watched him quietly with her elbow on the arm of the chair and her chin cupped in her palm. Looking at Barry she spoke to Dundas. "Alan, tell Dick what you do with weeds that grow up amongst your vines—the weeds that draw the nourishment from the soil, that would undo the work of your hands, and cramp the development of the fruit. What do you do with them, Alan?"

"Plough them under," said Alan briefly.

"Just so, plough them under," repeated Earani. "Dick, has your world not yet recognised that there are weeds of humanity as well as of vegetation?"

"That is no parallel, Earani. I say it was a crime—a hideous crime. There is no more justification for it than there would be for killing a man to steal his money. The fact that it was done on a colossal scale only makes it so many million times worse."

"You can find no palliation?" Her statuesque calm was a strange contrast to Barry's agitation.

"None. It is unthinkable."

Still unmoved, Earani said quietly, "Tell me, Dick, this country of yours you are so proud of—who owned it before your people came here, if I remember rightly, not much more than a hundred years ago?"

Barry stopped abruptly in his restless pacing as though the question had petrified him. Earani sat upright, and pointing an accusing finger at

him. "Answer me honestly, Dick. Have you ever once in your life given a single thought of remorse for the thousands of helpless, if useless, aborigines that were exterminated by the ruthless white invasion? Yet can you honestly declare that you think they should have been left in undisturbed possession? Morally, your fathers and you are on the same plane with Odi."

Barry threw back his head and answered defiantly, "Again, Earani, the parallel is not just. In this case it was the survival of the fittest."

"Sophistry, Dick, sophistry. The 'Death Ray' or rum and disease—aye! or firearms—what difference? The result is the same. Your people are in undisturbed possession of their land, and they are exterminated. Read your own world's histories. Your international morals are the morals of the jungle. Brute strength and nothing but brute strength, spells safety. Alan, what do you say?"

"Pon my word," said Dundas, who had listened half-amused and half-serious, "I don't think we in Australia can throw any stones at Odi, neither can anyone in North America, for that matter. The fact that the people of the United States imported a worse problem doesn't affect the fact that they settled their first one a la Odi, although they were more gradual about it."

"Do you support the theory of the 'Death Ray,' Dun?" asked Barry, perturbed by Alan's defection.

Dundas drove his hands deep into his pockets and leaned back in his chair. "Dick, honest Injun! I feel that the world would be better and cleaner if some of its races were to become extinct. Take, for instance, the gentle Turk. I'll say this, that if I knew of an impending catastrophe that would wipe the whole of that race off the face of the earth, and could prevent it, I wouldn't."

"You mean you think you wouldn't," put in Barry, "whereas if it came to the point you would probably do it if it cost you your life."

"I'll be hanged if I would, Dick. No, I mean it absolutely. I would think no more of it than you would of cutting into a malignant growth. You talk of parallels. Well, the Turk is a cancer on humanity, and nothing else. He would have been wiped out fifty years ago if the big nations were not afraid of one another."

Here Earani interrupted. "Can you tell me the present proportion of black to white, Dick?"

Barry shrugged his shoulders. "Afraid I can't," and he looked inquiringly at Alan.

Dundas rose from his chair. "I can't say, but I expect 'Whittaker' can. I had to get a copy to satisfy Earani's appetite for facts and figures." He took a volume from a casket and turned its pages rapidly. "Humph—here we are!" Then with his pencil he jotted figures on the margin of the page. "Here's what I make of it. Total estimate of human races—One thousand six hundred millions approximately. Caucasian, six hundred and fifty millions, leaving a balance of about nine hundred and fifty millions coloured. Roughly five to three against the whites."

Earani looked up. "You see, Dick, even now it is five to three, and the odds will go on increasing."

Barry looked at her in dismay. "Earani, for God's sake, say what is in your mind."

She answered calmly. "Nothing as yet, Dick—but think—were Odi's deed to be done again, would it better be done now or when those numbers were double, and when you think, remember too, Dick, there is no place in the world for the unfit."

Barry shook his head. "My profession is saving life, not destroying it. Are there none amongst the whites who are unfit? If you follow your theory to its conclusion where does it stop?"

"We found the means to eradicate the unfit, even amongst the white races," came the answer serenely. "But it took a man who could stamp his will on the world before it could be done. Dick, your ideas strike me as being absurd. You would hold in honour as the greatest of your citizens a soldier who would lead his countrymen to kill another people by hundreds of thousands and send as many of his own to their death, merely on account of an international squabble, right or wrong. He is a hero. A national demigod almost. But is he any better than Odi, or any different from him, who dared to save a civilisation? To my mind Odi is the better man. He had a reason for his 'Death Ray.' As often as not your soldier is wrong in the cause he fights for. Even putting the best construction on his deeds he frees the world of an overburdening population, only the worst of it is that the finest type of man is killed in warfare, and the weeds are left to breed. Pity you couldn't form your armies of the unfit."

"Earani, I don't surrender I merely won't argue with you any more," and Barry sat down, pursing his lips sourly.

The woman walked to his side, and laid her hand lightly on his shoulder. "Wise boy, Dick," she said gently. "Come, I must put you in a better humor. Why should we quarrel because millions of years ago some people died? Listen to this and forget your worries." She moved to

the keyboard, and a moment later a burst of heavenly music throbbed through the great gallery. It held the listening group spell-bound while it lasted, and when the last grand notes had echoed away there were tears in the eyes of the two men. There was a long silence, as though no one cared to break the spell, until Earani spoke. "That was one of our greatest choirs and the work of one of our master musicians. Tell me, Dick, was the price we paid for that, and all it means, too great? That is but an infinitesimal part of what we owe Odi?"

Barry made no answer, but rose to leave, and at a gesture from Earani, Alan followed his example. When they walked from the shed to the homestead that evening Dick spoke very soberly. "Dun, God send we have not done an evil thing for the world. If I could read her mind my own might be easier."

"I don't think we have cause to worry, Dick, though I'll admit she looks at things from a different point of view. Earani would be influenced by us in her actions."

"I'm not thinking so much of Earani as of that cold-blooded devil in the Himalayas. How far is he likely to be influenced by us?"

"Sufficient to the day—let us hope that Andax can't be found. It seems a pretty tall order to me."

Barry shook his head. "Dun, if Earani says she can do a thing, she can do it, and I'm perfectly certain that she can and will resurrect that damned friend of her youth, and, what's more, we can't stop her."



## Chapter 21

IF Alan Dundas had forgotten his world, his world had by no means forgotten him. A man in a comparatively small community cannot entirely disappear from it without exciting comment. In the club at Glen Cairn men talked, and asked questions that were not answered. Over afternoon teacups tongues wagged and heads nodded. Hector Bryce was uneasy, but kept his thoughts to himself, even from Mistress Doris. A girl who went amongst her friends giving no sign carried a sore and sad heart with her. Why, she thought, was Alan behaving so queerly? Before that night when they had looked into one another's eyes in the moment of danger no week passed that did not bring its meeting. Since then he had gone out of her life. Why? Why? Why? The question racked her day and night. True to him even in her thoughts, she would not believe that the man who had held her hand that night, and spoken her name so, had done it lightly and then ridden away. She felt that it was no small thing that had come between them, but she felt she could only wait until he gave a sign. That he would come to her again she would not let herself doubt.

Rickardson, who was wasting High Court abilities in a country town, sat in the club and smoked placidly. To him entered George MacArthur. Rickardson gave no greeting to the newcomer beyond pushing a chair over to him with his foot. MacArthur pressed the bell, and while the steward brought the necessary bottles he stared gloomily at the fire, while Rickardson stared at him. The steward departed. MacArthur sipped the whisky, and turned abruptly to his friend. "I'm damned if I know what to make of it!" Then he turned back to the fire again.

Rickardson took his pipe out of his mouth and spoke. "You went out there, George?"

"Yes," absently, "I went out." There was a long silence. Then he went on. "This is just between ourselves, Rick. He hasn't pruned a single vine, much less put a plough onto the place. The house was open, and the dogcart was in the shed. Billy B.B. was in the paddock, and I'm ready to swear that Dundas was about the place somewhere. I raised no end of a

row, but that was all I did raise. Never saw a vestige of him. Now what the deuce does it mean?"

Rickardson tapped the ashes from his pipe into his hand, and uttered one brief word, "Skirt."

MacArthur snorted. "Skirt! Rot! You're one-eyed on that idea, Rick. I hate this damned gossiping, and you're about the only one I'd open out to about Dun. But I've a pretty fair idea that Mrs. Bryce was working Dun for Miss Seymour, and Dun wasn't unwilling. Now, I know he hasn't been near Seymour's for months. I got that from Seymour himself. Now who else could there be? McCarthy's women are the nearest to him, two miles away, and I'd stake my life Dun isn't one of that sort. He's got some pretty highfalutin' notions about women."

"Did you try, Barry?" asked the lawyer presently.

"Humph! I did!" answered the other with a chuckle. "You know Dick. He told me nothing, with strictly professional politeness. Got nothing there, though the wily old beggar knows things, I'll swear. I didn't want to risk being told to mind my own dashed business. What about Bryce?"

"Bryce knows about as much as we do. That yarn about the study was all tosh. He was trying to pump me the other day, so I bluffed I was in the know, and said Dun was doing well. I expect he is, or Barry would come to light with something."

"Well," said MacArthur, in the end, "I suppose if Dun wanted to let us in he would, so we had better sit tight. Only I hate to think that he was in a hole and we were not on hand to help."

"Same here," replied Rickardson. "But, Mac, I'm prepared to bet a cigar to a brick house that when it comes out 'it' will be a woman of sorts."

Barry was neither blind nor deaf to what was going on. That 'Cootamundra,' usually one of the best-worked properties in the district, had been left to its own devices was a matter of small moment to Alan, he knew. He realised that, as things stood, Alan's future was elsewhere. But until he would be able to come into the open and show his hand, his present unusual existence was at least open to comment. To leave a valuable vineyard unpruned and unploughed to the end of August was inviting comment on his sobriety or his sanity. MacArthur was not the only one who had noticed. So Barry took counsel with himself, and one evening, as they sat smoking before his departure, he broke into his friend's reverie: "Dun, when were you in Glen Cairn last?"

Alan came to himself with a start. "Blessed if I know, Dick. It's so long ago that I've almost forgotten. Eight or ten weeks. Storekeeper sends out

everything I want—no need to go in. Think of piffing about at the club or anywhere else, when there is what you and I know here."

"Just so, Dun. I know why you are lying low, but others don't. People are talking."

Alan looked across at his friend in mild surprise. "Talking? How? What are they saying?"

"Nothing to me. They know better. But think how it looks, Dun. You were not an inconspicuous figure in our little crowd. Suddenly, and without any apparent cause, you disappear. People know you are still here. They know that there has not been a stroke of work done on the place since vintage. Then they know I'm here a good deal. Think how it looks from the outside."

Alan frowned thoughtfully. "Come to think of it, it must start them guessing a bit." He stood up and took a note from his mantelpiece and handed it to Barry. "I found that pinned to the door the other day."

This is what Dick read pencilled on a leaf torn from a pocket-book:—"Dear Dun,—Is it wine or woman? Rickardson and I are desolate. Where the devil and why the devil are you hiding? Come back, and all will be forgiven.—G. MacArthur."

Barry smiled as he read. "He tried to pump me a little while ago. I was sorry to turn him down, because he really seemed concerned."

"Good sort, old Mac. Anyhow, what am I to do?"

"Better show up a little, I think. It won't do any harm."

Dundas filled his pipe thoughtfully before he spoke. "To tell the truth, Dick, I'm rather afraid to leave. Suppose any one came along while I was away?" Then, after a pause: "There is something I haven't told you about. Not that there was any need to keep quite about it. Earani has been up here."

"Great Scott! When?" said Barry, sitting up.

"Two nights ago, and again last night. I suppose—well, to tell the truth, although I was very keen on having her up here at first, latterly I've tried to put her off. You see Dick, after coming from the galleries and her surroundings, this place looks pretty mean, and I thought she might not understand. I needn't have worried, and I ought to have known that she would be better than that sort of thing. She took my quarters as a matter of course, and with her usual practical curiosity. She was rather struck on my little shanty. I was foolish enough to try to explain." He paused and smiled reminiscently.

"What's the joke, Dun?"

"Well, she fired a lost world proverb into me and shut me up. Here it is: 'A man judged justly is judged naked,' and, Dick, my boy, I've heard a good many proverbs with less truth in them."

"By Jove, Dun, I wish I had been here. Did you expect her?"

"No; that is not the least interesting part of it. Tell you what. I've a suspicion, without a single bit of evidence to support it, that the night before last was not her first appearance."

"What happened?" Dick was all interest.

"Well, it was about ten. I've lost touch with my books lately, and I came out to have a wander round before turning in. It settles me down a bit. It was a stunning night, you remember. Bright moonlight. I'd been across the paddocks to the river, and when I came back to the house she was standing just between it and the shed." He paused and went on thoughtfully. "I couldn't believe my eyes until she hailed me. Dick, you should have seen her standing there in the moonlight, bare-headed, and with her white gown clinging round her. Visions! I thought at first it couldn't be real. She was as jolly as a school girl at having caught me on the hop. Nothing would satisfy her but to see how I live. So I damned conventions, and she came in here. Now what do you think she did first?"

Barry shook his head. "You can search me, Dun. Nothing usual, I'll swear.

"Well, she took one glance round the room, and her eyes lighted on my picture of Napoleon up there," and he waved his pipe in the direction of Delaroche's immortal portrait. "Then she went over to it as if pulled by a magnet. When she turned back her eyes were fairly flashing. She caught me by the arm, and, by Jove! I had never before seen her show so much emotion. 'Alan, Alan, tell me! Does he live? What is he? How is he named? He is the man I want. Tell me! Tell me!' By Jove, Dick, she was disappointed when I told her he had gone nearly one hundred years. 'Ah, I have come one hundred years too late, Alan. Nature breeds his kind once in a thousand years, and I have missed him. With me to plan and with him to do my bidding—aye, and he would have done it—my task here would have been very easy.' Queer, wasn't it?"

"Not very, when you come to think of it. Still, it's just as well Napoleon is under the marble at the Invalides. I don't like to think of those two running the universe. I'll admit, though, that their proceedings would probably be a cure for ennui. At the same time," he went on, "I think that Earani and Napoleon combination would be better than the prospective Earani and Andax partnership. Dun, the more I think of it the less I like

it. Has it ever occurred to you that we might do worse than hand the matter over to the authorities?"

Barry spoke hesitatingly, and half-expected an outburst from Dundas. Instead, however, Alan smoked on for some time before answering. "Dick, it's no use. I've reasoned the whole thing out. I won't hear of it. For one thing, we have passed our word to Earani, and nothing will induce me to break it. She trusts me absolutely, and I'm going to be worth that confidence. Apart from that, however, whom are we to inform? State or Federal Government? Think of letting a crowd of politicians in. The crowd who are in office now, for instance. The damned fools would appoint a Royal Commission to deal with the matter. Where would I stand with the place overrun with a horde of infernal carpet-baggers and newspaper men? Or think of Earani being gushed over by a mob of confounded society women. No! I will not hear of it. There is only one who has a right to say, and that one is Earani herself." Dick shrugged his shoulders. "As you please, Dun. You have the right to decide. I'll not refer to it again. You say you had another visit last night."

Dundas smiled. "Aye, Dick. We walked down to the river. It must seem strange to her. When Earnani last saw this place it was a plateau, with a river running round its edge south to the sea through hilly country. Now the river runs north, and so far as I can make out, her river must have followed the alluvial lead where the Golden Edge group of mines is working. Think, Dick, the bed of her river is eighteen hundred feet below the surface of the ground, and the hilly country is a level plain. Then again, where the great sphere is buried now it stood over six hundred feet above the surface then She tells me that it is set in a solid cube of its own material over a thousand feet each way. Jove! But it must have been a pretty conspicuous object in the landscape in those days."

Barry nodded. "No wonder she was surprised in that first interview when you told her you didn't know that her residence was a sphere. What else?"

"Oh! nothing much," was the somewhat evasive reply, and Barry, wise in his generation, forebore to press the question, but turned again to his former proposition. "Anyhow, Dun, I don't think there would be much risk in your taking a day off and showing up at the club. I don't think anything would be likely to happen to Earani."

"Quite so. I'm sure there would be no danger for Earani. But I'm not so sure about the safety of the intruder, or at any rate of the effect Earani might have on a visitor. Suppose, for instance, John Harvey Pook turned up while I was away. You can imagine the trend of thoughts. Then,

again, suppose a swaggie put in an appearance, and turned nasty, finding he had only a woman to deal with?"

"Well," replied Barry, "I'd back Earani to take care of herself."

"Right, but I don't fancy having to explain away a dead swaggie. Between ourselves, Dick, Earani has on occasion hinted at the value of a certain kind of human life as being less than nothing. I've explained our present-day view of the matter pretty clearly, but all the same, I think she looks on our regard for the sanctity of human life as a weak kind of sentimentalism."

Barry nodded. "It would be rather awkward. Still, you can tell her you wish to go to town, and ask her not to show up during your absence. However, I don't want to push in my oar, Dun, only I thought I'd let you know how the wind is blowing."

Alan thought the matter over long after Barry had left him. He paced the drive before the house in the hope that he would gain inspiration from a visit from his Lady of Dreams, but though he waited long his hopes were unrewarded.

However, next day Dundas told Earani that there were reasons why he should leave her to herself occasionally, so that he might attend to his affairs away from the vineyard. Whereat she showed such sweet contrition at what she called her selfishness in keeping him so much with her, that Alan felt inclined to refuse to take the liberty she offered so freely and fully. He told her of his fears of intruders, and she smilingly promised not to face the light of day during his absence unless with his permission. Indeed, it was her own suggestion that he should lock the shed door while he would be away.

So next day Billy was requisitioned, none the more tractable from his long holiday, to take the dogcart and the dogcart's owner to Glen Cairn. Alan greeted those whom he met with the casual greeting of every day, as though a three or four month's absence were a matter not worthy of comment. He dropped in on Rickardson at his office, and badgered the lawyer into breaking his own rules, and strolling down to the club. There they flushed MacArthur from a couch, where he was taking forty winks. MacArthur, taking his cue from Rickardson asked no questions, too pleased to see Dundas come to light to care about causes. They told him of Mac's latest war with John Harvey Pook. Pook had indiscreetly made an unmistakable reference to MacArthur from the pulpit. The town hummed with joy. Mac waited his time, and Pook gave him the chance. The vicar, puffed up with earthly pride, had attached a brass nameplate to his gate, bearing the legend "The Gums," as if the whole town did not

know the vicarage. Then Mac stepped in, and bought the adjoining house, without a word to anyone. A week later on the gate adjoining that of the vicarage appeared an identical brass plate bearing the legend "The Teeth." John Harvey Pook hauled down his colours and his plate, and the town hummed again.

Afterwards Alan and MacArthur played a hundred up, and Rickardson criticised cheerfully and caustically, and the two players retaliated by charging the table up to his account. Then, as the afternoon was closing, they strolled across to the tennis courts, where Alan was promptly captured by Doris Bryce, and carefully placed on the feminine rack. Doris flattered herself she was wily and diplomatic, and she probed scientifically for information. Alan flattered himself he was more wily and more diplomatic. The result of the contest was somewhat of a draw. Doris obtained nothing that could satisfy her curiosity, but Alan found himself cornered, so that he was obliged to promise to play in a tournament on the following Saturday. He would gladly have avoided the engagement, but it would have taken a more clever man than he to do it gracefully. Doris was a little nettled at her failure to solve the mystery of Alan's disappearance, and promised herself to deal more fully with her victim at her leisure. She felt he owed an explanation to herself in the first place, and also to Marian Seymour. Moreover, she determined that Alan should be picked to play with Marian in the tournament, and that both should spend the evening at the bank afterwards. Who was this man, Alan Dundas, that he should turn aside from the eminently desirable fate that she had in store for him?

MacArthur had sat listening with mischievous amusement to the verbal duel between the two, and had, with malice aforethought, given deliberate assistance to Mistress Doris in cornering Alan for the tournament. Inwardly Alan called him anything but blessed, and finally resigned himself to what he now regarded as a wasted afternoon, for all time that was not spent in the society of Earani he looked upon as so long unlived. He had grudged his present visit to Glen Cairn, and more so he grudged the prospective one. In the end he hailed with pleasure the advent of Barry, who passed on his way from the hospital, and gave Dundas the excuse for taking his leave.

As the two men strolled away from the courts, Alan turned to Barry. "Dick, what's happened? You look elated about something."

"Lord forgive me, Alan, but I ought to look jolly well ashamed of myself, and I'm not. I've been guilty of rank professional misconduct. I've risked an act of manslaughter, morally at any rate, and I've got Walton

into a condition of mental collapse. The worst of it is that I couldn't confess to Walton even if I were allowed to."

"Pretty good record for one day, Dicky. How did you do it all?"

"Well, you remember the yabber I had with Earani yesterday afternoon?"

"I remember you were discussing some of your usual objectionable subjects with her. The details were beyond me."

"Humph! Well, I discussed that particular subject because we had a case in the hospital. Characteristic and very clearly defined. Absolutely hopeless—at least, I said so, and I never heard of its yielding to treatment."

Alan laughed. "I remember that part of it, and Earani's mild contradiction of your statement. I got lost afterwards in the blaze of verbal fireworks that you both exhibited."

"Dun, do you notice that when she has absolutely pulverised one in an argument, Earani doesn't gloat? It's a most unfeminine characteristic."

Alan nodded. "I never argue with her now on matters of fact; it's no use; she is always right. What about your hopeless case?"

"Just this. She gave me a fluid of some sort, and told me to inject it, and guaranteed that so long as the patient were not dead, her treatment would wipe out the disease in six hours. She holds that where the organs are not actually destroyed no disease should be fatal."

"Well?"

"Just this, Dun; and this is where the professional misconduct comes in. The woman is Walton's patient. I slipped into the hospital this morning. Got the nurse out of the way and injected the stuff. Remember, I've not the faintest idea what it was I used, so if she had died I would have been morally guilty of her death. Though, mind you, Dun, she was moribund when I did it, and to all appearances had about two or three hours to live. Still, there would be the devil of a row if it were known."

"When I came in this evening I found Walton half off his head with bewilderment. The woman took a turn about ten, and Jove! when I left her half an hour ago, although she was weak and very low with what she'd been through, there was absolutely no indication of the disease. Walton doesn't know whether we were wrong in our diagnosis (and I'm absolutely sure we were not), or whether he has performed a miracle. He's anxious to report the case, and yet he's afraid to. You see, if he reports a cure he won't be believed, or he'll be asked to do it again, or, what is more likely, they'll say he is mistaken in his facts."



Alan chuckled. "Hard luck for Walton. Still, judging by results only, I don't think you have anything to fret about."

They had stopped at Barry's gate, and Alan refused his friend's invitation to go in. "Just as you say, Dun, I'm not fretting, and I ought to be. Tell that worker of miracles I'll be out to-morrow to see her. I've several thousand questions to ask her. I'm glad you have been seen in public again. Till to-morrow!" and Alan turned away to the club, where he picked up Billy B.B. and sped homeward, feeling satisfied that he had temporarily suppressed the current gossip.

## Chapter 22

"SO the woman lives," said Earani. "There is no miracle about it, Dick. There are many things in your daily life that would have been miracles one hundred years ago that you pass over now without a second thought."

"I doubt if I could get Walton to look at it in that light. He almost feels that the woman has shown an indecent contempt for medical practice in recovering."

"You have not told him?" asked Alan.

"Hardly," replied Barry, with a laugh. "I haven't the nerve. The first question he would ask would be what drug I had used. I'd reply that I hadn't the faintest idea. Of course, he'd feel convinced then that I am a genius. He'd tell me so, too. No, Dun, when I tell Walton anything about it, I'll want to be able to tell him a good deal more than that."

"You are on the verge of many things now, Dick, but you could not go forward much further without the aid of Maxi's lens. Our race came to the same wall that stopped them until Maxi broke it down," said Earani.

"Then Maxi was the second of your great men?" asked Alan.

"Yes, and to my mind the greatest of the three. He spent his life on the one work and succeeded. They thought him mad at first. He knew that every living organism gave out light rays that the human eye cannot see. His lens is really an artificial eye that can detect these rays and convey them to the brain direct. He was originally attempting to invent a substitute for the natural eye in cases where it had been destroyed, when he first gathered the threads that he followed through all their windings until the great work was completed. It took him twenty-five years of uninterrupted labour, and what a labour it was! He faced the years of failure without flinching. He could make no converts to his hopes and his idea. On every side there was ridicule and derision, and against it all he never once faltered. Absolutely alone, and without the help of one friendly hand, he won through. His recognition came in his lifetime, and he bore his triumph as simply as he had borne his reverses. He put aside with a smile all the honours they offered him. 'You can give nothing I desire

now but rest, and my work has won that for me,' was his answer when they asked him to name his own reward."

"He had no need of a monument, Earani," interrupted Barry.

She shook her head. "Not while his work lives. Think of the results. The average life of mankind at the time of Maxi's invention was about forty-eight years! Within two hundred years the average was well over one hundred years, and later it rose to one hundred and twenty with a maximum of one hundred and sixty. You must understand, too, that a man of one hundred years was not a tottering wreck of humanity, but a being as mentally and physically robust as one of forty in the pre-Maxi days, and many up to one hundred and fifty years retained their faculties to the full, and every step that led to this revolution was solely due to Maxi's lens. Without it even the work of Eukary would have been impossible."

"Ah!" interjected Barry, "and Eukary was the third person of your trinity?"

Earani nodded. "He came two hundred years after the old Doctor, and was one of the worshippers of his memory." She turned to Alan. "He was one of those that nature gives to the world once in a thousand years, like your Napoleon. He rose from the ranks, and for fifty years he ruled the world with a rod of steel. It was not a nation or a confederation that he ruled, but the entire world. He ruled ruthlessly and mercilessly, and when he died he left us a new world and a new religion."

"A new religion is a doubtful sort of legacy," said Alan with a smile.

Barry straightened up. "That's a fact from our point of view, Earani. Every religion that our world has been given so far has been as fatal from a point of mortality as a new disease. You see the converts as a rule have felt it incumbent on them to spread the glad tidings, even if they had to do it with an axe. The unbeliever had to love his enlightener, even if he had to be hammered into doing it. As a consequence, religions generally meant new causes for war, so they have been pretty fatal, taking them all round."

"There's nothing like the hatred that a really bigoted religious fanatic can raise for a rival creed," put in Alan.

"Perhaps Eukary's religion was an exception?" asked Barry.

"He met the usual reward of the reformer," she smiled. "Hate and spite and intrigue—but he was too great to feel or fear them, aye, or to notice them, except where they interfered with his plans."

"And then?" asked Alan.

"And then he struck once—there was never need for a second blow, and he never gave warning. He knew he was right, and he would not let one life or a thousand stand in the way of the future of the race. He taught us the worship of the unborn.

"He started from the theory that if infinite care in breeding be necessary in producing the highest class of animal or vegetable life, then it is so much the more necessary in producing the highest type of human life. We know that a weed can be cultivated until it becomes a splendid flower and that if neglected it will ultimately revert to its original worthless type. We know that the finest class of domestic animals are those that result from careful breeding. And humanity, Dick?" she paused.

"Left to carry on anyhow. It's a tremendous handicap. Reproducing at our own sweet will in the sacred cause of individual liberty, and to the detriment of the race. It's a wonder we have ever pulled through so far, or so well. It can't be helped, anyhow," was Barry's comment.

"It can be altered!" answered Earani decisively. "It has been once in the world's history. Eukary made no move until he had absolutely proved what was afterwards known as Eukary's Law of Transmission. When he propounded that law the world stopped sufficiently long in its work to find that it had discovered a new joke, and when the joke grew stale, both it and he were forgotten. The jesters would not have been so light-hearted had they known their man a little better."

"Curious, is it not?" said Alan, "when you think of it, how some—in fact, nearly all—of the men who have radically affected the world have been considered a subject for a jest in the beginning."

Earani smiled. "I suppose if you could trace the intimate history of the times there were many who jested at Mahomet, Caesar, Napoleon—aye, or perhaps even of your Divine Prophet. It has always been so, and will always be so while fools are born into the world."

"Consider the majority they are, Earani," said Barry with a laugh.

Earani nodded. "We had our share, Dick, but Eukary lowered the average."

Alan made an extravagant gesture of supplication. "Oh! Great Queen, grant us, we implore you, the formula, for never a world of all the worlds needed the boon so much as ours."

"You might demonstrate on us," Barry began.

"Dick, if you are offering me up as a subject, I'll regard it as an unfriendly action, as the diplomats say," broke in Alan.

"Profound self-consciousness, Alan," said Barry, with a laugh. "Let's hear the rest, Earani, and we'll find a subject afterwards."

"The work was not done in a day," said Earani, laughing at their nonsense; "and for thirty years the world at large heard nothing of Eukary. During that thirty years he worked silently at his tremendous plan. It seems incredible now that what was afterwards known as the 'Great Conspiracy' could be formed in secret, but it was so. I can give you no clearer idea of his character than that he could enrol hundreds of thousands of followers under his banner in a plot to place the control of the world in one man's hands, and do it undetected."

"A secret society," said Alan.

Earani nodded. "Exactly, and its members embraced every race and every creed in the world without a single traitor."

"He could not have known them all," said Barry.

"Naturally not," replied Earani; "but that is where the wonderful system and organisation came in. He had a faultless judgment of men in the first place, and selected his immediate followers without making a single error. Then again he had that quality of leadership that turns followers into worshippers."

"When the final blow was struck which made Eukary the master of the world, you must understand that conditions of life were different from those you know at present. War had ceased, and with it the necessity for armaments. By international agreement no weapon of offence might be improved, and the small armed force kept by each confederation had become merely an adjunct of State ceremonial. Amongst the conspirators were the greatest brains of the age, and these invented a weapon that made the movement irresistible."

"It must have been a fairly easy victory, Earani," interrupted Barry; "the resistance could not have been much against such an organisation."

"It was at first. People were too stunned by the blow to offer resistance. It was when they had had time to think that the trouble came. However, Eukary struck, and between the setting of one sun and the rising of another the old order had passed away. So perfectly were the plans laid that in one night the governing bodies of every confederation were removed, and a new administration was substituted."

"Without resistance at all?" asked Barry.

Earani shrugged her shoulders. "Eukary was not a man to allow sentiment to interfere with his plans, and the small regular armed forces might have been used as a nucleus for organised resistance, and so he made such a step impossible. They were exterminated to the last man."

"Eukary seems to have taken Odi for a model," said Dick.

"Possibly," answered Earani, without heeding the tinge of sarcasm in Barry's voice. "His methods never lacked decision, and he was not the man to risk failure through fear of public opinion. However, what you take exception to was nothing to what followed. The success of the revolution was absolute from the beginning. When people came down to their cities on the first day (they still lived in cities at that time) nothing was changed, except that they found proclamations notifying them that their government would be carried on as before, except that all existing and future laws would be subject to revision by a central council, of which Eukary would be the president.

"Eukary was not slow to use his advantage. First he dealt with all public men outside the organisation. They had the position fully explained to them, and were given the option of giving their allegiance without being told the alternative. Many fell in with the plan gladly. Others, for conscientious reasons, refused. Can you guess what happened to them, Dick?" said Earani, with her slow smile, turning to Barry.

"Placed under restraint, I suppose," answered Barry.

"Think, Dick. Under restraint they would always be a menace, and a centre of disaffection, and certainly a centre of antagonism. Eukary's method was kinder in the long run. He had a maxim, 'Where there is no head there can be no body,' and so he took care there would be no head," she concluded grimly.

"From the first day I saw his statue," said Alan, "I concluded that he was a gentleman who knew his own mind. He certainly was thorough."

"It cleared the way," answered Earani. "Then he brought the great plan into operation. It was very simple. All laws were left unchanged that did not conflict with the one law that was made uniform throughout the world. No marriage would in future be permitted without the sanction of the controlling body. Every unmarried man and woman of marriageable age was obliged to report for registration. Each was told, then and there, whether he or she would be permitted to marry. But it was not the end of the matter, for no marriage could be performed without the consent of the authorities. Here Eukary's Law of Transmission came into operation. If, subject to the clearly defined clauses of that law, the children likely to result from that union would be an improvement on at least one of the parents, then the marriage would be permitted; otherwise it would be forbidden. Later on, but not until long afterwards, the law became more stringent; the offspring had to show an improvement over both parents."

"And how did the world take the new order?" asked Barry. "Surely not quietly?"

"The world took the new order just as a child takes a nauseous drug, unwillingly; but"—she went on with grim emphasis—"it took it in the long run—Eukary saw to that."

"There must have been what we call 'ructions,' Earani," said Alan.

"There was a revolt; only one, though," she answered. "Eukary allowed the disaffection to come to a head; he even allowed it a measure of success, so as to induce all of his opponents to show their hand. In his grim summary of the situation 80 per cent of the revolting faction were defective, either mentally or physically, therefore their elimination cleared the atmosphere. When the revolt was crushed he was asked the fate of the survivors, and his orders were brief and merciless—"They were warned. I cannot and will not allow opposition. Spare none."

"Why," put in Barry, angrily, "he was a worse fiend than Odi."

Earani looked him over reflectively. "Dick, your profession has made you hopelessly sentimental. I could almost think you would weep over the fate of a tumour you were obliged to remove."

Dick laughed in spite of his anger. "No parallel, Earani," he answered. "I would be saving a life, not destroying it."

She shook her head. "Your horizon is too limited. What use to save the life if it were not worth saving? What use would the life be without civilisation? These people that Eukary removed were a malignant growth, nothing else, on civilisation."

"And the result?" asked Alan.

"Don't think that came in a generation. Eukary did not hope for that, but he lived long enough to know that the world would never revert to the old order. But his mighty brain was there to help the world through the first troublous period. He had to contend with an enormously reduced birth-rate, owing to the restriction on marriage, but this was to a great extent counteracted by a lowered death-rate.

"As time went on the reality of Eukary's work became manifest, and the standard of humanity rose to heights even beyond the expectation of its founder. Gradually the percentage of defectives became lower and lower, until there rose a feeling that to become the parents of a child who was classed as unfit became a disgrace—as great even as the shame of unchastity. It was from this feeling came the cult of the unborn. The restrictions and the regulations became more severe by the will of the people themselves, rather than by the will of the controlling body. The law of transmission became the world's creed."

Barry shrugged his shoulders. "You are too much for me, Earani, but butchery, even if it be discriminating, is only butchery after all. But," he added, looking up at her laughing, "I can almost forgive Eukary, in that you are one result of his dreams." She nodded. "Oh! I know I am beautiful, but I can say it without vanity. It is the gift I owe to hundreds of my forebears, who lived by the law."

"I am entirely reconciled to him now," said Alan. "Although I am content that there are a few million years between our times, I feel really that Eukary is one of those to whom distance lends a charm. What more, Earani?"

"There is not much more to tell. One unexpected effect was the gradual blending of the national confederations. It was found that racial inter-marriage gave the most vigorous offsprings under certain conditions, and that, together with the rapidity and ease of travel, gradually overcame racial distinctions, until the world, except for the convenience of government, practically became one great people, Dick"—she checked herself suddenly—"I believe, though, I can tell you of another effect that will take that stern look of disapproval from your face."

Barry smiled. "Your reformers were too drastic for me, Earani. It will be a comfort to hear of something that doesn't include wholesale slaughter."

"Well," said Earani, "perhaps this will satisfy you. Eukary was the originator with us of the sanctity of maternity. True, his reasons were those of policy rather than humanity. He had to work against the falling birth-rate. He adopted the plan of making prospective maternity notifiable, and from that time onwards until her child was born the mother became a ward of the State. To permit a prospective mother to work or to have a harassing care became unthinkable. She became something sacred, a being apart, dedicated solely to the new life she would bring into the world. Can you reconcile that idea with the man you class as a butcher?"

"I'd back him in that part of the plan, heart and soul," answered Barry. "It's a pity he didn't do his reforming by gentler means, and I'd admire him more."

"Remember, he was nearly 90 years old at the time of the revolution," Earani continued. "He might have wrangled for the remaining 50 years of his life without taking one single step. The generation that came after him and profited by his deeds made no complaint. Think of a world full of clean-blooded, carefully-bred people, armed against disease even before their birth, and growing stronger mentally and physically every generation by careful selection. Our men calculated that had it not been



for Eukary, the world's races, owing to the easy conditions of life and the absence of the tonic of war, would have relapsed into savagery in a couple of thousand years, and only the merciless knife of the master saved them."

"Earani is right," said Alan, looking across at her. "Did not the French revolution save France as nothing else could have done? To take just one instance. Was the American civil war entirely without compensation? Would any American affirm now that his country would be better off if it had not taken place? Oh, yes, Dick, the price seems high at the time, and that's because at the time it is impossible for the normal man to measure the extent of the benefits to accrue. It's the Eukarys and his type who know."

"Two to one isn't fair," laughed Barry, "especially when one of the two is Earani."

Earani stood up and laid her hand gently on Alan's shoulder. "Alan, take Dick up to the world again, and turn his feet on the right path. Tonight the right path is the homeward one." She turned to Barry. "Soon now, Dick, I shall put your feet on the right path, and—well— we shall see;" and she waved the two men towards the curtained exit from the "temple."

As Barry stepped into his car Alan heard a murmured remark above the chatter of the engine. "What was that, Dick?" he asked.

"I merely remarked," said the doctor, seating himself, "damn Andax."

"Amen to that, Dicky, even if it is the first time I have agreed with you to-day."

## Chapter 23

IT was on the morning of the following Saturday that Alan was seated in the "temple" in deep argument with Earani. For the first time there was even a shadow of a cloud between them. Dundas was leaning back in his chair staring at the ceiling, and there was deep concern in his eyes and a frown on his forehead. Earani was half reclining on a couch near by. Her splendid bare arms were thrown across the head of the couch, and her round chin was resting on her entwined fingers. She was apparently unmoved, except for the perplexed look in her eyes as she watched the man.

"Even now I cannot understand, Alan. You say it would not be right for me to go with you today, yet you give no reason. What is the play you go to join in that I may not see?"

"Oh, Earani! There is nothing in the play that you might not see. There will be women taking part, but—" He paused. One of the penalties of secrecy was upon him, and he was wriggling to try to save her feelings from the truth he could not put into words. For some perverse reason she had demanded that he should take her with him to Glen Cairn that day. As he paused she went on, "Then there will be women there?"

"Twenty or more," answered Alan grimly, and through his mind there flashed a picture of them all.

"So, Alan," she said persuasively, "that is why I wish to go with you. I would like to meet the women of your world and talk with them. Sooner or later I must. Why not now?"

"Earani, you must trust me. I know Barry would agree with me, too. We must prepare for your reception before you can make your appearance. They would not understand." It was doubly hard to refuse anything she asked when she pleaded.

"Alan, I think you are cruel," she said softly.

This was too much for Dundas. "Earani, Earani," he said, almost bitterly. "With all your science, and with all your generations of eugenics, Eukary could never make a woman anything but a woman."

Earani rose to her feet and looked down at him. Then she laughed long and softly, swaying herself slightly as she stood. "Alan. Oh, Alan! That was mighty truth. It seems but yesterday that Andax hurled the same reproach at me. 'After all, what use to give you a man's brain when you are a woman?' Oh, Alan! You should have heard the scorn he put into the word." And then she broke off to laugh merrily. "Tell me, Alan, and look at me when you answer. Would you have me anything else?"

She stood watching him, her splendid grey twin stars full of mirth, and the curved red lips parted, showing a snowy line beneath. Her glorious face was framed in the masses of her silky hair that hung to her knees, and she crossed the white hands on her breast in an attitude of mock humility.

Dundas leaned forward slightly. He knew it was deliberate coquetry, and this was not the first time she had displayed it, but in spite of himself his hands went to his eyes for a moment as if to shut out something too dazzling for sight. Then he looked at her again, and shook his head. "God forbid you should ever be anything but yourself, Earani," he answered slowly, almost in a whisper.

Then her mood changed suddenly, though a mischievous smile still played on her lips. "Ah, well, I will not worry you, Alan," she said. "To-day I will read, perhaps, or stay here and think of things I must do. But you—go, and do not think about my foolishness any more." She walked with him to the first landing. A few days before, Dundas and Barry, under Earani's supervision, had erected an elevator in the shaft of the great staircase. It was a piece of machinery that Earani had produced from one of the galleries, and which had since been a source of wonder and delight to the men on account of its simplicity and perfection. The hardship of the journey to and from the homestead had been no small matter when constantly undertaken, and their new means of transport had been a welcome relief.

Alan stepped into the cage, and placed his hand on the controlling lever. "Well, I shall see you this evening, anyhow, for I shall be back by dusk. Till then—" He waved his hand as the cage shot up into the darkness. But Earani stood for some moments after he had disappeared. Then she made her way to the galleries below, and busied herself amongst divers strange implements. Every now and again she paused and smiled, and had Alan seen that smile his serenity would have been badly shaken.

Saturday afternoon was "the" day on the Glen Cairn tennis court. Even the golf club admitted its social superiority. As in all country towns, few

of the men had leisure during the week to play, but the Saturday gathering brought them in not only from the town itself, but from a dozen miles round. The club courts formed a common meeting-ground and the centre of the social part of their lives. The club leased a corner of the town park, and had surrounded itself with a dozen rows of pepper trees that had flourished so that a stranger might walk past it without knowing that within the sacred grove lay the holy of holies of Glen Cairn society. Whoso held the right to pass the white gate labelled "Members only" knew himself to be one of the elect. Truly a democratic community were the good citizens of the borough and the shire of Glen Cairn, but the citizens who engaged in retail trade might not rub shoulders with the citizen who worked like a labourer for five and one-half days of the week but who did not engage in retail trade. With the exception of George MacArthur, old Tom Gaynor, the storekeeper, easily led the procession so far as this world's goods were concerned, and he alone knew what sums the various members of the club owed him for goods sold and delivered, but not even the majesty of the rabbit-trimmed mayoral robes could carry him one step beyond that white picket gate. Not that it troubled Tom to any extent, but it is on record that Tom's better half had been heard to express herself with freedom and fluency (and she could be both free and fluent of speech) on what she called the "dashed cheek of them tennis club people." In justice to the men of Glen Cairn, however, let it be put on record that the committee of the club was almost entirely feminine. It was a rare, golden winter afternoon, with just the first hint of coming spring in the air, and the day had drawn even a larger assemblage than usual. On the verandah of the clubhouse and round the courts were gathered the youth (there was plenty of it) and the beauty (not quite so much) of the district, likewise the matrons who gathered there for reasons best known to themselves.

When Alan arrived, accompanied by Rickardson, his presence was hailed by a volley of good-natured chaff that disturbed him not one whit. At the last moment he had written to Mistress Doris to say that, though he would appear on Saturday, he would not play, pleading want of practice. He made his way by slow stages towards the club-house; truth to tell, by no means anxious to face a group that his eyes had taken in the moment he came out on to the courts. There in one corner, were seated, in canvas chairs, Mistress Doris, Madam Kitty, and Marian Seymour. He felt in his heart that what had passed between him and Marian on that memorable night was no small thing to her. With another girl, perhaps a kiss pressed on reluctant fingers, or a few soft words whispered

during a moonlight drive, might mean but little, but with Marian he knew this meant much more, and not even the glory of Earani could drive from his mind the memory of the look he had seen in her eyes that night, and no amount of attempted self-deception could make him feel anything but guilty on her account. And so he put off the inevitable meeting.

He lingered beside the tea table, where Bella Pook was performing a miracle as great as that of the loaves and fishes by pouring tea from a two-pint teapot for nearly fifty people. It was no small relief to him then, when Rickardson, who had picked up MacArthur, came his way again, and under their escort he approached the group. With all his shortcomings, it was hard to dislike MacArthur, and his cheerful absence of self-consciousness made him proof against the arrows of feminine disapproval. Dundas knew that George had—more than once—come under the ban of the matrons' displeasure, and that the last occasion was all too recent, and it amused him to notice how calmly the culprit disregarded his punishment, and made himself one of the little party in the corner.

Marian greeted Alan without a trace of restraint, but, on the other hand, without the slightest warmth. That she was deeply hurt by his conduct she would not try to conceal from herself, but she would rather have died than let him know how bitterly she resented it. So that Doris, who watched their meeting with a true matchmaking interest, found but little in it to satisfy her curiosity. At the first opportunity she flashed a wireless to Madame Kitty, but found that that interested spectator was also out of her bearings.

"Mrs. Bryce," said Rickardson, "I caught this—" and he put his hand on Alan's shoulder, "in the reading-room of the club. Rara avis, is it not? You will notice that it is not even wearing seasonable plumage."

"I asked it why, and it said it had given up tennis. Miss Seymour, do you think that the leopard can change its spots?"

Marian shook her head. "Mr. Dundas has been away for so long that I have almost forgotten whether he plays or not. Used you to play?" she asked, turning to Alan. There was nothing in the words themselves, but there was an inflection in the voice that stung one of the hearers, and caused a momentary exchange of glances between two of the others.

Alan disregarded the question. "The foundation for the statement is a remark of mine that I am too much out of practice to play in a tournament. You ought to know what discount to allow for Rick's statements, Mistress Doris."

"What I want to know," asked Madame Kitty, "is whether you intend to stay out of your shell now you have come out? Because if not, I simply decline to renew our acquaintance until you do. If you intend to lead a patchwork existence, you needn't expect me to."

Alan replied, "I don't know yet, but I hope to become normal before long. Where is your man?" He deftly robbed MacArthur of the cushion he was settling for himself, and, despite the protests of its indignant owner, sat on the floor of the verandah with his back against a post.

When the squabble had subsided Kitty answered: "My man, as you call him, should be here somewhere," and she glanced round the courts.

"So he is," said Rickardson, "only he happens to be obscured for the moment by the bulk of the Rev. John Harvey Pook. If you twist your neck, Dun, you might see him."

Alan remained passive. "I don't care enough about Pook to twist my neck to look at him," he answered, and then, as Kitty rose to find her man, Alan took the vacant chair, and left the cushion to be wrangled over by the other two, with Doris as umpire.

Marian had remained silent, looking absently away, but, finding Alan so close to her, she turned reproachful eyes on him. "Have you been ill?" she asked in a low voice.

Dundas shook his head. He knew there was more than one question in the words. "No," he answered slowly, "not ill, but worried a bit."

"Dr. Barry has been much at 'Cootamundra', and as we heard nothing of you, I thought perhaps that would account for things," said the girl quietly.

Dundas turned from the soft, accusing eyes. "I did call," he said meekly, "but you were away."

"Oh! but that was ages ago. Just after the night—I saw you at the bank," she added quickly. "You do not blame me for not being there, surely? How could I know?" She stopped suddenly.

Neither had noticed for the moment that a strange hush had fallen on the chattering gathering, until Marian looked up with the words cut short on her lips and her eyes fixed in wonderment. Dundas watched her in astonishment. He saw Marian's hands clasp themselves, and she bent forward, looking across the court. Then she said slowly as if unconscious that she had spoken. "Oh! how lovely, how wonderful!" Almost immediately afterwards MacArthur's voice cut in behind him: "Great Scott! Ricky, it's a wandering angel."

Alan turned in his chair, then shot to his feet electrified. There, across the courts, apart from all others, stood Earani—Earani, whom he had left

to "think of things she must do, or read;" but, beyond doubt, if he were awake, Earani.

She had robed herself in the same pale blue gown that she had worn when he had first seen her. Her massed shining hair was twined in two arm-thick strands that fell before her from either shoulder. The dark blue cloak was thrown back, leaving the marble arms bare beside her, and the sunlight flashed and glittered on the jewelled belt about her waist. Even in the first astonished moment there flashed through Alan's mind the thought of how absolutely insignificant she made the whole throng look in comparison. There was a dignity in her carriage that stamped her as a being apart. She stood with quiet unconsciousness of the sensation her appearance had caused, and she glanced round with her great grave eyes in frank, unconcerned curiosity, meeting the scores of strange eyes as she did so without a trace of embarrassment or self-consciousness. As though drawn by the intensity of his gaze, her eyes turned to Dundas, and as she saw him a radiant smile flashed into her face. One white hand fluttered towards him, then her voice, clear as the ring of crystal, cut into the astonished silence: "Alan, I was afraid for the moment that you were not here." For a second every eye turned towards Dundas, and then went irresistibly back to Earani, who commenced to move towards him.

Alan made up his mind in a flash. He saw before him a staggering contretemps, but, come what might, his place was beside Earani, to take with her whatever might come, and with a great throb of love and pride in his heart, he strode out to meet her. She waited until he was close to her, and then said in a low voice: "I wanted to come, and I came. It's no use being angry with me. Show me your friends." He laughed recklessly. If he must face the music no one would have the opportunity of seeing him flinch, and he turned with his head high and faced the gathering on the verandah. He met the battery of questioning eyes with his own unabashed, and Barry, in spite of his own inner consternation, whispered a "Well done, Condor!" as the two came forward together. Barry felt certain that he himself had some stiff moments to face, nor did he prophesy in vain.

Now the members of the Glen Cairn Tennis Club were on the whole decently and normally behaved people, but it took more strength than they possessed collectively or individually to meet this abnormal situation. Here, out of the blue sky, so to speak, had appeared a feminine stranger of surpassing loveliness, and clothed, as one matron afterwards affirmed, in a princess robe and an opera cloak—a stranger, be it remembered, whose coming had been unheralded, and of whose presence

in the district they were totally ignorant. And this radiant being had publicly and unmistakably addressed Dundas by his Christian name before them all. So now, as the two approached, each one of the assembly on the verandah forgot everything else in an overwhelming curiosity. Alan's eyes met those of Barry, and in spite of himself the look of amazement in his friend's face caused reckless amusement to gain the upper hand, for Earani had also seen Dick, and walked directly towards him with outstretched hand, and said, "Why, Dick, dear boy, I'm so glad to see you here, too! You didn't expect me, did you?"

Barry turned a helpless look on Alan. He heard beside him the gasp of amazement from Kitty, and Alan hastened to the rescue. "Mrs. Barry, I want you to know Miss Earani." He choked over the prefix. It seemed as idiotic as saying Mrs. Venus. "She is a great friend of mine, and has already met Dick"—("No doubt about that," he heard a whisper behind him). "Earani, this is Doctor Barry's wife."

Earani turned from Dick to look at the perplexed face of Madame Kitty. "I have wanted to know you for a long time," she said, in a smiling, friendly voice. "I have heard much about you from Alan."

Now Kitty did not for a moment doubt the fealty of her man, but the easy familiarity of the speech to Dick roused in her the jealousy that is latent in even the best of women. "I do not remember hearing Dr. Barry speak of you, Miss—Earani," she answered, noncommittally.

"Oh!" answered Earani. "That is proof that he can be trusted, for I made him promise that he would not speak of me to anyone, even to you, and you see he has obeyed me."

The word "obey" was an unfortunate choice, and the flush in her face and the light in her eyes told Alan that, for Madame Kitty at least, Earani would take no little explaining. But the moment's tension was relieved from an unexpected quarter, for the Reverend John Harvey Pook (no one ever thought of shortening that collection of names) heaved his black bulk into the arena to meet what fate had prepared for him. "My dear Dundas," he said, in his blandest tones, "may I have the honour of being one to welcome your charming friend?"

Earani faced the interrupter. Her steady eyes swept him from head to foot. Without turning, she spoke, "Alan, who is this man?" as one would say, "What is this creature?"

Grasping at any chance that would give Barry breathing space, Alan introduced the reverend gentleman by his full name, omitting not one syllable. "I may add," put in Pook, "that I am the vicar of the parish of Glen Cairn. You can hardly have been long in the district, or doubtless



we would have met before." There was an evident question in the remark, and Earani's answer came unhesitatingly. "Oh, yes, I have been here quite a long time now. I am living with my friend, Alan. But you would not know that." She added the last sentence as an after-thought. Alan's eyes never left Pook or Earani, but a sixth sense told him of the sensation that went through the crowd at the frank avowal. He knew they were on the verge of a catastrophe, but he felt helpless to avoid it.

There could be no doubt as to the surprise on the face of the parson, who blundered on, "Oh, then, Miss Earani, your mother will be with you, too?"

"No," came the reply, simply. "My mother has been dead for many years. Alan and I are quite alone together, except when Dick comes to see us." She spoke so clearly and simply that no one present could miss a word.

For the first time Alan looked round the silent, breathless circle. His eyes went from the flushed face of Madame Kitty to the scandalised countenance of Pook's wife and master, and past that again he saw the eyes of Doris Bryce set in relentless judgment. He knew, none better, the verdict of the onlookers, the feminine portion at any rate. The masculine opinion found vent somewhere in a low whistle that gave Dundas a furious desire to slay the whistler then and there. The slow-working brain of Pook seemed entirely unable to assimilate the fact that he was in the presence of a tragedy. "But," he blundered on, "I do not understand—You have someone else with you, of course?"

This was too much for Alan. "Pook, my friend," he said shortly, "is this a catechism class?"

"It appears to me—" began Pook, who had at last grasped the situation; then he caught the look in Alan's eye, and broke off stammering.

"It appears to you," prompted Alan with deadly politeness, when Earani, who had become aware of the cold hostility that surrounded her without in the least understanding it, broke in—"Alan, what is a vicar?"

"A vicar," said Alan, struggling with a wild desire to laugh at the effect of this simple question on the countenance of Pook, "a vicar is a clergyman."

"Oh!"—she looked the reverend gentleman over with mild interest—"you are one of the priest class. I might have known." Pook was plainly qualifying for apoplexy. "What creed do you teach, priest?"

He was a low churchman, and to be publicly told that he belonged to the priest class, and then to be addressed as "priest," was more than Pook could endure. It savoured too much of the Rome his soul anathematised.

"Young woman," he stammered, waving an ineffectual paw, "I have been a minister of God for five and twenty years." What more he could have said was cut short by Earani's clear, incisive voice— "Man, you have been a minister to your stomach for much longer."

There was a gasp of amazement at this frank generalisation, and here and there a scarcely smothered laugh went up. Dundas, horrified, attempted to interfere. "Oh! that is not right, Earani."

"But, Alan," she persisted, "I tell you it is right. Look at him. He eats too much. His very brain is fat."

Before Alan could utter another word Mrs. Pook flew to the rescue, purple with fury. "How dare you! How dare you speak to my husband in such a manner?"

"Are you his wife?" asked Earani calmly, disregarding the fury of the demonstration.

The good lady gaped. "His wife! I am his wife. You—you... "

"Then God help your offsprings. It would be a crime to let two such people breed." Earani spoke with calm decision. There was no warmth in her words. They were uttered as a matter of fact.

"John Harvey—come away—at once! Must I stay here to be insulted by this shameless woman?" She caught the outraged vicar by the arm and drew him off the verandah. There was a general movement amongst the scandalised womenfolk, and Earani watched the movement with mild surprise. "Alan," she asked, "are these people all fools? What have I done that these women hate me? I feel they do, even the wife of Dick;" and she turned to Kitty, who met her with one blazing glance and turned away.

Alan determined to make one desperate effort to retrieve the position. Mistress Doris had held her ground, watching the proceedings, and beside her, with stormy eyes, stood Marian. Dundas drew Earani towards her, the crowd parting before them. "Doris, there has been a terrible misunderstanding," he said, as he reached her. "I want to try and explain."

Doris looked at him with level eyes, taking no notice of Earani. "How long did you say your friend had been living with you, Mr. Dundas?"

Alan had never heard that voice before. "Six months, but... " He got no further.

"I think there has been a misunderstanding—but it will not continue. Marian, dear, are you coming?" and, taking the girl's arm, Doris swept past as though Earani and Alan were non-existent. Her move was the signal for a general exodus, for Doris held no little power in the land, and scandalised matrons gathered their little flocks and fled, carrying in their train their mankind.

Dundas recognised the futility of a struggle against such overwhelming odds. He shook his head in answer to a mute inquiry in Dick's eyes, and felt relieved when he saw Barry turn away reluctantly with his wife and follow the crowd. Some of the men would have gladly waited, but, realising that it was "not their funeral," thought it better to leave. In a few minutes all who were left on the deserted courts besides Earani and Dundas were Rickardson, MacArthur and Bryce. Alan did not know that his old friend had been present until he found him standing by his side.

Earani had watched the flight in silence. There was the flicker of an amused smile about her lips. She turned to Alan at last. "Alan, what is it that I have done? You were right when you said that your friends would not understand me, and you might have said that I would not understand them."

"I'm afraid, Earani, there is too much to tell to explain now. What you have done cannot be helped. We must leave the rest to time. I think the only thing to do now is to go back to 'Cootamundra.' At least, before you go, you must know these three, the only ones who have stayed," and he nodded to the men who stood looking on.

Earani shook her head. "No, Alan, I have lost you too many friends today through my folly. Not now, but later, when they understand." She turned and stepped from the verandah. Dundas made as if to follow, but she waved him back with a smile. "Stay there. I go the way I came." She walked swiftly; before he could move, she had turned the corner of the clubhouse. A moment later Dundas ran in the direction she had taken, but when he reached the corner the tall, cloaked figure had vanished. He looked round dazed. It seemed impossible that she could have gone beyond his sight in the few seconds, even the close-growing peppers could not have hidden her completely, but the fact remained, she had gone as though the ground had swallowed her up.

Alan turned back to the verandah and met the questioning eyes of the three. "She's gone," he said.

"Gone where? How?" asked Bryce. It was the first time he had spoken.

"I haven't the faintest idea, but she's gone," said Alan, and his mystified air showed that he spoke the truth.

MacArthur laughed. "Well, Dun, she said that she would go the way she came, and she did, because I happened to be looking across the courts when she arrived, and I'm prepared to swear that the lady didn't walk on from anywhere. She just happened. One moment she wasn't and the next she was. Do you get me? Most disconcerting. Dun—is she—pardon a question—is she real?"

"Oh! ask Pook," said Dundas savagely. Then, after a moment, "Good Lord! What a mess!"

Then Rickardson spoke up. "Look, Dun, Mac and I only waited to know if we could do anything. For any mortal thing we can do we're yours. Only say the word."

Alan shook his head. "Good pals, but it's no use. Nothing could stop the talk. Jove! Mac, you'll be a plaster saint compared with me now. If you're going back to the club you might drop a hint that I'm not receiving visitors."

"All right, Dun," said MacArthur. "We'll leave you to Bryce. But, remember, call on us at any time"; and the two swung off together to discourage gossip at the club in their own peculiar fashion, with blind faith in their friend in his trouble.

It was not until their figures were hidden in the trees that Dundas turned to Bryce, who stood by, tugging at his moustache, and eyeing his friend with profound perplexity.

"Well, Hec," he said, "and the verdict is?"

"Judgment reserved—for the moment," answered Bryce, pushing both hands deep into his pockets. "Let me hear your version, Alan. To put it mildly, you'll admit there's an explanation due."

"How much did you hear?" asked Dundas.

"Pretty well everything, I think. Enough, anyhow, to shake my faith in human nature. Enough, almost, to shake my faith in you. Alan, what devil's scrape have you got into?"

"Listen, Hec. You've known me since I was a little shaver. You know me better than any man does. If I give you my word of honour that, in spite of appearances, although what she said about our being alone at 'Cootamundra' is true, for it is true, will you take my word that to me she is sacred?" He spoke in a low, earnest voice, and looked Bryce appealingly in the face.

Bryce's hand shot out. "Dun, I'd take that word of yours, and, thank God for it I do believe you. But can you help me to make others believe?"

Dundas smiled grimly. "Hec, that's just the point. You'll believe me blindly, and MacArthur and Rickardson. Barry knows, too. But the trouble is I can tell you nothing, for a while at any rate. Afterwards the whole world may know. But at the moment—well—I just can't, that's all."

"If you have to make a mystery of her, Alan, what on earth possessed you to bring her here to-day? It was suicidal."

"I didn't," came the brief reply. "Another thing, Hec, if I were to tell you the idea that's in my mind concerning her arrival here you'd jump about ten feet into the air with shock."

Bryce rubbed his chin thoughtfully. "Well, Dun, here's the situation. You've disappeared for nearly six months. All attempts to rout you out and explain matters were futile. Then, without warning, you are publicly claimed by—. May I go on?"

Dundas nodded.

"By the most"—Bryce paused again, searching for a word. "Don't you see, Alan, that it's her overpowering beauty that damns her and you hopelessly in the eyes of every woman in the place. Gad, man! Whatever they thought of her, they would pardon you if it were not for that. Why her face is enough to drive anyone crazy. Can't you see how hopeless it will be to try and explain?"

Dundas threw up his arms. "Dash it all, Hec! I know. I know, but I don't care a damn. Let them think what they like. One thing I can promise you is that before long every woman who turned away today will give her eyes almost to be able to say that she knows her. I won't try to explain to Mistress Doris—you saw our meeting?" Bryce nodded. "Only try and get her to think more kindly. Tell her she'll be sorry some day that she doubted."

"Dun, what about Barry? He seemed to be pretty well involved."

Alan laughed. "Afraid poor old Dick will have a bad time. The only thing is that perhaps Kitty will be too busy with me to remember him. Anyhow, it was a purely professional matter."

Bryce grinned under his moustache. "I hope your theory may prove correct, only if a client at the bank who resembled a goddess from Olympus addressed me as your friend addressed Dick—well, I'm afraid I couldn't plead business to Doris as a getaway—at least, with any hope of success."

"I'll trust old Dick to get clear," said Alan with a chuckle. "Taking it all round I think that was about the liveliest ten minutes in the history of Glen Cairn. I'll get home now, I think."

"But," said Bryce, "what about Miss Earani. How will she manage?"

Alan looked round thoughtfully. "No need to worry, Hec. As she said, she'll go the way she came, and," he added, "I've an idea that she's well on her way now."

They walked off together in the direction of the town, Alan chaffing Bryce that he would damage his reputation being seen with the culprit of the day. In spite of his apparent good humour, Dundas was bitterly

angry with all concerned, with the exception, perhaps, of the real offender. They parted at the club, and a few minutes later Alan was pelting down the main street behind Billy. He was biting his underlip savagely, and his cheeks were burning with anger. As he had turned out of the club yard he had been obliged to make way for a buggy driven by a girl, who looked him through with contempt in her eyes.

A man who had been shooting that afternoon, and who had not heard the "very latest," turned up at the club afterwards, and gave a description of how Dundas had passed him on the way home driving like one possessed, and when in answer to questions he affirmed that Dundas was alone in his dogcart, the hum of talk rose a few degrees higher.

## Chapter 24

Alan reached 'Cootamundra' somewhat steadied by his drive, and with the determination of letting Glen Cairn thank what it pleased until he would be ready to enlighten the disgruntled township. The soft, velvety dusk had set in, and a full moon was beginning to climb into the sky by the time he had finished with Billy and turned to the homestead. He felt perfectly sure that Earani would be back before him, and he intended to go straight to the "temple," where he expected to find her; but as he approached the verandah he saw her awaiting him beneath its shadow.

He stood bareheaded before her, and for a time neither spoke. It was the woman who broke the silence. "Am I forgiven?" she asked, holding out both hands. There was an adorable penitence in her glorious eyes, and the little upturned palms pleaded more eloquently than the voice. Forgotten; forgotten the humiliation and the anger; forgotten the reproaches; and his mind was swept clear of the jarring trouble of the day. The few softly murmured words healed every wound. "Oh, Earani!" he broke out, "what is there to forgive? The blame was mine alone. I should have warned you. I should have made you understand. Can you forgive me?"

One soft hand fell lightly on his arm. "Let us forget for the time, Alan. Is this a night to let troubles come between us? Look!" The growing moonlight threw its mystery over them. Across the flats from the river line floated streamers of silvery mists, like long battalions of wraiths. The silver light on the dew-drenched grass spread a jewelled carpet before them, The great stretch of naked vines was toned to a grey haze, and every harsh line softened and melted into the dim landscape. But over all was the silence of great spaces— that solemn stillness that only falls where nature is still untroubled by the works of men.

There was a long silence. It seemed to Alan that he was living in a dream. Her hand still rested on his arm, and she stood absolutely motionless, gazing into the night. He turned and looked into her face, and as he did so it seemed that the great wave of love and adoration that rushed into his heart swept away every trace of fear and doubt.

Unabashed his eyes drank in her radiant beauty—the beauty that had taken possession of his soul from the first time his eyes had fallen on her seemed to have grown as the days had passed, until now, with the rapt mystery in her eyes, she seemed something unearthly in her loveliness. The light touch of her white hand on his arm burnt like fire, and he felt his body quivering with the wild desire to clasp her to him, and words that could not find utterance storming to his lips. As though drawn by the intensity of his passion, she turned her head slowly until her eyes met his. For a moment the revelation in them held him dumbfounded. Then he whispered her name. "Earani! Oh, Earani, is it... " He broke off, unable to frame the words that held his fate. Her eyes met his, fearless, but with a new and splendid light in them. "Alan, why do you fear to speak the words that your heart bids you speak? Or do the maidens of your race tell their love to the men?"

He caught the slender white hand in his. "I have been silent, Earani, my loved one, because I dared not hope. Who am I that I should hope? Oh, love, I am not worthy. It was enough to be near you, to hear your voice, to worship from afar. I love you, Earani—love you! Oh, Earani, be pitiful to the heart that worships you!" And as he spoke her free hand stole about his neck, and the great grey eyes, so brave at first, grew softer with a strange shyness. Then the shadow of lashes hid the confession they bore within them. Then he knew; and with a glad cry of rapture his arms swept her to him, and he pressed his face to the bowed head on his shoulder. And for a space the world stood still. Then to his whispered entreaty she raised her face to his, and their lips met.

Later, arm in arm and soul in soul, they wandered away together into the night, through a new world empty of all save themselves; and the round moon looked down on the maid of the long-lost race and the man of the new, telling each other the old, wordless story. So at length they reached the river and came to rest, Earani seated on a fallen log and Alan at her feet.

With a little laugh she encircled his neck with her arms and bent over him, looking into his eyes. "Oh, man of mine, are we wise? I have given my heart and all, and, by my love for you, perhaps it were better had we left the tale untold."

"There never were two people half so wise, Earani," he answered, taking the hand that caressed his head and holding it to his lips. "To doubt the right to our happiness would be almost blasphemy."

"And yet, Alan—" She paused with a little sigh.

"And yet?" he queried.



"I have the gift that has been developed by generations before me of reading the minds of others, and today I read in the mind of a woman who stood near you a love for you that is as strong and as deep as mine. Oh, Alan! my love, perhaps—and I say it because I love you—it had been better had I stood aside. It may be that your greater happiness lay there. Tell me what lies between you?"

Simply, in answer, Dundas told the tale, omitting nothing, sparing himself nothing. "So you see," he said in the end, "whatever might have been is past. I am sorry—more sorry than I can say, because I know she is good—if I have harmed her; but, beloved, can a man fight against the real love that comes unsought? Would I not wrong her more by going to her when every beat of my heart is for you, and every thought of my mind is of you?"

"Perhaps it is written so, and we must follow the path laid down." She smiled down at him. "You were right when you said we were only women and can never get away from it; for almost I could have slain her when I felt her love for you, even though I have known from the very first of your love for me."

Alan laughed in turn. "This love seems to bring us back to the beginning of things, for I, too, think that way of Andax, who waits his freedom. What will he say when he knows you are promised to me?"

Earani drew his head closer, and bent over him smiling. "So, big man of mine, you think Andax might want me for himself. You need have no fear of that. Andax—well, neither he nor any of his blood ever gave a thought to women. From his point of view we have a low economic value, and our sole purpose in his mind is that we continue the race. He knows, too, the law that was laid on us that if we survived the wrecked world we might not intermarry. When the time comes he will ask me to find him a wife, and, provided she comes up to certain physical and mental standards which he will expect me to inquire into, he will not care what she looks like, and probably won't notice." She shrugged her shoulders with a laugh. "Ah, Alan! he will not be an exacting husband; but I won't envy the woman who is chosen."

"I shouldn't think he would be very attractive," replied Alan, with a weight off his mind.

"And yet," answered Earani, "women have thrown themselves at the feet of men of the same blood; have died for them; have sinned for them; knowing them all to be as callous as stones. It is too true, Alan; no amount of development would make us anything but women."

"Thank God for that," said Dundas. "Had it been otherwise you would have stayed at home to-day instead of exercising your perversity in stirring up my friends at Glen Cairn."

Earani laughed quietly. "Tell me, Alan. Why did they fly like birds before a hawk? What code of yours have I outraged? I could feel the hatred of those women beat against me like stones."

Dundas looked away, frowning. "Why worry about what they think? They are what they are. Dear heart, is their littleness worth a second thought of yours?"

She put her hand beneath his chin and raised his face to hers. "Tell me, Alan."

His eyes fell before a sudden enlightenment in hers. "Earani, they hated you for your beauty, that made them look so small."

But she judged more truly. "No, Alan; I see it now. They condemned me as unchaste." She spoke without a tremor in her voice.

He caught the white hands in his. "Dear love, I would have spared you that thought—" He broke off miserably, and bowed his head upon her knees, but she raised him again.

"I see it now, Alan. You must not blame yourself. But are the women of this world such that their good name could not stand were they to live alone with a man unguarded? Is their purity so weak a thing? With us a thought so vile would have brought shame only to the one that uttered it. Ah, Alan, this world of yours has further to go even than I thought."

"That is why I tried to prevent you going, heart of my heart," he said bitterly. "Truly they judged you as they would judge themselves. 'Forgive them, for they know not what they do,'" he quoted.

She smiled down at him, stroking his hair tenderly. "I pity them, Alan; perhaps we two together may teach them a greater faith, but..." she paused for a moment, and an expression came into her eyes that startled him.

"What is it, Earani?" he asked.

She laughed again. "I was thinking that it is well at the time I did not read their thought, or perhaps the lesson may have been learned so swiftly that a score of lives would be too short a time to forget it."

"A lesson would have done them good, I think," replied Dundas; "but, you worker of wonders, you have not told me how you came to be there or how you left so suddenly. Teach me the answer to that riddle, most wonderful."

"You did not guess?" she asked.

He shook his head. "Except I felt that you moved by paths unknown to me."

Earani stood up and stepped back from him. "Watch and you will understand." Then as she stood she disappeared. He gave a gasp; although a suspicion of the kind had crossed his mind, the actual happening was staggering in effect. One moment she was before him smiling and radiant, and the next she had vanished completely. Then as he stood staring he heard a low, soft laugh beside him, and two arms stole tenderly and swiftly about his neck. For a second he felt her warm breath and her lips lightly touch his cheek, but ere he could clasp his arms about her she had gone, and the mocking, merry laughter rang out behind him. Had there been a witness to what followed who did not hold the key to the mystery that witness would have gone away with the firm conviction that Dundas had entirely lost his reason. For in the moonlight on the river bank, with a zeal and persistence that seemed entirely unwarranted, he hunted a voice that mocked and a laugh that rang like silver, now here, now there. One moment she was beside him, and the next far beyond the reach of his outstretched arms. It was a new game, fascinating beyond words. Sometimes his hand brushed her flowing robe, and once a perfumed strand of her hair fluttered for a moment across his face, but ever she eluded his eager hands. Until, almost breathless, he was giving up the chase as hopeless, his arms closed about her, and as they did he found himself looking into her laughing eyes, and her sweet red lips were there to ask his pardon and to receive their just punishment. "Still," said Earani, as they wandered back to the homestead, "that is only part of the mystery. I had to disappear before I could carry out the other." She turned and motioned him to stand still.

"Don't hide again, dear heart," he begged.

She shook her head, but mischief brimmed in her eyes. "No, I will not hide, but..." She raised both hands to her breast, then lightly, and without effort, she floated off the ground. With a movement full of perfect grace, she bent forward as though swimming through the air, and circled slowly around him, and as gently as she had risen she came to rest beside him. "Well," she asked laughing, "have you nothing to say?" Dundas shook his head. "I won't try and say anything—though, Earani, I half-suspected something of the kind," he answered. "But tell me how it is done, and may I, too, learn the art?"

"The art is easily learned," she answered. "One of our scientists stumbled, by accident, on the real cause of the force of gravity, and after that the means of controlling it were discovered almost immediately, and

from that time the problems of travel and transport were solved for all time. Like everything else, it was very simple."

"MacArthur said you were a wandering angel when he saw you to-day," replied Dundas, "but he would have been absolutely convinced had your arrival at Glen Cairn not been invisible. I am glad, dear heart, that the secret is mine yet, for I am jealous of every eye that sees you. Still, most wonderful, we must soon let the world know all about you. I hate to think of the thoughts that are in the minds of those women, and I long to claim you as my own before them all."

They had reached the homestead again, and he held her tenderly to him, and her soft white arms were about his neck. "Soon now, Alan; but first we must release Andax."

"Must we wait until then," he pleaded.

One gentle hand caressed his cheek. "Oh, man of mine, I am bound. You would not have me break a great trust, a charge that was laid on me by the millions who have gone?"

He sighed. "You are right, and I must be patient. But it will not be long?" he asked.

"No, I think, not long now," she answered softly. "Not one moment longer than I can help. My heart is with yours in that."

"But we will need help, Earani. Even before we release him we must tell our world about you. To reach Andax where he lies will need the fitting out of a great expedition, with perhaps thousands of helpers, if his great sphere is buried. The spot itself is almost inaccessible."

She smiled quietly, and said: "The great expedition to release Andax will consist of two people, Alan and Earani, perhaps three, if you would like Dick to join us."

"Do you mean we could do it alone?" he asked puzzled.

"I could do it alone," she answered, "if there were no one to help me. Think, Alan; from what you have seen do you suppose anything has been left to chance? Beneath our feet lies, all ready to put together, a ship that will carry us surely and swiftly to any spot on earth. And with that ship will go the means by which we may tear mountains asunder if necessary, and merely by pulling a lever."

"And you have no fear that you may not be able to find the spot?" he questioned.

"Before we start even," she answered, "I will be able to mark the spot so surely that when the time comes we will be able to alight exactly upon it."

"And then, when he has been brought back to life?"

"Then for a while I must be at his side." She saw the look of disappointment in his eyes. "No, Alan, remember, it will not be for long. What has taken me months to learn will mean with him weeks. We will have our whole life before us. Not a few years, but many happy ones, for I can and will give them to you."

"Forgive me, dearest. I know I must be patient, but every day that stands between us is a year."

"Ah, Alan! and to me, too, but you will help me. The trust that is mine I hold as sacred as my love for you. I would not be worthy of your love if I failed there. Before my eyes were closed in the long sleep, I bound myself by every tie of honour to place my mission first, and I must do it."

"Then all I ask is that you will take my help, and I will follow wherever you may lead."

"That is what I want, Alan," she answered. "When the times comes we will be guided by Andax. I do not know what plans he will make, but I know that it is not likely that he will move until he has mastered every factor in the problem he will have to face."

"You are sure he will not come between us?" he asked, still doubtful.

"That I can promise. Even an Andax would not dare. It is likely he will give us ten years to ourselves while he plans."

"And then?"

"And then," she smiled, "there will be work to do. Most likely, when he has decided on his course, he will stand in the background and leave the work to me. Alan, would you care to rule the world?"

He laughed ruefully. "I only want one kingdom, beloved, and that is in your heart."

"Your throne is there already, man of mine, but you may have both thrones. Think, heart of my heart, we two together, and powers behind us such as are beyond your dreams, and behind the power again a brain to guide us with all the wisdom and knowledge of the lost world. We two together, and a world to mould and shape, not for a few brief years, but perhaps a century of untrammelled power."

His face flushed, and his heart beat faster. "Oh, temptress! Could any man resist?"

"So now what is left is to prepare. For a little while, perhaps another month, you will be my teacher, then we will find the other sphere."

"And then?"

She raised her stately head. "Then we two may face our future side by side, until the end which will come here, and then beyond, for ever." Her voice thrilled him with its intensity: "A forever not of years, but of

eternity. Ah, love of mine! The greatest gift of all is the thought of that eternity of happiness. It is written."

He raised her hands reverently to his lips, and so they parted, and long after her figure had vanished into the soft night, the memory of her words held him wondering at the glory of their promise.

## Chapter 25

EARANI was lying on the great couch in the "temple," where she had slept her long sleep. Her head and shoulders were supported by a pile of soft cushions, and Dundas, seated close by in great content, was feasting his eyes on the picture she made. Across his mind there came a flash of anger to think that any one who had ever seen her could doubt her stainless purity—the purity that seemed to radiate from her, and shone in her deep, untroubled eyes.

There had been a long silence between them—the silence that falls between those whose souls are in too close a communion to find a need for words. She raised her eyes to his. "You were angry for the moment, Alan; I felt it. What troubled you?"

He smiled back. "Could you read my thoughts, dear one?"

Earani replied, "It was just the sudden rush of anger that I felt. It brought a shadow for the moment on my happiness. I would not read your thoughts unless you told me to. That gift is not one that may be lightly used."

"Then tell me why the shadow came," he challenged. She looked for a moment into his eyes, and smiled.

"Ah, those women and their folly. Is it worth a moment's anger?"

"For myself I care nothing," he answered. "But that they dared to doubt you. It is too much."

"But," she said, "would not the punishment be greater for you? Why think of me?"

"You do not understand, Earani. With us the sin they thought is as nothing for the man. He is forgotten. The woman is forever damned."

"Why the woman?"

"It is the code; our code; unjust, cruel, but always the woman suffers most."

"Then the law was made by men?" It was, as she said it, as much a statement as a question.

"It may be, but it is no written law; and, believe me, the women are its chief administrators."

She laughed. "The sex again, Alan, but with us each would bear the same share of blame, had such a sin been possible. But we knew the penalty too well to err."

"Penalty?" he asked.

"Oh, no legal penalty. We recognised the futility of that; but we knew, each one, that the infraction of the moral law brought its own penalty, so surely as day follows night. There was no discrimination in sharing the blame."

"We know our code is rotten, but it is unalterable. I suppose it's part of man's claim to superiority," answered Dundas, thoughtfully.

"That is what I cannot understand," she said, "'man's superiority.' I suppose, though, you have developed in advance of your women. With us there was no such claim by the men. We stood legally and socially equal in all things."

"And lost the deference of the men due to your sex," he contended.

"How much of that deference is real and how much due to habit? Deference of that kind is a poor compensation, and worse excuse, for keeping one half of the world in subjection to the other half."

Alan laughed. "I'm just not going to argue with you, Earani. Only I think you will find the women are ripe for your creed, if the men are not."

"It appears to me that the men have prevented the development of the women deliberately," she went on mercilessly. "I cannot believe that Andax would approve, only as it happens, he cannot carry out his plans without giving the women their just due. He will have to do as I wish in spite of himself."

"So there are better times coming for the women?"

"I'm afraid, Alan, we will have very poor material to work on," she said with a sigh.

Dundas chuckled. "That's ample compensation for what you have said of the men. I wish Barry could have heard it."

"He is coming now. You can tell him yourself."

"How do you know? Most wonderful."

"I know because I can feel he is looking for you."

"May I tell him of our coming marriage?" asked Dundas, coming to her side as she sat up.

"But lately his feeling towards me has changed; I know it."

"Surely no; I have not seen it in word or deed."

She shook her head. "And yet it is true. I can feel it too well. His feelings are not hostile, but I know he wishes to oppose my plans."



"Why, Earani, old Dick is enthusiastic about you almost as I am."

She smiled. "Ah, well, tell him what you please. Indeed, I think if he has eyes there will be no need to tell him," she went on, looking at him fondly. "But, Alan, if you have an opportunity, give him a hint that it would be unwise to oppose me. He would only harm himself, and then I would be sorry."

Before Dundas could reply Dick's voice came booming and echoing down the gallery. "Dundas, ahoy," and a few moments later the man himself appeared on the "temple" steps.

As Barry's eyes fell on the two standing side by side he paused, cutting short some words that were upon his lips. There was no need for Dundas to tell him what had occurred between the two. It was written on both faces, so that he that saw might read, and there was a tightening at the heart of the doctor. He knew without being told of his friend's devotion to Earani. Without having analysed his feelings there had always been an uneasiness in his mind at the thought of a marriage between the two, but whenever the thought had arisen he had put it aside with the hope that Earani would not reciprocate. In a flash he saw how the contretemps of yesterday had precipitated matters, and now there came over him a sudden foreboding of evil. He was too loyal to his friend to give the slightest indication of his feelings. In the moment he paused he read in the faces of the two the happiness that had come to them, and without hesitation he hurried forward and took the hand that was held out to him. "Dun, old man, no need to tell me. I wish you everything you hope for—Both of you," he went on, turning to Earani. "I hope you don't expect me to be surprised."

Earani looked at him thoughtfully. "Alan, do you know, I doubt his discretion," she answered. Then she checked him as he was about to protest. "Dearest, I don't doubt his loyalty to you; that is beyond question."

Earant smiled from one to the other. "It is kind of you to wish me happiness, Dick, after I had been so wicked yesterday. Alan has been explaining. I feared you would never forgive me." But there was more repentance in her words than in her looks, and Barry laughed in spite of himself, for truth to tell Madam Kitty was far from appeased, even after an explanation that had continued intermittently ever since they had left the tennis courts, and that hot-headed little lady would have been less satisfied than ever had she known that Barry's early morning call had been to 'Cootamundra.'

"Indeed, Earani, I do not know that I have forgiven you, or will until you have made my peace. You are all too beautiful for a woman of our world to forgive you easily."

"And I?" asked Dundas. "Am I beyond the pale?"

Barry chuckled, reminiscently "From what I can gather, Dun, beyond summary execution, excommunication, and a few trifles like that, you are not likely to suffer much. Can you stand it?"

Alan drew himself up and turned to Earani. "Can we?" And for answer she passed her hand through his arm, and Barry, watching them, saw how little the tempest of wrath at Glen Cairn would trouble the atmosphere at 'Cootamundra.'

"What happened afterwards, Dick?" asked Dundas. "Well, I know very little except what I heard from Bryce this morning. I had two urgent calls, and escaped the riot, but Hector told me over the 'phone that a feminine deputation had waited on him and insisted that you should be asked to resign from the club."

"And Bryce?"

"Told them he would resign himself first, and, reading between the lines, he didn't waste any time in choosing his words."

"Good old Hector," said Alan.

Earani nodded. "So we are not without friends, and we will not forget our friends when the time comes."

"It doesn't matter much, Dick," said Alan after a moment. "I'm not likely to trouble Glen Cairn much in future. I will be too busy here." He gave Barry a brief outline of their plans, and told him of Earani's suggestion that he should join them in the search for Andax. For the second time that day a sense of depression came over Barry. He had thought long and earnestly over the situation, and the entrance of a new and unknown power into the problem filled him with forebodings, and he saw that before long a crisis must be faced that might spell disaster for all concerned. He fenced with the question now by replying that he would not decide about accompanying them until later. There was one point on which he wished to enlighten himself, however, for he hoped he might be able to find a vulnerable spot in the ambitions of Earani.

Seating himself, he spoke to her. She had resumed her place on the couch.

"It has occurred to me that there is one thing you have overlooked, Earani, and you'll understand, Dun, and that is the question of money. All your science, backed with all your knowledge, won't be much use without gold."

"Why should we require gold, Alan?" asked Earani, turning to Dundas.

"I'm afraid Dick is right. I never thought of it before. It is essential for everything from the very beginning. Nothing can be done without it, and what I can supply will not go very far. There's no use trying to evade the point. Any organisation you wish to carry out will require an immense sum of money."

"And gold is the essential?" she asked.

Dundas nodded. "The medium of exchange throughout the world."

Earani smiled from one to the other. "I have always looked on it as a useful metal, but I have never thought of considering it in the light of wealth. It is difficult sometimes to adjust my ideas to yours. Tell me how much will be wanted?"

The two men looked at one another, and Barry solved the problem by saying that it would be impossible to have too much.

Earani looked puzzled. "It is so easy to obtain. For instance, this home of mine here that you call the 'temple' is made of gold. The great door to the sphere that you found so hard to open is made of gold."

It was the turn of the two men to be astonished.

"Why, Earani," exclaimed Dick, "there must be thousands of tons of metal in the 'temple.' Only a portion of it would be enough to give you unlimited power." And between the two they gave her some idea of the purchasing power of the metal.

She listened in silence, and when she had finished she turned to Barry. "So you see, Dick, that does away with your difficulty. Though the gold in the 'temple' will be of no use to us."

"But why not?" came the surprised question from both men.

"Because," continued Earani, "the 'temple' and the door were built of gold because we knew of a means of hardening it, so that once the process was complete it would be impossible to break or destroy it. No machinery or power known to us would be able to affect it in any way. You could stamp air into coins more easily than you would the gold you see round you."

Alan's face fell. "So, after all, we are no nearer a solution of the trouble."

"I did not say that. I merely said that the gold we have here would be of no use, but it will be very easy to obtain more. We used to extract it from auriferous soil at one time, but it was found easier to collect from the sea. It would take a very short time to collect sufficient to give us all the wealth we wanted." She paused, and added: "At the same time, I

think it is one of the things we would want to keep to ourselves. Over-production would be as bad as not having enough."

Barry nodded. In spite of his misgivings, he could not but admire the manner in which she grasped the weak point in her position. "There will be no need for you to worry about 'Cootamundra,' Dun; there appear to be easier ways of making money."

"We'll want a good deal, any way, but until we are ready to start, what I have will be sufficient. It doesn't seem much, though, since I've heard Earani's money-making methods. But it would not do to force the world to make diamonds, for instance, into a standard of exchange."

Earani laughed lightly. "It wouldn't be any use, Alan. We could make them, too. In the end you would do what we had to do, and make the work of your hands and brains the only medium of exchange. It's the only just way."

Barry looked at her wondering. "And you really made diamonds, Earani? Some of our men claim to have made them."

For answer she rose and went to a cabinet, which she opened. "Here, Dick, take this proof and try and make my peace with your wife for me. Tell her that I am not nearly as wicked as she believes me to be, and I hope some day she will acknowledge it." As she spoke she placed on the table a great belt that drew a gasp of amazement from both men. It seemed as if she had spread out a stream of blazing fire. The belt was composed of a dozen links closely woven together with exquisite jeweller's work, and each link was composed of one great perfect white diamond. Each stone must have been nearly three inches across, and each flashed back the brilliant lighting of the "temple" in a blaze of myriad-coloured fires. Barry held it up and let it fall in a heap, where it lay in a dazzling, splendid mass.

"Earani, I could not accept such a gift. It is worth a king's—no, a kingdom's—ransom."

Earani laughed. "It is a small gift for a friend, Dick. Take it. It was made by a man merely to prove that it could be made, and its sole value is in its beauty. Let your wife wear it for my sake," and she lifted it up and placed it in his hands.

Barry looked at Dundas in perplexity. "Take it, Dick," said Alan. "Earani wishes you to have it. Madame Kitty's heart would be harder than any of those stones if she could resist such a lure."

Barry took the blazing mass in both hands, and turned it over and over, watching the play of myriad lights flashing through it, then turned to Earani, smiling. "I will accept it gladly; but, Earani, there are men in

the world, and plenty of them, too, who would send me to my death to possess but one link of this chain. I will keep it from my wife until she may have it with safety. As for my peace with her—" he broke off and laughed lightly, "it must come without being bought."

Earani nodded. "Ah, Dick, you have wisdom in some things, at any rate, where I can teach you nothing."

Barry dropped the belt into the pocket of his Norfolk jacket, and slapped the bulge that it made. "Most people would diagnose an instrument case instead of half a million in diamonds. I'll make Bryce the innocent curator of these until they are ready for Kitty."

"And so," said Dundas, as he sat down again, "the question of finance is disposed of. Have you any more objections or obstacles to raise, Dick?"

Barry shook his head. "It seems waste of time, Dun. The only obstacle that Earani and Andax will have to face will be the human element."

Earani looked at him a moment before answering. "The unknown quantity, Dick?"

Barry nodded. "Don't forget that when Eukary started his reformation he was dealing with a more intelligent and pliable material than you will have to handle. You will have to reckon with the most obstinate and savage resistance from one end of the world to the other."

"They will bend or break," said Earani, shortly. Then, after a moment she went on: "Andax will not move before allowing for every factor, but your world is ready for the changes we will bring. They cannot come too soon now."

"And if they resist?" asked Barry.

A slow smile came to Earani's lips. "Ah! Dick, you little know how useless resistance would be. We might have to depopulate one-half of the world; indeed, it is likely we will have to do it. No," she held up her hand to check Barry's protest. "No, Dick, there can be no resistance. The world will learn that quickly. It would be the kinder way."

"Your theories are terrible, Earani. Has life no value in your eyes?"

"You cannot understand, Dick. On the contrary, it is sacred so long as a being is worthy of the life. Tell me—If a thousand or ten thousand men could by any possible means throw back the world's civilisation, say, to your tenth century, and wipe out all your knowledge and wisdom from the world, would you hesitate to strike to save all—even if you did it with your own hand?"

Barry was silent. She turned to Dundas. "Alan?"

He spoke without hesitation. "I should strike."

Earani went on. "It is the same thing, Dick. Andax and I can advance your world more in a century than it has advanced in the past two thousand years. We have the power to do it. We know we are right. Then we will use that power, and let nothing stand in our way. To do otherwise would be folly—worse, weakness." She stood up. "Your world is full of crime, disease, and suffering. It must, and shall, be cured, and if in the healing we cause some pain, it is nothing. That passes, and is forgotten. The world in time to come will bless the pain that gave it happiness." There was a ring of finality and even warning in her voice that left no room for protest. Although no word was said, Barry felt that the warning was levelled at him, and it seemed for the moment that she clashed a mighty door between him and hope.

He sighed and looked up at her. "Perhaps when you have learned more you will deal gently with us, Earani."

"Cheer up, Dick," said Alan, laughing at his friend's evident discomfiture. "I'm relying on the world's common sense. It will take its medicine when it knows it is going to do it good."

"You've more faith in the world's common sense than I have, Dun," growled Barry. "The world has a prejudice against doing what it is told to do, and a preference for doing what it likes. You can't alter the ingrained habits of human nature without dislocating something pretty seriously, any more than you could in stopping dead an engine running at full speed. I foresee ructions." He spoke lightly, but his heart was heavy as lead.

Earani looked from one to the other. "Don't worry, Dick; perhaps Alan is right," she said. "In fifty or seventy years perhaps you will smile to think of your anxiety now."

Barry laughed lightly. "It does me good to hear you speak of time like that, Earani. I'll be over a hundred then; perhaps I'll be wiser. Alan, we have an interesting half century in front of us. Faith! I must get away now, or the ructions will commence sooner than I anticipate."

"Take him up to the world again, Alan, and then come back to me," said Earani, laughing good-bye.

The two men reached the surface, and walked slowly towards Barry's car in silence. Dick stopped to crank up, but paused, and turned to Alan. "Dun, I'm afraid I won't be able to come out quite so often," he said.

Dundas looked at him anxiously for a moment, and then his face cleared. "Of course, Dick, I understand. I'd hate to think that your practice would be affected by the prejudice of the fools in there. But come if you can. I can let you know anything that is happening here."

Barry was about to speak more plainly, but accepted his friend's solution of his words. Why worry Alan yet, he thought. Time enough for that. Instead he nodded. "They have really cut up pretty rough in Glen Cairn, Dun; more than I cared to tell you before Earani. It was a most infernal contretemps. Why on earth did you bring her?"

Alan laughed lightly. "She came unbeknownst, like. Altogether, I'm not sorry. But I was sorry on your account. Madam Kitty looked furious."

It was Barry's turn to laugh. "Dun, I've been explaining ever since, and all the time I'm admitting to myself that in the face of the evidence for the prosecution my explanations look fishy. But it is funny. One moment Kitty is raving over Earani's beauty, and the next she is raging over her impertinence. She says one is as great as the other."

Dundas whistled, but Barry still laughed. "Time is the healer. Still, Dun, you and 'Cootamundra' are anathema for the moment, so I'll scuttle before the storm until it blows over."

"Dick"—Dundas paused for a moment, and went on, "you are anxious about Andax?"

Barry's face clouded. "I can't help it, Alan. I'm sorry now that we handled this alone, or that I ever came into it. God knows where it will end. It's a big thing to have on one's conscience."

Dundas looked down, and kicked absently at a grass tussock. "I've a message for you, Dick."

"A message?"

"Perhaps not a message exactly," he paused, feeling for words.

"Out with it, Dun. I think the less we hide from one another, the better for all concerned."

"Well, Dick, Earani has an idea that you might try to interfere—and—"

"Well?" Barry eyed him curiously.

"And she told me to give you the hint that it would not be exactly healthy for anyone to do that. You know, Dick, she likes you, and she says she's afraid you might get hurt."

Barry smiled grimly. "I think that would be very possible, Dun. Still, I'm glad you told me." He looked off across the grey vineyard. "Jove! I wonder what is the limit of the powers she holds. Ah! well, it's no use speculating." He cranked the car, and held out his hand. "We are on the lap of the gods. Buck up, Dun," and a moment later the car was speeding down the drive.

All the way back to Glen Cairn Barry stared straight before him, driving mechanically, and his thoughts were very grave. He had not given

Dundas his real reasons for discontinuing his visits. For some time past his anxiety had grown to an intolerable extent. He was torn between loyalty to Dundas and his fear of the untrammelled power that they together had let loose on the world. He knew that in Alan's eyes Earani could do no wrong, so that the struggle for the world's future must rest between him and Earani. Was it too late to prevent a terrible catastrophe? In his mind was taking form a plan for sharing the responsibility with someone better able to bear it.

His last interview with Earani had convinced him of the necessity for action of some kind, and as he drove he turned the matter over in his mind. He decided that he could no longer accept the confidence that Alan gave him in allowing him to come and go at 'Cootamundra' as he wished. He felt that he was bound to betray the promise he had made, and it hurt him to meet his friend and feel that he was trusted, when in his heart he knew he was ready to betray that trust. He knew that if he warned Dundas, then Dundas would let Earani know, and after that "Well, I doubt if Dun's intercession would save me from something unpleasant," he said to himself. "Yes, Dick Barry, I think it very possible indeed that you would get hurt."

And so the plan that was half formed in his mind took definite shape, and so intent were his thoughts on the subject that even Madame Kitty's cold and hostile indifference passed almost without notice that day.



## Chapter 26

THE back country of Australia carries men who are known from station to station for some outstanding mental kink. The solitude of the Never-Never breeds them, and when they foregather with their fellows they become an institution, humorous or aggravating, according to the form the kink has happened to take.

There is a son of Anak, otherwise sane, who wanders through the country, and who has become a joy to every camp and shed beyond the Murray, where his search for work has led him. He has a story to tell, and sore experience has taught even the toughest of his auditors to accept that story without question, at least in the presence of the narrator thereof. The story never varies in so much as one amazing detail, and woe betide the luckless one who ventures to cast a doubt upon it.

"I was working' down from the shearin' through Glen Cairn way for the hop pickin'. Keepin' off the main road, too. There was crowds of blokes goin' that way, and the cockies was shy in passin' out the tucker. A few miles out of Glen Cairn one afternoon I noticed a house a bit off the road, and thought I'd word 'em for a bit of scran. It was a fair-sized place, and when I got to the back there was no one in sight, so I goes round the front and drops Matilder when I seen the front door was open. I walks to the verandah, and 'ad 'ardly put one foot on it when I got the start of me life. Struth! I thought I was seeing' things when that tart showed up. She walks out of the 'ouse, and stands lookin' me over, and I stands lookin' her over, like I was a stuck pig. Ye never even began to think of anything like her. Take all the bonzer tarts yer ever 'eard of and roll 'em into one, and yer ain't even beginnin' to get near what she looked like. She was pretty near as big as me, and she was dressed rummy-lookin'. And 'er hair— struth! It was fallin' down in front of her, damn near to 'er feet. Most amazin'. But it wasn't that. It was 'er face that gave me the knockout. Wat's the use in tryin' to tell youse blokes. You'd never understand in yer natural—never—Struth! I could a just stood and looked at 'er for a year. Well, there was me standin' starin', and she lookin' me over quiet, like as though I was a surprise to 'er, and after a

minute she says, 'What are you?' Just as though she thought I might be a bandicoot or a gohanna for all she knew. So I pipes up and asks if the boss is at 'ome. So 'elp me cat! She says: 'What is the boss?' like as though she 'ad never 'eard the word. O' course I spotted that she was a bit ratty—ratty! My Gawd! If I'd only 'ad enough sense to get away then. Ratty! Anyhow I says to her that I just come to see if she could give a bloke a bit o' tucker, hadn't had a feed since the mornin'. She thinks a minute, lookin' at me queer, and says, 'You want food?' 'That's it, missus,' I said, brightenin' up; 'a bit of mutton and some flour, anything 'andy.'"

"She thinks a bit more, and says, 'I'm alone here; the owner of the house is away. I cannot give you food.' Well, that made me a bit wild, 'cause what's a bit of tucker to these cockies? So I thought I might as well 'elp myself; there's no harm in that. So I says to 'er: 'You look 'ere, missus, I want tucker, and I'm goin' to have it, so just you pass it out, or I'll bloomin' well take what I want—so git a move on.' O' course, I wasn't meanin' 'er any harm; it was just bluff. Cripes! But it was rummy. She just stood quiet, lookin' at me, not a bit put out or scared, and that made me feel all the more certain she was ratty. But what took the bun was what she says next. Says she, 'Tell me, do you vote in the elections for your country's legislators?' It fair took me breath away. Vote—me vote? Me with me name on four rolls between Ballarat and Bourke. I just laughed until I couldn't laugh any longer. Then I says: 'Well, you are a peach, missus. You pass out the tucker, and then we'll talk politics, and I think I'll take one little kiss into the bargain. Course I never meant any 'arm to 'er; but she was a bonzer peach. I just took one step up to 'er, when she puts out 'er 'and straight in front of me, and says, 'Stop!' And the rummy part of it was, though I didn't mean to stop, I did, and she just stood starin' at me with 'er eyes lookin' big and shiny, till I felt cold all over, and then, strike me pink! all of a sudden I began to feel scared. Cripes, it was like 'avin' the horrors. But she never says another word, but goes into the house, and comes out again in a minute with a damn great green-hide whip. I wanted to make a bolt for it. I'd a given fifty quid to get away. Course, I thought she was goin' to lay into me with the green-hide, but she just chucked it down at my feet most contemptuous. Then she goes and sits in a chair in the verandah and looks me over for a bit. You'd never 'ave thought such a bonzer tart could look the way she did at me. Struth! before I knew where I was I was sweatin' all over. Then she says, quiet like—and that was the worst of it, she was so quiet, never raises 'er voice a bit—she says, 'It is in my thoughts to kill you, but

I will leave a mark so that you will remember. Pick up that whip', she says, pointin' to the whip. I'd a given a quid not to. I wanted to talk back, but all I did was to pick up the whip. Then she says, Now you will beat yourself till I tell you to stop.' Cripes! you blokes needn't laugh like that. Gawd! but I wish any of yer had been there but me. I know what you think—that I was shikkered. So 'elp me cat! I'd not 'ad a drink for days, and any'ow, a bloke might go and toush 'is mate when he was boozed, but 'e don't go 'ammerin' hell out of hisself with a damn green-hide like I did. Struth! but I did; look 'ere, if yer don't believe me." And here the indignant narrator would show a hairy leg scarred and scarified with pink weals against dirty white, or to convince a doubter would roll up his shirt to show his flanks and hips scored deep with bluish corrugations. Then he would continue.

"It fair took the cake. There was the tart sittin' in the chair, 'ardly takin' the trouble to look at me, and there was me standin' there layin' into myself with the whip like all possessed. I fair cut the togs off myself, and the blood was runnin' down me legs, and I couldn't 'elp 'owlin' a bit, for that damn whip curled round me every time it 'it. Struth! but it must a looked comical. I'd got a new pair of moles on. I'd paid a bloke up the road three 'alf-crowns for 'em, and I cut 'em pretty near to rags. Oh, yes! you laugh, yer cows. It wasn't nothin' to laugh at. An' all the time that bloomin' tart was leanin' back in 'er chair not takin' any more notice than if I'd been ten miles away. At last she looks round and says, 'Stop, now.' Cripes, it was about time, too; I was all out. Then she asked where I was makin' for, and I says to Glen Cairn. Damn civil I was, too; she 'ad me scared stiff. With that she get up, and, lookin' at me with 'er big shiny eyes, says, 'You will go now, and you will run, and you will not stop running until you get to Glen Cairn, and you will come here no more.' She might 'ave left out the last part, any'ow. The minute she speaks off I starts, but she stopped me and says, 'Take that,' pointin' to Matilder. So I picks up the bluey and off down the track without look-in' back. Mind yer, I tell yer I was all out from the 'ammerin' I'd give meself. But for all that I ran, and, by Gawd, I went on runnin'. Don't know 'ow far it was, but I was staggerin' along, and fallin' down, an' pickin' meself up, and runnin' again, and before I got to Glen Cairn I found the runnin' was worse than the hidin' I'd got. It was after dark when I got there, and I was staggerin' all over the road, when a police sergeant cops me. Course he thought I was shikkered, too; but when 'e seen me face and the blood on it under a lamplight he takes me up to the hospital. Well, when I gets there they wants to know 'ow I got meself into such a 'ell of a state, and I was too

sick and too silly to tell 'em anything but the truth, and, of course, the bloomin' doctor reckons I'd got the fantods. That made me blasted wild, I tell yer, but what made me worse was another doctor comes in—a big, red-headed, freckled bloke—and 'e made me tell the yarn over again. An' what do yer think? Why that bloke just sits down and laughs till the tears is runnin' down his cheeks. I told 'im straight I'd like to stoush 'im, but 'e doesn't take any notice, and calls the other doctor aside, and they 'as a yarn on the quiet, and after that they puts me to bed.

"I was in that bloomin' horspital for over two weeks. But it was bloom-in' rummy. The mornin' I left the other doctor (the red-headed one) comes in and makes me tell the yarn again, and when I'd finished 'e says, pretty serious, 'Now, you, look here. I know that yarn's true; and let me tell you you're damn lucky to get off so light. You take my advice and don't go tellin' it any more round these parts, though, because they'll only think you're ratty, same as they do now in the horspital'; and then 'e gave me a couple of sovereigns, and told me I'd better keep away from the house where the tart lived or it might be worse next time. So I asked 'im what sort of a bleedin' idiot 'e took me for. Why, I wouldn't go within a mile of that place if yer gave me a thousand quid. But, cripes! she was a bonzer tart."

## Chapter 27

The month that Earani stipulated before the search for Andax commenced was passing swiftly. Dundas used the interval for making all necessary arrangements of his private affairs for an absence that might be prolonged or brief as circumstances fell out. He found it imperative that he should leave 'Cootamundra' occasionally, but the greater part of his time was passed with Earani.

They prepared for their journey by hours of work in the great machinery gallery, where, under Earani's supervision, they gathered together for removal to the surface the parts of the vessel that would bear them to their destination. It was a task that fascinated and bewildered Dundas. It seemed to him that the vessel itself was one of the greatest wonders of the gallery. When completed, she would be over a hundred feet long, yet each part was so made that it could be easily handled by two people, and with a little difficulty, by one, if necessary. Its torpedo-shaped hull was a marvel of enormous strength, combined with lightness. The plans of the completed vessel showed no propellers, nor, indeed, any projection outside the hull. The power generators occupied only a fraction of the interior space. Earani showed Dundas how the pull of gravitation from the earth was first neutralised until the hull and contents, weighing perhaps eighty tons, could be lifted by one hand, and then the attractive force from bodies millions of miles away from the earth's orbit was used to obtain both vertical and lateral movement, so that almost incredible speeds could be obtained—speeds that were only limited by the heating of the vessel through atmospheric friction. She demonstrated how they would speed on their journey at the rate of about three hundred miles an hour, and how special vessels built to reduce the friction on the hull could be sent flashing through the air at almost twice that speed.

Best of all, she showed him how to adjust to his body the specially made machines that, fitted to chest and back, enabled him to fly birdlike round the galleries. Perhaps "birdlike" is a somewhat inaccurate description, for his first attempts in the air were somewhat akin to a skater's first attempts on the ice. That he flew was true; to say that he flew with either

grace or comfort would be wide of the mark, and with Earani floating beside him in his sprawling progress, they made the galleries ring with unrestrained mirth. But with infinite patience she taught him how to poise his body for the flight, and how, with a touch of his fingers, to counteract any unexpected stress or strain, until with their hands locked they were able to sway together from the ground and float from gallery to gallery with perfect ease. At the same time, she forbade him any attempt to use the new-found sport above ground until she would be able to escort him. There was no fear of failure once he left the ground; the danger lay for the novice in getting beyond control, and being snatched to levels above the earth's surface, where intense cold and thin atmosphere would be fatal before help, even if it were available, could reach him. The principal work connected with the airship was carried out in the galleries, and all the parts were assembled and tested, so that when the time came for them to start, it would take not more than a day to bring the material to the surface, and but little longer to put it together.

They had already decided on the day on which they would start, and Earani had spent no little time immersed in calculations over maps and charts, until at length she called Alan to her side. Before her was spread a map of Northern India, and on it she had marked a tiny red cross on which she put her pencil point.

"Alan," she said, looking at him, "if your maps are true, that red cross marks our destination. Look, 36 deg. 32 min. north and 74 deg. 18 min. east. Do you know anything of the country?"

Dundas bent over the map and sighed. "Faith, Earani, I could have wished that your friends had chosen another spot. Yes, I know a little of it. It is one of the wildest and most desolate countries in the world: almost unknown, and such inhabitants as are there are about the most savage and uncivilised on earth. It is in the heart of the world's most mountainous country. The elevation will be over twenty thousand feet amongst eternal snow." He paused and looked over the map carefully. "I should say it is about fifty miles north from Gilgit. Our people may have an outpost at that place. I think they have. I know we have been fighting in that country during the past decade, but it is a terrible country. Why did they select such a spot?"

Earani smiled. "The spot has become what it is since he was put there. In our time it was an easily accessible plateau. Things have happened since then. I remember it as one of the most populous parts of the world with a most perfect climate." She folded the map and put it aside.

"However, it makes no difference. It may mean a few hours, delay, and he has waited so long."

"Are you absolutely sure, Earani, that your calculation is correct?" asked Dundas.

She nodded emphatically. "So sure that I will be able to land exactly on the spot, and even if we were a little at fault, this," and she put her hand on an instrument beside her, "would detect the fault and rectify it for us."

She lay back on her couch. "We must make the most of our ease now, Alan, for we have some hard days before us."

He laughed. "The prospect doesn't seem to worry you much. Most wonderful! The women that I know would be rather scared of such an undertaking."

"Why should I worry?" she answered. "Indeed, I'm looking forward to it. Think, for the first time since I've known him Andax will be in the position of being my pupil, and will be obliged to learn from me. If you knew him as well as I do you would see how humorous that will be." She laughed lightly. "He won't like it a bit, but he won't show it."

Dundas looked at her reflectively. "And how long, Earani, will your superiority last?"

She pursed her lips thoughtfully. The action was too tempting for Dundas to pass it unnoticed, and he moved towards her with intention, to be waved away unceremoniously. "Go away, bad man! How can I think when you distract me like that? No—sit still." He obeyed reluctantly. Then she went on, "My superiority will last perhaps two months, perhaps three, but not much longer. After that—well, Andax will know more, perhaps, than the two of us put together. But sufficient unto the day. I will have had my little triumph." She looked across at him smiling, and relented, and at the glance he flew to her. She made a place for him beside her, and he bent over fondly.

"Sometimes, dear one, it makes my heart stand still to think how easily I could have missed you," he said, holding her hands in his. "It was a mere chance that I started to dig where I did. Indeed, at first I meant to start much further away."

Her big, grave eyes looked up into his. "It was written, Alan. You of all men were chosen. It had to be so."

"Listen," he said, "and I will tell you a tale they tell to children"; and he told her the old, old story of the Sleeping Beauty and how the Prince came in the end. "I think," he said, "that that story was in my mind when I first stood beside you, dear heart; and yet—" he paused.

"And yet?" she asked mockingly.

"I have thought sometimes, supposing I had missed you, and another had come. Supposing you had been found, not by me, but if the world were different, and someone had come of a race unfitted to be helped. The danger could not have been foreseen. What then? Oh! I know I am absurd. But if—"

She drew one hand from his clasp and let it fall over the edge of the couch. "Such a risk was foreseen and guarded against. Look beside you, Alan."

He turned and looked. Where her hand had rested a small panel, a few inches square, had opened in the side of the couch. "What is it?" he asked, looking round at her.

She smiled up at him, her hand still resting beside the opening. "Can you see anything there, Alan?" she asked.

"Just a disc and a button," he answered.

She nodded her head, "Just a disc and a button, as you say; but," she slipped the panel closed again, "do you know what would happen if my finger pressed that button?"

He shook his head. "Can't guess," he answered

"Well," she went on, "high above our heads, in the body of the sphere, are two cisterns filled with fluid. If I pressed that button, the contents of the two cisterns would drop into a third, and the moment they did the whole sphere would be transformed into a molten mass, with everything it contained. It would be over in a second."

Dundas recoiled, "Good Heavens, Earani, why?"

She answered thoughtfully, "Just for the reason you have given. It was recognised that everything here under certain conditions might have proved a curse rather than a blessing when the time came. To each of us the right was given, that if when we woke from our sleep we judged that it would be better, then we might resign our trust and our life together."

"And you would have done it?" he asked.

She nodded in answer. "Far rather that way, than have what is here fall into the hands of the unfit. Indeed," and she paused thoughtfully, "if Andax or I were not here to guide, it would be better if everything went. Your world is not ready to use with wisdom all of what is hidden here."

"You have a poor opinion of us, Earani," he said smiling.

She answered gravely. "No, I have not really. There is very much here that I know would be used wisely and well, but again there are other things that might be misused. Take, for instance, that cylinder that did so much damage in the machinery gallery. Ah! Alan, that time you missed death by a very little. Now, although that was first invented for us as a



weapon of warfare, it subsequently became one of our greatest engineering assets. It could be used for the purpose of excavating canals and similar works. If properly used it would do more work in a day than your engineers could carry out in a year, or perhaps two, but it could still be used as a weapon."

"And as a weapon?" asked Dundas.

"It could be made to devastate a country for a radius of a hundred miles, and not only would it blot out all living things, but it would leave the country it covered a blackened desert. It was called in our language by a word that means 'the devastator' in yours. Tell me, Alan, would you like the secret of such an engine to become the property of any nation in your world?" Dundas shook his head. "No, that is unthinkable. At the first quarrel one or all would use it."

"So you see," Earani went on, "it would be better to lose all than to run a risk of that kind unless there were a power to check the dangerous element amongst you, and that is only one instance. There are a score of things in the galleries that might be misapplied just as disastrously. To be of any use their secret must be more or less widely known, and without the guiding hand the whole race might be easily obliterated."

Dundas was silent for a while. "No doubt you are right, Earani. It would be a catastrophe to entrust such powers as you speak of to any one people or to all without some restraining influence. The temptation to bid for supremacy would be irresistible if the powers were held by one people, and if by two or more it would amount to the obliteration of any two that quarrelled."

"So you see, Alan, that the sacrifice of all that is here would not be too great to prevent such a thing happening. However, thank goodness, the responsibility will be on the shoulders of Andax before long. And now, dear one, I am going to ask you a question. What is troubling you?" She held a finger to his lips to check a denial. "Listen; you went into Glen Cairn two days ago; since then you have had something on your mind. What?"

Dundas laughed. "You—What shall I say, most wonderful? I shall have to walk circumspectly when we are married. I flattered myself that my general behaviour did not show that I was annoyed, and yet you knew all the time."

She nodded smiling. "It did not need any magic to find that out. Tell me?"

He looked at her thoughtfully. "Could you find out if I did not tell?" he asked.

"I could, of course, but I would not unless you gave me permission," she answered.

"Then I do give you permission," he said.

She took his hand in hers, and looked into his eyes a moment before she spoke. "So," she said at length, "it is Dick, and I was right."

"Yes, it is Dick. I cannot understand him. I went to get his final answer about coming with us. He refused."

"I expected it," she answered. "Did he give a reason?"

"He gave a reason," replied Dundas, "but I doubt if it were the real one. Dick has changed." He paused.

"Tell me what passed between you," she asked.

"I went to him at the hospital. When I told him that I must know then if he intended to come with us, he at first asked me to give up the idea. I told him our plans were fully made, and I could see no reason for altering them. Then he said that he had work in hand that would prevent him from joining us at present. He could get no one to relieve him. He seemed to evade my questions about the work, and in the end I felt that what you said was right—that he was hostile to our going."

Earani listened with interest. "Yes, I was right, Alan. I have felt the hostility to me for a long time. Dick would tie my hands if he only knew how. But he has a vague idea of my powers, and he cannot think of a way out. We need not worry. If he cried all he knows to the world he could do nothing. But he might cause us trouble by forcing me to show unmistakably how helpless he is. It would not suit my plans to use force at present to exact obedience from him or from any authority he might attempt to put into action."

Dundas interrupted. "We have his word, Earani, and I do not think for a moment that Dick will break his pledge. He doubts, perhaps he fears Andax. But I cannot doubt his loyalty."

"Ah, well, Alan, we need not trouble. I am sorry, for I liked Dick. Perhaps later he will understand. Remember, he has only been here twice since the day I went to Glen Cairn, and I do not think that public opinion has kept him away. Still," and she paused, turning the question over in her mind, "I will watch, nevertheless. I do not want trouble just yet. Let us go to the river for a while. I tire of being so much away from the world."

## Chapter 28

IT was a soft, clear moonless night that found the two strolling slowly towards the timber that fringed the river. Earani turned her eyes upward. "It has changed very little, Alan, since I saw it last; see, there is the Red Planet. It must be a very old world now, and a very wise world. Do its people still call to yours, I wonder?"

"Call to us? How?"

"We used to talk to them once," Earani replied. "It was they who first warned our world of the catastrophe impending, long before we would have been able to foretell it."

"But how could they talk to you?" Dundas reiterated.

"Have you ever heard of coloured lights in the skies at either pole?" asked Earani.

"You mean auroras?"

"Perhaps. The lights I mean show at nights in masses of ever-changing colours, and appear generally at both North and South Pole. That was how the Red Planet spoke to us."

"We have known them for many centuries," answered Dundas; "but they have always been a mystery. But why do they show almost always at the poles where there are so few to see them? Perhaps if they had been more familiar we would have understood."

"They used the Poles because of the long periods of darkness," replied Earani. "Yes, it is strange to think that all these millions of years they have known of the overwhelming of the old world, and have been trying to mend the broken link in the chain. They knew a new race would be built up, and the time would come when someone would interpret their signals. Before long we will be able to answer them, and learn how they stand. But I fear it will be a sad story, for they were a great people, and they must be near the end now."

They had come to the fallen tree that had been their resting place ever since the great night of their lives. For a long time they sat side by side in silence, for there was little need of words between them. It was Dundas who spoke first. "If the sky is unchanged, Earani, what of the earth?"

"That was in my mind at the moment, Alan," she answered. "I wish I could make you see it here as I once saw it." Then, after a pause, she went on: "It was on such a night as this in the long ago I stayed here with two others, waiting to hear our fate. Think, Alan... We were on the edge of a great valley, perhaps ten miles across, and through the valley ran a broad river to the sea. Even from where we sat we could trace its course, and all across the valley were dotted lights, and just behind us towered the black mass of the great sphere on its pedestal, nearly two thousand feet above us. But we thought very little of it. Our thoughts were turned to one light across the valley brighter than all the rest. The light came from the great council hall where they were making the final choice of those who would stay behind. Word had come that Andax had already been selected. There were two others still to be named, and we knew that of we three two would be chosen. Which two? For my part, I prayed that the lot would not fall to me. What the others thought as they waited there I do not know. One was the girl friend of my life. Alan, you say that I am beautiful; you should have seen her to know what beauty means." He laughed lightly, bending his lips to her hand. "I am well content, dear one."

"But it is true, Alan," she went on. "The other was her lover. Strange, was it not? They knew the world was on the verge of destruction, but they did not fear death, so they went together. They feared that one should be called on to stay behind when the other died. And so we three waited. There had been six left for final choice. Andax had been already chosen, as I told you before. Two others had been stood aside, and now the time must be near when the summons would come.

"It seemed so long in coming. I sat a little apart from the others, and every now and again I heard whispered hope pass between them. But the world seemed very still. Then I saw a tiny star separate itself from the lighted council hall, and I knew. Marnia, my friend, stood up and called to me, 'He is coming, Earani,' and we watched the star grow brighter as it floated to us across the valley, until the messenger stood before us. He brought us the order to appear before the council. We three knew that the messenger had heard the decision, but we did not dare to question him. Together we sprang from the ground and followed him, flying with locked hands through the quiet darkness."

"I can never forget the scene in the council chamber. There were our greatest and wisest waiting our coming to take our stand before them. My mother was amongst them, and the sadness in her eyes is with me yet. I knew many of them personally, and the old president had been one

of my first teachers. Of all the faces those two stood out, and one more. That one was Andax, standing beside the president's dais smiling cynically at me. Then the names were announced, mine first, and my heart sank a little. I was proud to be chosen, but I knew then why the mother eyes were so sad. Then the next name, Marnia. I turned to her, but the agony in her eyes cut me to the heart. Her arm was flung about the lover who stood beside her, and she faced the council as though about to speak. But my voice was raised before she could find words, and I begged them to take the two and leave me. But the President shook his head. The council had finally decided that I must stay. Then it was that Marnia broke from her lover and flung herself on her knees before them all. No human heart could withstand the splendid appeal she made to wait the end and death together with the man she loved. And in the end they yielded and gave them freedom, and the choice of the council fell on one of the others who had been stood aside."

"It was fine of them to grant her appeal," said Hundas.

"Yes," answered Earani: "I feared they would not, but the President was a descendant of the old doctor, and his heart was in the right place, and his voice was raised for them. Oh, but I was glad, for their sakes."

"And what happened then, beloved?" asked Alan.

"Then before we left that night we three who were chosen took the solemn oath of obedience to the charge that was laid upon us. That we should not swerve or flinch from the duties laid down for us should the time ever come when we should wake to the world again. That no thought of self or lust of power should turn us from teaching the laws and truths of our race to the race to come. Our lives were held and dedicated to that one sacred trust.

"It seemed to me that night, when those vows were taken, that I was a being apart. None could foresee where that event would lead us. We had all for a long time been trained to the duties that would be ours; but I never realised before the solemnity of it all until I heard the charge laid on us by the President before he gave us the final benediction of the race that was to die. For myself, I felt no shadow of fear, but a terrible sorrow caught my heart to think that our world and all I loved upon it must so surely perish utterly. When I left the council hall that night with my mother, Marnia was waiting for me with her lover, and begged that I would permit her to be with me until the time came."

"Had you long to wait, dear heart?" asked Alan, moved by the sorrow in her voice.

"Two days, Alan, just two days. You see, towards the end they feared that the blow might fall sooner than they expected. The three great spheres were ready for us, and delay might spell disaster. On the third day I surrendered myself to the council, and at the hour of noon we left the council hall and flew across the valley to the sphere that was to be my living tomb. I remember now how the sight of the valley touched me as we went. The air was thronged by countless thousands waiting to see us pass, and, as we floated slowly through, the sound of their voices raised in greeting and farewell echoed like thunder from the hills. And at the doorway of the sphere stood Andax. As we passed he held out his hand to me. 'Sister and comrade—to our next meeting'; and he raised my hand to his lips, and for once the cynical smile had gone. 'To our next meeting, Andax. I shall not be the one to fail you.' He laughed. 'The council could not have chosen better. Are you content?' I smiled up at him as I turned to enter the doorway. 'Ask me that when we meet again,' I said; and the last I heard was his laughter as we went down the stairway."

"He didn't seem to worry much, but it must have been a terrible ordeal for you, Earani?" said Dundas.

"Oh, to Andax it was a splendid experiment. If it failed, well, he died, and that was the end of it. If it succeeded, he would have a new world to play with. Could one of his breed ask for a better fate? No. I dare say that Andax gave not a single thought of regret for the world he was so soon to leave; beyond that, he would not be there to study its destruction as it happened."

"And you?" asked Dundas.

"I felt no fear for myself," Earani went on. "Death was nothing. But it was heart-breaking to leave behind so much and so many I loved. There were very few with me at the end—my mother and Marnia, and the President of the Council, with two or three others, who were to complete the work and close my sleeping place. The couch was ready for me, and we had said our farewells. All was done swiftly. Just as I was stepping to the couch Marnia took a flower from her hair and placed it in my hand. It was a blossom of the Earani, 'the flower of life,' that gave me my name. It was called so because it remained fresh and fragrant for many years after it had been plucked from its stem. As I lay down she smiled on me through her tears, and closed my fingers over the blossom. 'Keep the flower in your hand, beloved, and when next your eyes are opened look first at it, and if it is faded then you will know that we, too, have gone.' Then she stood aside, and I took from my mother's hand the draught

that brought oblivion. I can just remember her bending over me as I sank back, and I could feel Marnia throw the robes across my feet, and then darkness fell."

"And that was all until you woke and saw us there beside you? Were you not frightened then?" asked Dundas.

She passed her arm about his neck and pressed her face to his tenderly. "No, I was not afraid. At first I could not grasp it all. You remember how I looked at my hand. There was nothing left of the blossom but a dark stain on my palm. I could not realise it, for at the time it seemed but an hour since Marnia had placed it there. But the truth was driven home when I found that one sphere was wrecked, and when those dials in the cabinet told me how long I had waited for my waking."

"And still you did not fear, brave one?"

"When I looked into your eyes as you spoke to me, Alan, I knew that I had nothing to fear from you, and perhaps—" She paused.

"And perhaps?" he asked.

"I won't tell you," she laughed. "It would only make you conceited." But tell him she did in the end, and before they parted at the homestead that night, and a sweeter confession never fell from woman's lips.

## Chapter 29

SIR MILES GLOVER sat in the Prime Minister's room at the Federal Parliament House. Beside the Prime Minister stood his secretary.

"I thought you had better see it," said the secretary, and as Sir Miles only pinched his shaven chin and stared at the opposite wall, he went on, "It reads like another lunatic in places, and yet—" He stopped and looked down at the quiet figure of his chief, who had bent to re-read the letter on the table before him.

"And yet—there's a distinct trace of method in the madness. Still, you'll remember that your friend, who announced himself as the Messiah, wrote an excellent letter." Sir Miles looked up as he spoke, and the secretary looked away, for he did not like to be reminded of that episode. "I'm afraid," the Prime Minister went on, and there was a shadow of a smile at the corners of the straight mouth, "that the Archbishop has never quite forgiven my passing him along. Really, he should have been grateful for an opportunity to investigate the matter. Still, as you say, there may be something in this. Have you spoken to Professor Gordon?"

"No," answered the secretary, "I thought if you wished to go further into the matter you might like to speak to the professor yourself."

Sir Miles nodded. "Very well, get him for me now." The secretary took up the desk telephone, and the Prime Minister stared thoughtfully at the letter.

"Here he is now," said the secretary presently, and passed the receiver over.

Said Sir Miles, "Hello! is that you, Ginger?" and an irreverent small voice answered back, "'Tis I, Smiler; how goes the ship of State?" There were few men who would have cared to address Professor Gordon, plus quite a lot of the alphabet, as "Ginger," and still fewer who would have cared to address Sir Miles Glover as "Smiler."

This is what the secretary heard:—"The ship of State is making bad weather—no, not as bad as the press would have you believe. We'll ride the session out. No; I don't know that you could help much. It would create rather a bad impression if I arranged with you to poison a few of the



opposition. Three or four hundred years ago, and—perhaps. Ah, well, it's gone out of fashion. Truth? I daren't. They might indulge in reprisals—Ginger, consider the effect on the electors if the truth were told about any of us. Well, perhaps you're right, they would not believe it. No—I wanted to know if you are acquainted with a man named—wait a moment—a man named Richard Barry, M D., of Glen Cairn. At least, I think that's it; he writes an appalling fist—Ah—I see—pretty level-headed? No traces of insanity, for instance? Well, he has written for an interview—wants it urgently. Extremely mysterious. No hint of his reasons. You see I'm too busy to be bothered by cranks, but there's something about this letter that seems genuine—ah, you would? Well, yes. He referred me to you... Begged I would communicate with you before refusing to see him. All right, Ginger, and I'll scalp you if he turns out a fraud or a bore—I'm rather out of practice, but I'll give you a round on Sunday. Yes, thanks, she's well. Good-bye."

He hung up the receiver and turned to the secretary, who was standing by silently, "Very good. Wire this man and tell him I will see him at two o'clock tomorrow. No, there's nothing else just now." The secretary turned away, and as he reached the door, Sir Miles looked up from his papers. "Oh! tell him to be punctual," and before the door had closed he was deep in his work again.

That same afternoon Barry reached his home after a weary round. Madam Kitty, all concern for his welfare, met him in the doorway. "Very tired, Dick?" she asked. Barry laughed lightly. "I've felt fresher in my time, Kit. Anything turned up?"

"Come and have a cup of tea first," she answered, It was a rule of Kitty's that her man should have his tea in the afternoon, unworried, and it was not until he had finished that she placed a telegram in his hand. "This came just before you got back."

Barry opened the message. "Sir Miles Glover will see Doctor Barry at two to-morrow afternoon, twenty-third. Please be punctual." Dick read, and handed the paper across to Kitty. She read the paper, and looked over at him, her eyes two big notes of interrogation.

"Listen, Kit. There's something very wrong going on. I've not worried you with it. In fact, I couldn't very well. I wrote to the Prime Minister, asking him for an interview, and that's the answer. I'm going down to Melbourne by tonight's train, and you'll be the only one who will know I have gone. But, little woman, there are most urgent reasons (some day I'll tell you all about it) why my movements are to be kept secret. I won't take the train at Glen Cairn; I'll drive down to Ronga, and get it there. If

you should be asked by anyone, mind, even your dearest friend, I have been called to Ronga on an urgent case." He took the telegram from her fingers, and slipped it into his pocket wallet.

"But, Dick, may I not know?"

"Not just now, Kitty, for your own sake."

She rose swiftly, and went over to him. "Dick! There is some trouble, some danger. Dick, what is it?"

He took her outstretched hands. "Trust me, Kitty. I don't think there is danger, but there may be annoyance," he lied carefully. "It is better at present that you know nothing, then you will not be worried."

"How long?" she asked with a sigh.

"Oh! Cheer up, Kit. I'll be able to get the night train back to-morrow, so I'll be here early on the following morning. Will that do, Storm Bird?"

She smiled back at him. "I suppose it must, though I know you have had loads on your mind lately."

"We'll let it go at that, Kit," he said lightly. "No one called?"

Whereat his wife sprang to sudden attention. "Oh, Dick, I'm positively idiotic to have forgotten. Marian Seymour is here."

Barry looked round. "Here—where?"

"It was after the telegram came. Dick, she was looking wretched. She asked for you, and seemed upset because you were away. She drove in, so I persuaded her to have the horse put in the stable, and a little while ago I managed to get her to lie down until you came back. She's in the spare room."

"Is she ill?" asked Barry.

His wife looked at him a moment, and then looked away. "It's not fair to give a girl away, Dick; anyway her complaint isn't recognisable by the faculty. It's a broken heart, Dick. Oh! I should like to tell Alan Dundas what I think of him."

"Steady, Kit; don't jump to conclusions. I know it's a bad business, but Dundas is not so bad as you give him credit, or discredit, for. As for the rest—well, a broken heart—" He broke off abruptly. "I'd better see her at once."

"Here?" asked Kitty.

"No, bring her to the surgery," and Barry passed into the next room. A few minutes later Kitty followed him, leading Marian, and then at a glance from Dick, she disappeared, leaving the two together.

Barry placed the girl in a comfortable chair, and seated himself at his table. He felt as he glanced at her that it was a case more for a diplomat than a doctor. He saw that she was holding herself in hand, and that the

calm exterior covered a mental tempest. She kept her face turned partly away, and her eyes were hidden by their long lashes, but the dark shadows below them told their tale of sustained endurance.

"Marian," he said presently, "am I wrong in thinking that you want a friend's advice rather than a doctor's?" She flashed a grateful glance at him, and smiled faintly. "You see, Marian, we are used to hearing things that are kept from even your nearest and dearest, and it helps to make us wise. What can I do for you?"

She was silent a moment. "I told Kitty you were an understanding dear, Doctor Dick, and I do want a friend's advice. I'm desperately worried."

"Let's hear the trouble, Maid Marian, but take your time; there's no need for hurry." He crossed over, and took a chair closer to her.

For a few minutes the girl seemed irresolute, then she spoke suddenly, as though taking the plunge in desperation. "I wanted to talk to you about Alan Dundas"—She broke off, but, gathering courage, went on again. "I am terribly anxious about him. It's hard to explain to anyone, but I feel that he is in some terrible danger. Oh! I am sure of it. I've no right to interfere, and I don't know what you'll think of me, Doctor Dick, but I feel that you know more than anyone else, and you can guide me. Tell me, have you seen him lately?"

Barry took the outstretched, trembling hands in his strong grasp. "I feared that was the trouble, Marian, and I don't know what to say to reassure you. I have seen Alan quite recently, but I have not been to 'Cootamundra' for some time. I can tell you that up to a few days ago he was safe and well."

She looked up at him suddenly. "Tell me, on your word of honour, that you, too, are not anxious about him, and I will believe you."

Barry mentally anathematised the deadly intuition of the sex. There was no evasion possible under the clear, steady eyes. Indeed, she did not wait for an answer. "I knew it, and you fear because of that woman. Oh! she is terrible. I hate her! I hate her!"

There was something deeper than mere jealousy in the outburst, and Barry recognised the note. It was that of a woman in love at bay, and fighting for the man she loved. He spoke gently. "One thing I can assure you of, Marian, and that is that he is in no danger from her. I know that she wishes for nothing but his welfare. How far her influence may affect his future I cannot say, but I know she would not willingly harm him."

The girl stood up and turned away. "Oh! Dick, I know you are right. I know she loves him. I know he loves her, but it is her influence that I

fear." She sank into a chair by the table, and buried her face in her hands, and a few minutes passed in silence that was broken by the girl speaking suddenly and desperately. "Oh! why should I be ashamed to say it? You must see it, Dick. I love him too. Don't think he is to blame." Her words came in a torrent now that the barrier of reserve had broken down. "He is not to blame. How could he help loving her? How could any man help it? Oh! she is so beautiful; the most beautiful thing God ever made, and the most evil. I feel it. Oh! Dick, what hope had I to win him against her? And yet, Dick, he loved me, I know it, before she came and took him from me, but for all that, if I thought she would make him happy, I could stand aside and see them together, and thank God that he was happy. Yes, Dick, though it would kill me, I could stand aside, for I love him that much."

"Perhaps we are both wrong, Marian. I admit that I'm a little anxious, but she cares for him very much, I know."

"Dick, I may as well tell you everything, but I'm afraid you'll think my anxiety has affected my reason. But first tell me, who is she? Where did she come from? You know, I am sure."

Barry looked at her in deep perplexity. How could he explain? Explanation at the moment was out of the question. "I'm afraid, Marian, that the secret of her history is not mine to disclose; at any rate, not now." He turned his eyes away from the searching gaze of the girl.

She sighed and thought for a moment before she spoke. "Dick, I saw her last night and spoke to her."

Barry sat erect in astonishment. "You have seen and spoken to her?" he said incredulously. "Where?"

"In my own room at home," said the girl quietly. Then, mistaking the expression in Barry's eyes, she protested: "Don't think I was dreaming, Dick, or that I imagined it. She was really there."

Barry waved aside the protest. "I understand, Marian. Indeed I feel sure you have not been dreaming. I was surprised for the moment that she had gone to you. But—"

"But what?"

Barry smiled grimly. "It just occurred to me that it was folly on my part to think that I could gauge either her motives or her intentions. Tell me what happened."

The girl looked at him thoughtfully. "It is only because you know her that I am telling you this. I would not dare to tell anyone else. Even now, after I have thought it over quietly, it seems too fantastic to be real. Last night it was late when I went to my room. You know our house, with the

French windows opening onto the verandah. I always sleep with the windows open. I had put out my lamp, but there was a night-light burning. For a long time I could not sleep. I was thinking of that woman and who she could be. I think I must have dozed. You know last night was dark, but very clear and calm. There was absolutely not a breath of wind. Then suddenly I became wide awake. One does sometimes, you know, without apparent cause. I did not move, but lay quite still. Then—Dick—the curtains of my window moved, not as in a draught, but as though someone had touched them. But I could see through quite distinctly, and there was no one there. Then they were drawn apart. Dick, it was just awful. I could see them gathered together on each side as though two hands had caught them, and they stood wide apart for, it seemed, an age. It was as though someone were standing in the window holding back the curtain looking down at me. But I could see distinctly, and there was nothing there. Then they fell together again, but every nerve and fibre of me told me that there was some being in the room."

"That was pretty awful, Maid Marian," said Barry quietly. "What did you do?"

The girl gave a little shiver. "What could I do? I lay there looking through my half-closed eyelids, and I seemed frozen. I didn't have the strength to scream. It was too like a nightmare. Then—oh! Dick, tell me that you believe what I am saying. I don't want to go on if you think it was all nerves and imagination."

Barry patted her arm gently. "Tell me all, Marian. I understand. I know it was all real."

She hesitated a moment. "Then, Dick, she suddenly appeared. One moment the room was empty except for myself, and the next that woman was standing beside my bed looking down at me." She stopped and looked at him anxiously. "It happened just as I tell you, Dick."

Barry nodded. "I expected what you were going to say, Marian. I know and understand. Go on."

"For a moment I was too astounded to move, though I knew in an instant who she was. Then—it may seem strange to you—but all the fear vanished. I think the only feeling I had was anger that she should have dared to come to me like that. I didn't think to be amazed at how she had come. It was just anger that she was there at all. I know I started, and half sat up with my elbow on the pillow, looking at her. And we just stayed like that for a minute without a word. Then she let her hood slip back from her head, and I could see her quite distinctly in the glow from the night-light." She stopped, and looked at Barry, smiling faintly.

"Women are queer creatures, Dick. I had seen her that day on the tennis-courts, and I knew she was beautiful, and as I lay there looking at her, one half of me was worshipping her for her beauty, and the other half of me was hating her for it. Oh! Dick, she looked perfectly lovely. I would not speak first. I waited for her. She stood there looking at me with those big inscrutable eyes of hers for so long before she spoke that I felt almost ready to scream; it seemed as if she were staring into my very soul. Then she said very quietly, as if it were merely a matter of no moment: 'I did not think it possible for one woman to hate another as you hate me. I hoped we might have been friends.' I was furious, Dick, because she seemed so absolutely unmoved, but I think I spoke as quietly as she did when I answered, 'You are right; I wish I could tell you how much I do hate you.' And then she gave that slow, thoughtful smile of hers: 'Ah, there is no need to try. I know; yes, I knew even better than you know yourself. And yet I came as a friend.' It was queer, Dick, for I knew she meant it when she said she came as a friend; yet that seemed to make me even more angry. I wanted to hurt her. 'Do you fear that he will leave you as he has left me? He will tire of your beauty. Have you nothing else to offer him?' Dick, it was simply cattish, nothing else, and I knew it while I spoke, and I felt mean."

Barry smiled and shook his head. "It would take heavier metal than that to worry, her, Marian."

The girl was silent for a moment, and then said, wearily: "Oh, I knew that at the time. She seemed so absolutely self-assured and aloof, I felt as though she did not belong to this world, and I was a puny mortal fighting an immortal." It was as well she did not see the look on Barry's face as she said this. "But it didn't matter; she only smiled again in that pitying way that hurt me more than if she had struck me. Then she said, 'Even yet I am your friend, and I have come to help you.' I said: 'You help! You! Can you give him back to me?' Dick, it didn't occur to me till afterwards that I'd only seen her once before for a few minutes, and that I'd never spoken to her before, and yet, although no name was ever mentioned, we both understood. She thought for a moment, and then she said: 'I could not give him back. Always his memory of me would stand between you; but I can make you forget. Yes, I can make you forget him and ease the pain of memory. Although you hate me so.' I could take nothing from her, not even that, and I felt sure that she could do as she said. I sat up and faced her. 'No, I will have no gift of yours. Who you are or what you are I cannot tell, but this I feel in my very soul, that you will bring him evil and sorrow. His very love for you and yours for him will

wreck your lives. If I must live for ever in pain, I will do so rather than take your friendship." Barry interposed gently, "Were you wise to refuse, Marian? I know she could have done it."

The girl shook her head impatiently. "What does it matter. Dick? It is over now. She—yes, I know she could. I knew what I had refused when I looked up into her calm, lovely face. I knew she wanted to be my friend; but I couldn't, I couldn't; and she only said, 'It is written. I will go now, you poor foolish child,' and as she spoke she stepped backwards to the window, and passed through the curtain, and I was alone again." Then, after a pause, Marian went on again. "Dick, I don't know what mystery surrounds that woman. I think you do; but this I feel, that she is something to fear; something for Alan to fear, too, instead of to love. Oh! Dick, can you not help me to get him away from her—to help him?"

Barry shook his head sadly. "Marian, I wish I could help. But you must believe me when I tell you we are both powerless. I cannot tell you anything about her yet. Her story is incredible, but this you may know, that to my mind she is more dangerous even than you can imagine." He saw the look of pain in her eyes, and went on hastily. "Not to Alan. I do not mean that, for I do not think she would harm him; she cares too much for him. But the danger from her is for others."

"Surely Alan can see it. Surely you can make him see it," she said with a sob in her voice.

"Alan can see no wrong in her," said Barry, grimly. "You, who have seen her, cannot wonder at that."

Marian smiled faintly. "The queen can do no wrong."

"Exactly," said Barry, emphatically. "The worst of it is that I know that she would not hesitate to kill without mercy or scruple if she should be interfered with, and that's why I feel anxious about you, Marian, more so than for him. You must wait to see how things turn out." He paused for a moment. "There is one chance, and I am going to take it. I am telling you this because I know you won't repeat it, because if you do it may cost me my life; but I will know on the day after to-morrow; and I will see you again then. Until then you must be patient." She looked at him anxiously. "Dick, may I not help? May I not take this risk?"

He shook his head. "No, I must work alone. I can only ask you to be brave, until I know the best or the worst."

"Would she really kill, Dick?" Marian asked, quietly.

Barry smiled. "I only tell you this because you know her—a little, and I wish you to be forearmed. I know she would kill, if she thought fit, and

we are absolutely helpless against her. So, Marian, you must wait; there is nothing else to be done. If you can help in any way I will tell you."

The girl stood up. "It is good to talk it over with someone, Dick. I could not go to mother, even, with this story."

"I'm afraid I've given you no comfort, Marian, but I want you to guard yourself, and not do anything reckless. If anything comes of my plan I will let you know."

They went into the next room, and Barry handed over his charge to Kitty, and busied himself making his preparations for his journey.



# Chapter 30

ON the morning following at 'Cootamundra,' Dundas and Earani were astir early. That day was to see the end of their preparation of the galleries, and on the following day they were to bring the parts of their airship to the surface to be assembled. Indeed, their preparations were complete, and their work for the day was mainly one of inspection and revision, to see that nothing necessary had been forgotten.

When Dundas reached the "temple" Earani was already at work, and greeted him gaily. On the table stood a large chest, in which she was packing sundry phials and boxes, which, she told him, contained food for two for a year. Not that it would be wanted, for there were ample supplies in the other sphere, but they must leave nothing to chance. Then she gave him a long robe to be worn over his clothes. It was made of a very light, but thick, material. "Our journey will be a very cold one, beloved, and that robe will be your protection. Put it on now, and see what will happen." Obedient to her wish, he wriggled himself into its soft folds, and in a moment stood before her transformed into the likeness of a monk, even to the cowl which she drew over his head. She looked at him, smiling, and said, "Now wait a few minutes," and as he waited he found a warm glow set up through his body, that increased every minute, until it became uncomfortably hot, and he was glad to rid himself of it before he had worn it five minutes. "You will be glad to wear it later, Alan. Indeed, our journey would be almost impossible without these robes. The heat is caused by chemical action, and with them we can defy the bitterest cold of those mountains, and work in comfort and safety."

Dundas tossed the garment to a chair. "There is one thing you have not told us, most wonderful," he said, taking her hand. "We will be away from 'Cootamundra' for an indefinite time. How will you guard what we leave behind? It would not do for intruders to find their way in during our absence."

She nodded her head. "That is so, Alan, and I have not forgotten. Come, and I will show you." She led the way to the machinery gallery,

where parts of the airship littered the gangways in apparent disorder, and came to a halt before a pedestal bearing a metal box measuring about a foot each way. Earani placed her hand upon it, and said, "It doesn't look much, Alan, but this will be our watchdog, and not all the armies in the world would overcome it without knowing its secret." She raised the lid, and disclosed half-a-dozen screws and knobs protruding from an inner cover. "It's merely a variation of the gravity machine that will carry us to Andax. We will carry a similar one with us, and leave this one in the shed on the surface. Before we leave I will set it to a radius, of, say half a mile, and the one we carry with us will be adjusted in the same manner."

"And then," asked Dundas, "what happens?"

"Just this. As our machine recedes from the one we leave behind, the stationary one throws out a repelling force over the area to which it is adjusted, and within the boundaries of that area no earthly force could penetrate?" She paused as she saw the perplexity in Alan's face. "It is difficult to make it clear, but it is as though the force of gravity were inverted. A man, or a thousand men, could no more push their way over the line of repulsion than they could spring into the air and remain there, and the nearer the centre the more intense the repulsion. There is nothing to see or feel. There is just an inert, impalpable force that cannot be overcome until our machine again neutralises it."

Dundas laughed lightly. "That will be something in the way of a surprise for any unauthorised investigator, dear heart. Dick Barry, for instance, would wonder what had happened if he tried to cross the line in his motor-car during our absence. I must write and warn him."

Earani nodded, smiling. "Yes, you had better, though he would be more surprised than hurt if he charged the line of resistance. In our time the use of these repellers was forbidden by law except under certain circumstances."

"But why?" asked Dundas.

"Well," she answered, "unless the spot were buoyed or marked there would be nothing to show there was a repeller in action, and, with a population that used the air to the extent that we did, an unmarked area left too many openings for trouble. An airship travelling at three hundred miles an hour would crumple up as if it had struck a rock. So, you see, there was some necessity for restrictions." Dundas smiled thoughtfully. "Yes; in that case Dick had better be warned; but it would be rather interesting to watch someone trying to claw his way through. However, it's a comfort to know we can leave the place unguarded."

They turned away to their work, and it was after midday before they returned to the "temple" for a rest. Earani had saved Alan the trouble of bringing food with him when he spent the day in the sphere, for their meal consisted of a tabloid or two, and he had become accustomed to this unusual means of nourishment, though he could not reconcile himself altogether to the absence of that feeling of good fellowship that comes with the meal eaten in the company of a friend.

This day found them in thoughtful mood. When they reached the "temple" Dundas went to a couch and drew Earani down beside him, and circled her with his arms. For a long time they stayed in silence, cheek pressed to cheek in a happiness so complete that neither cared to break the spell. It was Earani who broke the silence at last. "If we work very hard to-morrow, Alan, I think we will be able to leave on the evening of the following day. In four days from today we should be able to number Andax as a friend and an ally."

Dundas sighed. "I'm foolish, perhaps, heart's desire, but I fear that unknown Andax. Fear, I mean, that he might come between us."

"Oh, foolish one, you are," she said, laughing. "He will need you almost more than he will need me, and he dare not break the vow he is under. Apart from that, he will need my help too much to come between me and my desire." Her soft hand stroked his hair tenderly. "Andax will regard our love, perhaps with cynical amusement, that would be like him, but he will tolerate it for his own ends. Forget your fears, Alan." She broke off suddenly and sat up. "Would you like to see him now?" Dundas looked at her in perplexity. "No, Earani, how can I see him now?"

"Oh! I can show him to you," she answered merrily. "I was looking at him only yesterday. More magic—come, and we will inspect the great Andax as he is waiting for us." She stood up and took his hand. "Hurry! Hurry!" she went on, laughing like a school girl, and drew him after her, through the vestibule to the third gallery. There she paused before a great circular disc set in the wall. Below it was a keyboard bristling with keys and levers. Between the disc and the keyboard were set an array of staring dials.

Earani waved her hand towards the disc. "Now we will see some real magic. Behold!" Her white hands fluttered over the keyboard and pressed a gleaming button. In an instant the dark face of the disc vanished, leaving a white polished metal surface in its place. She turned to him smiling. "The window of the world, Alan. Now, watch." Her hand moved swiftly here and there over the board. "Thirty-six, thirty-two north, and seventy-four eighteen east," she said aloud. The metal surface

flashed into life, and blurred shadows danced across its surface. The shadows took shape, and Dundas uttered an exclamation as he watched. It seemed as if he were looking through a window into a new world; a world of titanic desolation; mountains heaped on mountains of snow and ice. There were cloud-swept peaks and snow-blocked ravines, and across them all swept a devastating storm. Earani turned and smiled at him. "We will need our warm robes, Alan. You were right about this place; Alan; it has changed since I knew it."

"What is it?" he asked, bewildered.

"That is the spot where Andax lies," she answered. "Only he is somewhere below; not far. Look where that roundness shows on the cliff below. That is the side of the sphere that is only partly buried. Now we will go deeper." Again her hands moved amongst the keys. This time more delicately than before, and as she did so the disc darkened again and again flashed into light.

"Now!" she exclaimed, "I have it. Watch!" The blurred shadows on the disc took shape, indistinctly at first, as if in a lens out of focus. Then the picture flashed clearly into view, and Dundas gave a gasp of astonishment and was silent. Mirrored on the disc, so clearly that it seemed as if they were looking through a sheet of clear glass, there showed the interior of a great room. It was in many details similar to the "temple" they had just left, but it was the "temple" as he had first seen it. Right before them in the centre of the picture showed the crystal dome, and beneath it a figure was lying enthroned. After the first glance Dundas saw nothing but that still, majestic form. Andax was lying with his head pillowed as had been Earani.

A crimson cover had been thrown across his body, but the arms lay outside rigidly on either side. Naturally above ordinary height, he seemed in his recumbent position a veritable giant. But it was the likeness of his face to that of the statue in the vestibule that appealed to Dundas most. There was the same high, round forehead and thin, aquiline nose. There was the straight, almost lipless mouth and the square, firm chin. But seen in the flesh, even lying as though in death, the figure before him filled Dundas with awe. There was about it an indescribable air of majesty and power. Dundas realised, the longer he stood there, that in the face of Andax was intensified every feature of his ancestor that bespoke immense, almost immeasurable, intellectual force.

When Dundas spoke at last it was in a whisper, as if he feared that his voice might break in on the rest of the still form before him. "Oh, Earani, he is wonderful beyond words. What a man! What a man!"

She smiled and nodded. "No need to tell whose blood he bears, Alan. Eukary arranged that one branch of his line should be kept pure. If one wanted proof of how our race bred itself one need only point to the statue and then to Andax."

Alan answered, still almost in a whisper: "No doubt of that, but he is a greater man than Eukary."

"Yes, Alan, twenty generations better and finer. The brain is bigger and better, but—" She paused.

"Well?" he asked, his eyes still on the figure beneath the dome.

"We found that in breeding to a line like that"—she nodded towards the recumbent figure—"what we gained in one direction we lost in another."

Dundas turned to look at her. "Lost, dearest? What was lost?"

Earani thought for a moment, and then said, slowly: "You would call it soul; we had a word that meant 'spirit force.' They became more and more human machines. Magnificent, but had our world lasted longer, I think the line would have been broken. There was a point beyond which we dared not take it. He"—she waved her hand towards the disc—"he could control himself. Perhaps in a generation more the mere machine would have been stronger than the spirit."

"And then?" asked Dundas.

"And then it would have been better for all concerned to obliterate the whole line."

"A pity," said Dundas, "but necessary, I suppose."

Earani looked down at the quiet figure before them. "Yes," she repeated slowly, "a pity, but necessary. I have heard him discuss the matter himself, and say that but for the sake of the experiment the line should be carried no further, or that the blood should be diluted." She laughed lightly. "Always with his breed it was the 'experiment': the sufferer did not matter. It will be a good thing that he will have plenty of experiment to occupy his time for a good many years to come."

"It is very wonderful, dearest," said Dundas presently, looking up at her. "I feel almost as if he could hear us speak, that reflection is so real." For answer Earani drew over a lever and turned to him. "So he could now, Alan, were he awake, and, what is more, we could hear him if he spoke."

Dundas smiled. "I believe it because I must, but it seems incredible."

"Why incredible?" she asked. "A hundred years ago your ancestors would have had more reason to doubt your telephone or telegraph had it been described to them. It is only a question of applied science—science

greater than your own. I will prove it." Again, in answer to her touch, the disc darkened, and once again the blizzard-torn landscape flashed into sight, but this time, as the vision cleared, there came to them the howling roar of a tempest. It was uncanny to stand and watch the storm, and hear it, too, in the calm, still atmosphere of the gallery—hear it so plainly that when he tried to speak Alan's voice was lost in the mighty uproar, until, with a touch of her hand, Earani stilled the sound.

She smiled at him. "We could hear a whispered word as easily, but the storm was the only sound I could get for you then," and, as she spoke, her hands blotted out the scene, and in a moment nothing but the polished disc remained.

"Tell me, Earani," he asked, "could you show any part of the world as easily?"

"Just as easily," she answered. "Near or far, it makes no difference. That instrument was called by us a name that means the 'window of the world.' Two friends ten thousand miles apart could stand face to face to speak with one another."

Dundas laughed. "It would be a joke to find Barry and speak to him. Could he hear us?"

Earani nodded. "We could both hear and see him, but he could only hear us."

Again Dundas laughed. "Dick would think we were spooks. It would be a lark to find him. Could you, dearest?"

Earani's eyes flashed mischief as she caught the infection from Alan. She nodded her head and turned again to the machine. "It can be done," she replied. "Hold this firmly," and she placed his left hand on a lever. "Now, take my left hand in your right—so now concentrate your mind on Dick, think of nothing else." Her right hand touched lever and button, and the mirror flashed into blurred life. Minute after minute went by, and the dull flickering images danced over the metal surface. Earani kept her eyes on the disc anxiously for a while, then she turned suddenly to Dundas. "Alan, had you heard that Dick was leaving Glen Cairn?"

"I have not seen him for days," Alan replied, "but I don't think it likely he would go. Why do you ask?"

"Because," she answered quickly, "I have covered the country for a radius of fifty miles, and he is not within that radius or he would have shown on the disc."

"You are sure, dearest?"

"Absolutely," she answered. "Can you think where he would be likely to go?"

Dundas paused before replying. "Unless he has gone to Melbourne for some purpose of other. I can think of nowhere else."

Earani looked at Dundas thoughtfully. "Alan, you gave him my warning?"

"Of course, Earani. You don't think—" He broke off as a sudden suspicion crossed his mind.

"Melbourne. Yes; Melbourne, is that not where your Government is?" she asked, and then a slow smile came to her lips. "Yes, Alan, I do think. Indeed, I am almost sure that Dick is trying to make trouble. Well," she went on after a pause, "we shall see. How far away is Melbourne?"

"About two hundred miles," answered Dundas. "Still, Earani, I trust Dick. He would not act treacherously towards us."

Earani shook her head. "He would not for his own gain, Alan, but Dick is troubled by a conscience, and I fear that conscience will make him forget his friendship to you and his promise to me, too."

"You will not harm him, dearest?" pleaded Dundas with a note of alarm in his voice.

She smiled before answering "He was warned, Alan, but unless he has committed himself too far, or has placed himself beyond pardon, he may escape the punishment he deserves, but we will see. We cannot risk interference during the next day or two. Take the lever again."

Dundas obeyed, and once more the flickering light and shade played across the disc, and presently Dundas caught fleeting glimpses of familiar landmarks in the great city. One moment he saw, as if from a great height the granite spans of Prince's Bridge with the vista of gardens in the background. Then, for a second, the dome of the Law Courts swung into view. Then a moment later came across the screen the stately facade of the Federal Houses of Parliament, with their flight of steps. Here the image on the disc paused for a minute and then blurred again. Then Dundas, with a catch in his breath, heard Earani's voice. "Alan, we are close to him now. Remember, not a sound. He could hear the lightest whisper when his figure appears in the reflector."

Dundas nerved himself for he knew not what. Some instinct told him he was standing on the verge of a tragedy. He felt a warning pressure on his hand, and then, in a moment, the mirror cleared. Even prepared as he was, had not Earani's hand, now free from the levers, closed swiftly over his lips, a cry must have broken from him at the revelation before them.

Clearly on the disc showed the interior of a large room, with two men seated at a table. One of these was Barry, and the other, although Dundas had never seen him, he knew to be Sir Miles Glover, and, as if

nothing were wanting to complete the damning picture, on the table between them, in a glorious fiery mass, lay the great diamond belt that Earani had given to Barry.

Even as the picture flashed up, Barry turned and looked nervously round as if some sound had startled him. They saw the anxious, worried lines of his face quite clearly, before he turned away, for he sat with his back to them, facing the Prime Minister. Then his voice came so naturally and distinctly, that again only the restraining hand of Earani prevented Dundas from startling the two reflected figures.

"I must ask you to overlook my nervousness, Sir Miles, but if you knew as much about Earani as I do you would know I have cause for it. I cannot guess the extent of her powers or her resources, and if she knew I had betrayed her, for it is a betrayal, well, I don't think I would have long to live."

Then came the clear, incisive voice of Sir Miles. "No need to apologise, Dr. Barry. You have told me enough to make me feel that my position would be no more secure than your own."

"I blame myself for that, Sir Miles," answered Barry, "but, as you know, my position became intolerable. You were my last hope."

The grim face across the table relaxed into a slight smile. "I came in with my eyes wide open, doctor, and if we are both on rather thin ice, well, it's a duty neither of us dare shirk. Still, I hope your fears of that lady's activities are exaggerated. If not, well, it can't be helped. One thing we must do at all costs, and that is, we must stop those two from leaving the country. No question of life or death—ours or theirs—can stand in the way of that." Alan's eyes turned to Earani, and she saw the strain of anxiety in them, and with a swift and silent movement of her hand the mirror dulled and cleared.

For a moment after the strain, it seemed almost unreal to Alan to find himself standing in the gallery alone with Earani. It was when he looked into her eyes again that fear came into his heart. For the first time since he had known her he saw a look of anger in her face. Regally, splendidly lovely, she faced him. "You heard, Alan? Treachery—a betrayal—he acknowledged it. He plots with that other for our very lives."

His hand caught hers eagerly. "Beloved, oh beloved! I know he is guilty, but he is my friend. You will spare him. You will, Earani, for me. You will spare him," for he saw death in those glorious angry eyes, and even as he spoke and she looked back at him, the glance softened, and she sighed. Then a soft smile came to the adorable lips, and she shook her head. "Oh, Alan, Alan. It is not right to plead to me like that, but I



will show you I am not merciless. Though he has earned his death I will spare him." Then her soft bell-like laughter rippled through the gallery as he caught her passionately in his arms. "But, Alan, beloved, I will not promise that he shall escape altogether. I will give our Dick a lesson; yes, a lesson he will remember. He will know that it will not be good to interfere in the future."

Presently she freed herself from the arms that encircled her. "But Alan, I have no time to lose. I must catch those two together, and I must move swiftly. Leave me now, and go to your home and wait for me. I will be away perhaps for a few hours."

Dundas pressed her hand to his lips before he turned away "I am content, dear heart, I will be waiting for you and counting every moment until you are with me again."

# Chapter 31

THAT night Barry had driven down to Ronga, and left his car at an hotel, giving himself bare time to catch the night mail for Melbourne. Although he had a compartment to himself, he made no attempt to sleep, but passed the long hours in settling in his mind the story he was to tell the Prime Minister. He knew he must marshal his main points in proper order, for his auditor would be the most critical and the most difficult man to satisfy in Australia. By the time in the early morning, however, that the train rolled slowly into Spencer Street station he had satisfied himself, and felt fully armed for the coming interview.

He had brought with him only a rug and a small handbag, and with these he crossed from the station to Carlyon's, and procured a bedroom. He explained that he had been awake all night, and went immediately to his room, and, after leaving word that he was to be called punctually at midday, he turned in, and in spite of his anxiety slept soundly until a hammering at his door warned him that it was nearly time for action.

He took a hot bath and dressed himself at his leisure, and by the time he had finished his luncheon it was twenty minutes to two. Then, bag in hand, he strolled out into Bourke Street and entered a tram at the terminus. Not one of the dozen passengers took more than a casual glance at the quietly dressed figure in the corner, and Barry, looking round, smiled quietly to himself at the thought of what effect a full knowledge of his mission might have on them. How would the stout well-dressed citizen opposite him look had he been aware that in the bag resting on the seat beside Barry were jewels to the value of half a million or more? Scarce one of the thronging thousands in the street as that tram went through even glanced at it, though, unknown to them, it was bearing the fate of the world.

By five minutes to two Barry had climbed the long flight of steps before the Federal House, and entered the building with the secretary's telegram in his hand as a passport. Although outwardly cool, his heart was moving faster than usual, and at the head of the steps he looked back nervously. He had tried to reassure himself that his fears were

groundless, but over and over again came the thought of Earani. He had no illusions as to her views of his action should he be detected, and very little doubt as to his fate. He made no attempt to excuse himself for the course he was taking. That he was violating a solemn promise he did not attempt to disguise from himself. Even at the last moment, while he waited the coming of the secretary, when he might still have withdrawn, no thought of weakening in his purpose entered his mind.

Then the secretary came forward. "Doctor Barry?" he asked, abruptly. Dick nodded. "Sir Miles is waiting. This way, please," and a moment later he stood in the presence of the Prime Minister.

Each man turned an inquisitive glance on the other, and Sir Miles waved his hand in the direction of the chair on the opposite side of the broad table at which he was seated. Dick took the seat indicated. The face before him was almost as familiar to him as his own, though he had never before seen the man himself. Not a week passed without some illustrated paper picturing the keen, clear-cut features and cold, almost ascetic face of the man who, practically single-handed, ruled the Commonwealth. After the first glance Barry's nervousness dropped from him, and the feeling took its place that here at last was the one man who had the brain to meet the problem that he had found insoluble. It was Sir Miles who spoke first.

"Doctor Barry, I am a very busy man, and it is not usual for me to grant an interview of this kind. All I ask of you is that you will not take up more of my time than is necessary." He spoke in a clear, incisive voice, but there was a note of encouragement in his words.

Barry met the keen eyes steadily. "Sir Miles," he answered, "before I can touch on my mission I must warn you that by sharing with me the knowledge of the matter I wish to put before you, you place yourself in grave personal danger. I cannot assume the responsibility of going further unless that point is perfectly clear to you."

For a moment the grey eyes seemed to bore into Barry's soul, then a shadow of a smile came to the corners of the wide mobile lips. "You have taken the right course to make me listen, Doctor Barry. I'll share the risk with you, whatever it may be."

"It is a very real risk, as I am afraid you will find before very long," said Barry seriously. "However, I will get down to business at once, but before I start I want you to hear me out. I will tell my story in the fewest possible words, and however incredible it may seem, I promise to back every word of it by tangible and incontrovertible proof."

"Very good. I promise not to interrupt," said Sir Miles with an inclination of his head.

Then Barry started his story. On his journey to Melbourne he had put it into shape, and in clear, brief sentences he told Sir Miles of his knowledge of Earani from the first day that Dundas had called in his aid until the last meeting he had had with Alan at the hospital. While he spoke the keen eyes scanned his face. At first there came into them an expression of cynical amusement, and once or twice Sir Miles seemed about to interrupt. Gradually the look of interest deepened. Barry knew that he was telling his story to the keenest and most deadly cross-examiner at the Australian bar. He knew that the listener had built up a great reputation by his faultless judgment of men's motives, and he took heart as he saw the incredulous expression in the questioning eyes give way first to interest and then to concentrated attention. "And so," wound up Barry, in conclusion, "I felt I could bear the responsibility no longer. I feel now that I should have spoken long ago. I have gained the wisdom that comes after the event, and I pray that it is not too late even now to prevent a terrible catastrophe."

As he ceased speaking, Sir Miles sat with his long white hands clasped on the edge of the table, and, with knit brows and tight-lipped mouth, stared straight before him for a long minute. Then with an abrupt toss of his head he came to life, and his voice as he spoke took on a note that had broken down many a carefully thought-out lying story. "Doctor Barry, if a man came to you with such a story, and asked you to accept it and to act on it, what would be your first request?"

"Some tangible proof," answered Barry bluntly.

"Exactly; some tangible proof," repeated Sir Miles, with lifted brows.

For answer Barry took his bag from the floor beside his chair and opened it. "This," he said, "was given to me by Earani as a present for my wife," and as he spoke he tossed the great diamond belt on to the table, where it lay in a heap of multi-coloured fire that filled the whole room with its flashing splendour. Now Sir Miles, the cold and immovable, unknown to all but a few intimate friends, had stored away at the back of his sphinx-like calm an intense love of the beautiful. His collection of rare and splendid gems was his only hobby, and it was woe to the dealer who tried to impose on his judgment.

For the moment he regarded the blazing mass of light before him with incredulous eyes. Then slowly he drew it towards him and passed it link by link through his fingers, studying each stone and its setting from a dozen angles. For ten minutes he sat in silence, never lifting his eyes

from the flaring wonder in his hands. Then at last he spread it at full length on the table before him, and looked up at Barry. "Have you any conception of the value of this?" he asked, with a whimsical smile.

Dick shook his head. "The stones are real, though she said they were manufactured as an experiment." Sir Miles gave a sigh, and looking down at the shining mass said, "Well, manufactured or not, if we only possessed its value I should not worry any further over the deficit for the past financial year." Then he went on abruptly. "However, this," and he touched the belt lightly with his finger, "carries conviction if I am not dreaming. If I accept this as a reality I must accept your story."

"It is the merest trifle compared with what I could show you, provided I ever have the opportunity," Barry added the last words with shrug of his shoulders. Sir Miles looked at him with knit brows. "But, my dear sir, there would be no chance of this woman knowing of your visit to me. Are you not worrying yourself unnecessarily?"

"Tell me," asked Barry in return. "You accept my statement of the case?"

The Prime Minister's head bent slightly. "Doctor Barry, strange to say, I do; though," he went on, after a pause, "it is as well, perhaps, that some of my colleagues did not hear me make the admission."

"Well," continued Barry, "it would be serving you a very ill turn if I allowed you to under-estimate Earani. Some of her powers I do know. There are others I can only guess at vaguely. But this I do assure you, that I feel certain that she would be able to discover my whereabouts and put her hand on me here as easily as if I were in Glen Cairn."

There was a long silence while Sir Miles sat weighing Harry's words. Through the open window came the faint clang of tram-bells, and the hum of traffic outside seemed to accentuate the stillness of the room. Then Sir Miles spoke. "Quite an interesting programme, doctor. The total destruction of the coloured races in the world, and an absolute domination of the remaining white population by two people—one, most likely, if that precious gentleman in the Himalayas is let loose."

"That is the way I read it," answered Barry. "I've no doubt that Earani will become subservient to Andax, and then God help the world."

"How long do you think it will be before your friend Dundas and Earani will attempt to leave?"

"Not more than a day or two now, at the outside," answered Barry. "I believe if we can do anything it must be done within a few hours."

"What of Dundas?" was the next question. "Could we use him?"

Barry shook his head. "No hope. He is absolutely infatuated. If you saw her you would understand." He turned and looked nervously round as he spoke, and then, seeing the look in Sir Miles' eyes, he laughed shortly. "She might be in the room now, for all we know."

Again the Prime Minister thought deeply. "Then," he said presently, "to me it appears that force, or an attempt at force, would be hopeless. I mean civil or military force. Diplomacy is the only weapon left."

Barry nodded. "Any force brought against her would only mean useless bloodshed. Of that I am certain."

"And diplomacy?" Sir Miles queried. "You know it rests now between us."

"Our only chance, and a slender one. Remember, Earani believes that her mission in the world is sacred. What possible argument do you think we could bring forward to alter her ideas?"

The Prime Minister stared fixedly at the flashing jewels before him. Then he looked up at Barry before speaking. "Doctor Barry, suppose we knew a foreign Power to be on the point of launching a resistless attack on this country without a declaration of war. Suppose, again, we knew that by taking one life we could prevent that war and so save the lives of hundreds of thousands." He stopped and looked at Barry inquiringly.

"Justification?" Dick asked.

Sir Miles nodded. "Ample, in my mind—provided of course, that the case stands as you put it, and I have no doubt that it does."

Barry thought for a moment. "It's revolting, but I can see no other way. If it can be done—" He broke off for a moment. "It will mean Dundas, too. He would not live if he lost her."

Sir Miles drew open a drawer in his table and produced a heavy revolver, and looked at it carefully. "If anyone had told me this morning that I would be seriously considering an assassination this afternoon as a matter of policy, I'd—"

Barry broke in. "Listen, Sir Miles. You have shown me the way—the only way. For two of us to be involved in it would be folly. Leave the rest to me."

Sir Miles looked up with a smile. "No, doctor; we stand or fall together."

Barry answered calmly. "You must leave it to me. Consider the position. In the first place, if I brought you to 'Cootamundra' your very presence would arouse suspicion. Then again, if we fail, it would mean the death of both, and your life is too valuable to be thrown away like that. On the other hand, should I succeed, you will be alive, and in authority

here to protect, me, in a measure at any rate, from the legal consequences of my act. No, Sir Miles, my course is clear. You must leave the work to me."

The Prime Minister sat back in his chair, with his chin on his chest and his fingers on the edge of his table, in great perplexity. There was a short, gasping breath from Barry, and a whispered "My God!" And Sir Miles came back to himself with a start, and looked up. Midway between the table and the window stood the tall, cloaked figure of a woman. Not without justice had his enemies named Miles Glover "Cold Steel." Even at that moment Barry could not but feel a thrill of admiration at his splendid self-possession. Had such an occurrence been an hourly detail with him he could not have shown himself less moved. Not a line in his strong, clear-cut face altered. There was no trace of nervousness or anxiety visible as he sat watching the motionless figure of the woman. Earani was cloaked heavily from head to foot, and her face, hidden by its hood, was in the deepest shadow; but not even the shadow could hide the light in her eyes, and it was a light that boded ill for those that kindled it. There were a few moments' tense silence, during which Sir Miles Glover's hand fell lightly on the butt of the revolver that lay on the table before him.

Then Earani glided slowly forward and stood beside the table. From the first moment her eyes had never left those of Sir Miles. Barry she disregarded utterly. Bending forward slightly, she spoke, and her clear voice scarcely rose above a whisper. "Give me that weapon." The strong hand of the man seemed to close more firmly on it, but he made no other motion. There was a pause, and Earani bent closer. "Give me that weapon." Her voice did not alter, but there was a deadly intensity in her words. Barry watched, fascinated. It seemed as if the two were engaged in a mighty struggle. The Prime Minister's face set in tense lines, and his eyes met those of Earani undaunted. Once, twice, Barry saw the fingers close on the trigger, then the hand relaxed slightly. For the third time the clear, relentless voice cut in, "Give me that weapon." Sir Miles seemed struggling to speak, or to throw off the spell of those pitiless eyes that bound him. Barry saw that his forehead was damp, and that his breath came faster. Then, as if he had broken under an intolerable strain, his whole body seemed to relax suddenly, and with a hand that trembled he lifted the revolver by its barrel and held it towards Earani. Without moving her eyes from his for a moment, she took the weapon from his hand and tossed it from her across the room, where it clattered into a corner.

Then she stood erect again, and Sir Miles heaved a great sigh as of a swimmer who draws his first breath after a prolonged dive. Then, for the first time, she seemed aware of Barry's existence. He rose slowly to his feet and faced her; at least he thought she would not see him falter, whatever his fate might be. She spoke slowly and clearly: "You are alive now, and will live, not by any weakness or compassion of mine, but because the friend you would have betrayed has asked for your life. Otherwise you would have died an hour ago. Stand there." Her white hand pointed to the spot where she had first appeared, "and if you move, move but one inch, your life is finished." Barry backed slowly to the spot indicated and stood still. For a moment she regarded him with cold, contemptuous eyes, then turned back to Sir Miles, who had watched the scene breathless.

With a sweep of her hand she tossed the hood back from her face to her shoulders, and then sank into the chair Barry had left. As she did so, all trace of anger seemed to pass from her face, and there was a faint smile on her lips as she turned her grave grey eyes slowly to those of the Prime Minister, who had by this time entirely recovered his self-possession, and met her look without faltering.

"I think," she said coolly, "I can forgive almost any offence except treachery." Then, abruptly, "What is your name?"

"My friends," answered the statesman quietly, "call me Miles Glover."

"And your enemies?" There was no heat or malice in the soft inquiring voice.

Sir Miles shrugged his shoulders. "I am not interested in what my enemies call me," he said. "Why ask?"

She waved her hand in the direction the revolver had taken. "Was it a friend that plotted to kill me?" Then Barry saw Miles Glover at his best. Where a smaller man might have tried to temporise or equivocate, his answer came unhesitatingly. "There is not enough room in the world for you and me, Earani."

Earani's soft liquid laugh filled the room, and there came a look of admiration in her eyes. "Ah! that is well said, Miles Glover. I thought you would have lied. And so you would have killed me, and yet—if"—She spoke more to herself than to him. "And yet you are not a fool. What has Dr. Barry told you?"

"Enough for me to realise that for the world's sake you are better out of it than in it," he said bluntly.

"I said you were not a fool; but does a wise man do well to take the word of a fool for wisdom? Is there no more than one side to a question?"



"Scarcely more than one to this question."

"Why?"

"Tell me, is Dr. Barry right when he says that you have the means, and intend to use them, of destroying the coloured races of the world?" asked Sir Miles.

Earani answered without hesitation. "That is right, inasmuch as I intend to eliminate all that is unfit in the world."

"And," went on Sir Miles, "is he right when he says that you have the means, and will use them, of imposing your will and your own ideas of civilisation on the world?"

"That is my mission," she answered quietly, "and I regard it as a sacred mission."

"Then, that being the case, I repeat there is no more than one side of the question, and there is not room in the world for both of us."

Earani laughed softly. "Even tenacity of purpose can be overdone, Miles Glover. If one of us must leave the world, I will not be that one."

He placed his finger on the button on the table beside him. "What is there to prevent my having you placed under restraint?"

Again she laughed softly. "That would be a solution of your problem. The first person to enter this room would find two dead men, and nothing to show how they died. Come, we are not children, you and I. You had one chance, and you lost."

The hand fell back from the bell, and he looked at her keenly and thoughtfully. Earani spoke again as if in answering the unspoken thought. "No, Miles Glover; there is no way out that you can find. Surrender, and become an ally instead of an enemy."

"Never!" The terse answer came like the snap of a whip.

"Why?" she asked smoothly.

"Because as the head of the Government of this country I intend to uphold its laws. Apart from your hellish intentions of slaughter, your very existence threatens the destruction of all established order and authority. To parley with you for a moment would be treason."

"You cannot bring yourself to look at the question from my side?" she asked quietly.

"It would be unthinkable," he answered shortly.

"Listen, Miles Glover, and answer me this question. If it were possible for one human being to take the world, and at one stroke wipe out your progress for the past thousand years, and leave your civilisation where it stood when the Roman Empire had fallen, what would you do to prevent it? Would you kill that man as you meant to kill me?"

"There would as much justification in either case," he answered shortly.

"So! Now wait—I tell you this. What I can give your world, what I will give your world, will be immeasurably greater than what the world has won for itself during the past thousand years. Would that not be worth while?"

Sir Miles laughed shortly. "It has taken a thousand terrible years to win, so far. You would crush the experiences of those years into a century. The world would die of mental and moral indigestion. Your meat would be too strong for us."

Earani nodded comprehendingly. "It would be as you say, unless the medicine were administered scientifically, as it will be."

Sir Miles sighed deeply. "I believe you have powers that will make you almost omnipotent amongst us. Before you use them, stay your hand a while. Live amongst us. Learn our thoughts and our ideas. Study the forces that are moving us. Understand us a little more. Afterwards you may come to thank me for pleading for time. You may come to know that in waiting you have been saved from doing an incalculable wrong." He spoke with intense earnestness.

Earani stood up and let her cloak slip from her shoulders. Then she moved a little way from the table and stood looking down at him. "Look at me, Miles Glover," she said quietly. "Tell me, have you ever seen a human being such as I am?" There was no trace of coquetry or vanity in word or action, and the man knew it as he looked at her, standing proudly erect before him. He paused a moment before answering, and then nodded his head. "I did not think it were possible that humanity could be brought to such perfection." He spoke with simple sincerity. "But what does it prove?"

Earani stepped back to her chair and faced him again. "It proves this, that humanity can be made as I am. This world of yours is full of pain and misery. Is any price too great to pay to cure it? Is any price too great that buys a perfect and wholesome humanity? A humanity that is morally and physically free from infirmity? I tell you, Miles Glover, that I can and will carry out the trust that has been laid upon me. There is no power on earth that can stand in my way and escape destruction. You cannot even dream of the forces you would try to combat. You hold that to carry out my mission would be a crime. I hold that to fail in doing so would be a crime, and," she finished with grim earnestness, "my voice and my authority in this are final."

Sir Miles listened with bowed head to the relentless voice that he felt had passed sentence on the world. What he had heard from Barry gave him some idea of what Earani stood for in the world's future, but now, in the few minutes she had faced him, she herself had intensified a hundredfold his feeling of dismay at the prospect of her undisputed rule. It was not so much in what she had said as in the indescribable sense of power that surrounded her. He had felt the effect of the mighty will that had left him crushed and broken. He felt as she spoke that her words were no empty boast, and what she said she could do, she most surely would do if she wished. So it was with a feeling of hopelessness he spoke again.

"Supposing you are right," he said, looking up at her. "Allowing you can do all that you say. Even then you cannot act alone. With all your powers you must have help. Even this Andax that I hear of, and you, together, will want the advice and support of others. You must have those experienced in the ways of their world to help and guide you."

Earani nodded. "So now that you know that and understand it, we can talk on better terms. We must have men to help, and those must be the best of your race. That is why I said, 'Be our ally.'"

"And I answered before," said Sir Miles emphatically, "I would not."

She looked across at him and smiled. "That was because you thought that we were devils, when in reality we will be the world's greatest benefactors. Tell me, you who know this world and its men so well, would not it be better for you and for the world if you were on our side to help us with your knowledge and experience?"

For the first time a ray of hope came to Sir Miles. Perhaps here was a chance. If he could not avert the catastrophe he might at least lessen its force. "Would you accept my advice or trust me after to-day?" he asked. "Why not," she answered. "Would I blame you because that fool," she nodded towards Barry, "misled you. Miles Glover, what power have you here now that is not hampered at every turn by men who are unfit to stand beneath the same sky with you? Is it not that again and again your best plans for the good of this people have been wrecked to gratify the vanity or private ambition of some of your co-workers? I know that it is so. What could you not do with this country if you could rule it for its own good, and give it the best that is in you? Give it unselfishly as you have always done."

He looked up at her bright-eyed. "What you say is impossible."

For answer, Earani stood up and moved round the table to his side. He looked up at her wondering as she stood over him, with her eyes intently on his face. "How old are you, Miles Glover?" she asked quietly.

"Just fifty-two," he answered, smiling.

She placed her hand on his forehead, and bending his head back slightly, she looked intently into his eyes. "Fifty-two," she repeated, "and you have always treated this body of yours fairly, my friend, I should judge." She paused, and went on: "Fifty-two—well, I can give you another fifty, perhaps sixty years, of useful, vigorous life." She stepped back a few paces. "That offer is not merely empty words; I can and will make it come true if you wish." She paused for a moment.

"Think, fifty years of absolute power, backed and guided by ten thousand years of experience, and this people of yours to work for. To lay the foundation of a work that will knit them into a perfect humanity; a race that will eventually become without blemish, morally or physically. My friend, would such a work be the work of the fiends you would have us appear?"

Miles Glover looked at her with a new light in his eyes. "Tell me," he asked, "if I promise my help, would you leave this country to my guidance?"

She bent her head. "Absolutely. You will have it, subject to no other restrictions than the rules we will give you, and you will use your own discretion in enforcing them."

"And if I accept," he asked, "what will you do now?"

"For the time being I must leave here. There is other work to be done, but until I am ready you must forget you have even heard of me."

"Forget?" he said in amazement.

"Until I wish you to remember," she answered, smiling.

Sir Miles sat in silence, thinking deeply. Then Earani spoke again. "My friend, there are but two paths to choose between. The one will lead you to power such as you have never dreamed of. The other—well, you must see for yourself that I can leave no strong enemies in my path."

He looked up at her calmly. "Is that a threat?" She smiled back at him. "It is merely a statement of the case. I would far rather have you with me than remove you, as I must otherwise. You know too much now. I can take no risks."

"It makes no difference," he said quietly. "I had already made up my mind to accept."

"And you will never regret your decision, Miles Glover," she answered. "And now to forget until I am ready for your help."

"How forget? Could I ever forget?" he asked.

"You will," she said, stepping closer to him. "Look up at me. So. Now your hand." She took his outstretched hand in hers and bent over him. Then she commenced to speak softly in her own tongue, and as she spoke the light faded from his eyes, and his head sank forward slowly. Presently she ceased speaking, and stood looking down upon him. A moment later, and his face rested on his arm that lay outstretched on the table, and Miles Glover had forgotten.

Earani watched the unconscious figure for a few moments. Then she stooped forward and picked up the great jewelled belt that lay on the table, and clasped it about her waist. Only then did she turn towards Barry, who had watched the scene throughout with despair in his heart.

She walked up to him and looked at him reflectively. "I do not think I am wise to let you live, Richard Barry, but because it is Alan's wish I hold my hand. I will not even seal your lips as I have sealed his"— she nodded towards the table—"but this I do promise you. If now or at any other time you make one move against me, aye, or even think of one, then the punishment I have withheld today will overtake you." She walked towards the window and turned again. "It is my order that you return to your home tonight. You understand?"

"Yes," was the sullen answer; "I understand, Earani. I have failed."

"Go now," she said, "but remember, you are watched."

Barry took his bag from the table and turned towards her again, but Earani had vanished. With a shrug of his shoulders he paused for a moment to glance at the quiet form at the table, and then, heavy at heart, he left the room.

## Chapter 32

Meanwhile, at 'Cootamundra,' Dundas awaited impatiently the return of Earani. In implicit obedience to her wishes he had returned to the homestead. The afternoon wore on, and for some unaccountable reason a feeling of foreboding took possession of him. When he had come to the surface the sun was shining brightly and warmly, but shortly afterwards the southern sky gave signs of one of the sudden spring storms that were characteristic of the district. The light wind died away, and the creeping line of cloud rose higher, dulling the brightness, and over all fell the threatening stillness that heralded the outbreak.

Dundas paced to and fro in the drive, watching the sky with anxious eyes, and trying to battle with his nervous anxiety for Earani, and to shake off the feeling of depression that had fallen on him.

Then suddenly, as his eyes turned across the vineyard, he saw something that brought him to a halt with an exclamation of surprise and dismay. Unseen till that moment, a dogcart had turned from the main road into the lane approaching 'Cootamundra,' and it did not need more than one glance to tell him that the coming visitor was no other than Marian Seymour.

He stood his ground, watching the progress of the dogcart with increasing perplexity. The gate was too far away for him to open it for her. She would reach it long before he could. So he waited, racking his brain for some reasonable explanation of her visit.

As the dogcart drew nearer, and he could hear the beat of the pony's hoofs on the drive, he walked back to the verandah, and stood bare-headed. Marian swung the dogcart smartly round the curve, and came to a clattering halt before him. Without a word of greeting, she sprang down from her seat, not waiting for his assistance. Dundas stood in embarrassed silence as she faced him, still holding the reins in her hand.

"Alan," she said quietly, "will you tie my pony up for me? There will be no need to take him out of the shafts. I will wait here for you." Her calm self-possession gave him time to regain his own. He took the reins from her outstretched hand. "You were wise to run for shelter, Marian,"

he said in as matter-of-fact voice as he could summon, and, turning as he led the horse away, he continued, "This storm will be something out of the ordinary." It took him very few minutes to complete his task, and, after covering the cushions to protect them against the coming down-pour, he returned to the verandah.

Marian was standing where he had left her. A feeling misgiving came to Dundas as he looked at her strained and anxious eyes. He was about to make some commonplace inquiry, when she interrupted quickly, "Alan, I did not come here to pretend. There can be no pretence between us. You know that it is not the storm that has driven me here."

"Whatever the cause, Marian, you are welcome," he answered in level tones. "But you had better come into the house," and he held the door wide for her as she passed inside. "It is not exactly conventional, I suppose," he said, as he brought forward a chair for her, "but—" She cut his words short with an abrupt gesture. "Convention!" she gave a little laugh. "How little convention weighs when the real things are in the scale. No, Alan we won't talk of convention."

Dundas looked at her with lifted brows. It was a new and unknown Marian who stood there, proudly erect, ignoring the proffered chair, and whose pleading eyes gave the lie to her haughty bearing. "As you please, Marian," he replied, smiling, "I knew when I saw you coming (you want me to be honest?) that you were not coming for shelter, but—" here he paused and shook his head, "but why you came is beyond me."

She glanced through the window into the gathering shadows, then turned abruptly. "Yes, Alan, I think you would be hardly likely to guess why I am here. I have come to ask you a question." She paused.

"Well?" he prompted.

She looked straight with unfaltering eyes into his. "Alan, you cannot have forgotten that night you drove me home from the bank. Tell me, did what passed between us on that drive mean anything to you then? Tell me, were you in earnest?"

Dundas flushed. The directness of the attack staggered him for a moment, and she saw it, and interrupted his halting words quickly. "Don't misunderstand me, Alan, this is not recrimination. My purpose is too strong to allow any trifle of convention to come before it. I only want to know if you were in earnest then. Don't count what has happened since."

He looked into the true brown eyes and read the devotion shining from them. For a moment he bent his head, and then spoke calmly. "Since you ask it, Marian, I answer, Yes. At the time I meant it all, and more."

The girl sighed deeply and then spoke again. "And if the other had not come, Alan, you would have asked me to be your wife?" She smiled bravely as she spoke, but the smile could not hide the pain that showed behind it.

Dundas could not find the word to answer, but bent his head in silence, and so they stood for a long moment. It was the man who spoke first. "I cannot ask you to forgive me, Marian. There are some things that are beyond forgiveness. I do not know how great the wrong may be, but, Marian, you have seen her"—his voice faltered—"and at least you can understand. If there can be any palliation for the wrong I have done it is in that I had not found her until afterwards—and then—I forgot all." His voice died away in a whisper, and he stood with his head still bowed before her, and could not see the all-embracing love that shone from her troubled, worshipping eyes.

"Ah, Alan, no need to ask for forgiveness; that has been yours for many days unasked. I have not come to blame, for I understand so well—oh! so well. But tell me, Alan, do you think the girl you would have asked to share your life would wrong you now?"

He looked up quickly. "You wrong me, Marian! You surely do not need an answer to that question."

"And yet, Alan, I am going to test your confidence in me to the utmost," she went on steadily. "I am going to risk your anger, and perhaps before I have finished you will despise me."

He smiled and shook his head. "You could not make me do that, Marian. Whatever you have to say to me, I know you come as a friend."

There was another silence, and then the girl spoke again. "Alan, I have come to beg you, to implore you, to give her up before it is too late."

"Marian!"

"Let me finish first," she broke in quietly. "Don't misunderstand me. No matter what happens, you and I could never be anything to one another now. There is no thought of self in this for me. It is for your own sake, Alan, that I appeal to you now. For your happiness and your whole future, for everything you hold dear, I beg you to guard yourself. I do not know who she is, but in my soul I know she will bring you nothing but sorrow. That terrible beauty of hers holds you in its grip, Alan, but a woman can see more clearly. She will lead always, and always you will follow, and the road she will take you will lead to despair."

Dundas listened with a faint smile on his lips. "Ah, Marian! It is not like you to condemn without a hearing. If you only knew her really as she is, you would know how great a wrong you do her."



"Alan, I do not wrong her. I know she would not harm you purposely. But tell me, why is it that I feared her instinctively from the moment I saw her? Why is it that Dick Barry fears her, not only on your account but on account of other things which he dared not tell me?"

Dundas answered coldly, "I do not know what Barry has told you, Marian. He is no longer my friend. But this I do know, if he has said a word against Earani he is worse even than I thought him, for until today, when he attempted to betray us, she has been nothing but his friend."

"Friend," she said bitterly, "and yet he feared for his life from this friend. This friend that comes and goes unseen. This friend that holds some powers that the mind shrinks from. This friend that would not hesitate to kill to gain her ends. I could have had that friendship. It was freely offered, but I tell you I would rather die than take her hand, Alan," she went on passionately. "I tell you she is evil, evil. I have loved you. I love you now; but I would rather see you dead than bound to her. What do you know of her? Is she a creature of this world, or is she something nameless, something to dread instead of to love?"

Dundas listened in silence until she paused. Then he spoke gently. "Marian, you wrong yourself greatly, but you wrong Earani more. That you are sincere in what you say I do not doubt, but you are wrong, so wrong, that what you say would be almost laughable, if it were not so pitiful. Even were she all you say, my answer would be the same, but I know her as no one else ever can or will. She is the noblest and the most splendid woman the world has ever known, and, Marian, if by any chance we were parted, then my life would end."

At that moment a clear, full voice broke in, "A proper answer, Alan." Both Marian and Dundas, lost to all else but the question at issue, swung round at the words. The shadows had deepened while they talked, so that the room was almost in twilight. On the threshold stood Earani. She had tossed back the hood of her mantle, and the silky strands of her hair fell about her face in wind-blown disorder. She was flushed and radiant with exercise, and her breath came quickly, and the big grey eyes were bright with excitement. Never before had Dundas seen her look so regally beautiful. Forgetting everything else but the joy of seeing her safe, Dundas exclaimed, "Earani! Thank God, you are back and safe. I feared—"

"There was nothing to fear, Alan. In truth I came on the wings of the wind and raced the storm back. I think my woman's instinct urged me on," and she turned her eyes meaningly on Marian, who stood silent and motionless watching her.

Dundas glanced from one to the other. Into Earani's eyes had come a look of cold inquiry, while from those of Marian flashed an expression he could not fathom. Both seemed about to speak, and he hurried to interpose. "Marian came as a friend, Earani, but she does not understand."

Earani smiled and turned to him. "Ah, Alan, am I unfortunate in that I antagonise your friends, or are you unfortunate in your friends? First it is Dick, and now it is this girl who tries to come between us, but," she went on, coming towards him, "but your faith in me remains unshaken. I am very rich in my one friend, Alan." He took the outstretched hand in both of his, and together they turned toward Marian, who had neither moved nor spoken.

"Marian," said Dundas quietly, "this is the only answer I can give you. I had hoped that you would have been friends. It is not too late even now."

For the first time the girl spoke, facing them erect, with her clenched hands stiffly at her sides. "Friends!" and there was a terrible bitterness in the word. "As you say, Alan, it is not too late even now. It is not too late to save your future, and your peace of mind. Alan, I am right. You are at the parting of the ways. For the sake of all you hold sacred close your eyes to her beauty, and draw yourself away," and she held out imploring hands.

But the calm voice of Earani broke in, "And for you, Marian, it is not too late. What you wish is hopeless, hopeless, and your fears for him are folly. The gift of peace and forgetfulness I offered is still yours, if you will have it; but nothing can part us now. In the eyes of your God, we are bound."

At that moment the first deep growl of thunder rolled round unnoticed by them all. Marian's answer came swiftly. "From you I will take nothing. Not even my life, if it were yours to grant it. Alan, for the last time."

He shook his head, and turned away. "Oh, Marian, why will you be so blind? My life and all are here." For a fleeting second the room was lit by a vivid flash from outside, and a nearer crash of thunder rolled over them. Earani threw one white splendid arm across his shoulder, and the two stood looking into one another's eyes, forgetful for the moment of the girl. Again the light flashed up. Marian had turned away, and as she did so saw the blue light gleam on the thin, keen blades of the Indian knives on the wall beside her. With the crash that followed the light, the blind hate she felt for Earani reached its flood. Her hand snatched a light knife from its place, and as she turned Alan's arm encircled Earani's

waist. They had forgotten her very existence. Then the strain snapped. She took one swift step towards them, and with all the force of her strong, young arm, struck—once, and the red knife dropped from her hand.

Earani made no sound. Her stately head dropped on Alan's shoulder for an instant, and then her body, relaxed in death, slipped through his arms. But as it fell, with a cry of fear, he knelt, and caught her to him. After that one cry, he, too, was silent. Swiftly as had come the blow, came to him realisation. He drew his hand from beneath her, and stared wide-eyed at the blood that reddened it. Then he looked up with agonised questioning eyes at the girl, who stood looking down on him. Then his glance fell to the knife that lay at her feet, and after that he saw her no more.

As the slow moments passed he knelt, gazing down into the white face of his dead, and while he knelt the storm broke in a lashing fury of rain. Neither of the living heard it. Mute and motionless they gazed until suddenly Dundas roused himself. Without looking up he passed his arms round the still body of Earani. Then with a mighty heave of his shoulders he brought himself to his feet, still holding her in his arms. Passing Marian with unseeing eyes, he crossed the room, and bearing his still-warm burden out into the storm he strode towards the shed. Horror-stricken, Marian watched him go; then she suddenly followed him into the storm; calling his name. He reached the shed and entered it, and she followed in all haste, to find the door barred against her.

As one in a dream, Dundas stood in the lift and sank into the depths of the sphere. With a strength born of a terrible resolution he made his way down the steps from the first landing to the vestibule. No sound of the fury of the storm reached him. He crossed the gleaming pavement, passed the groups of figures, and made his way to the "temple," and came to a halt beside the throne-like couch, and bending, laid the body gently on it. Reverently and tenderly he composed her for her rest. He loosened the arm-thick silken tresses over her shoulders, and folded the white hands across the still, round breast. Then he stood erect and looked down on her long and earnestly, and there was a faint smile on his lips that answered the soft, mysterious shadows about the corners of her mouth.

Then he knelt beside her, and kissed the white forehead, and spoke softly and tenderly. "Wait for me, my beloved. Wait for me, I am coming to you now." His hands felt for the spring beside the couch. The tiny panel fell open, and with steady, unfaltering touch, still keeping his eyes on

the hallowed face before him, he pressed the button in the cavity—and found peace.

Above, in the driving welter of the storm, the frantic girl beat with her hands on the locked door of the shed. The voice that called aloud one name in her agony was swept away by the storm. At last, in despair, she turned away to the homestead. The lashing rain had drenched her through and through, and her dripping garments clung to her body.

She reached the verandah, and turned to look back. As she did so a dull roar broke on her ears, a roar that swelled into a terrific volume of sound that blotted out the fury of the storm. Then for an instant the shed showed up an incandescent mass, and collapsed in twisting, writhing sheets of white-hot iron, and where it had stood shot up for a second a mighty pillar of blue-white flame, that while it lasted turned the falling night into midday brightness, and the solid earth rocked and swayed like storm-tossed water. In ten seconds from the time the first sound was heard it was all over, and the darkness and the storm swept on again, and a thick mist of steam rose from the cracked and blistered earth.

It was a weary and dispirited man who stepped from the night mail to the Ronga platform on the following morning. Barry had passed the night in sleepless vigil. He had failed in his purpose, and failed hopelessly, and the future was dark before his eyes. The night of storm had given way to a glorious spring morning, when he started in his car back to Glen Cairn. It was still early when he reached his home. At his door he was met by Kitty, with deep trouble in her eyes. "Oh, Dick, I'm afraid something dreadful has happened. Marian Seymour is missing. She left home yesterday afternoon, and did not come back. Her mother has been here, simply distracted. Can you help?"

"Where's Seymour?" asked Dick, with sinking heart.

"He went to Sydney a week ago," answered Kitty.

Barry thought a moment. "Then I must get Bryce."

"Oh, Dick, do you know anything?" asked Kitty, in deep distress.

"I'm afraid I do, Kitty, and hope with all my heart I'm wrong," and he turned back to his car. "I may be a good while, Kit, but don't worry," he said, as the car moved off.

He roused Bryce from his after-breakfast cigar, and with a few words of explanation hurried Hector to his car. Barry had no doubt but that Marian had gone to 'Cootamundra,' in spite of his warnings, and as they raced along at top speed he outlined in terse, swift sentences to the

bewildered Bryce the history of Earani as he knew it. "And," he concluded, "Marian has gone out there, and God alone knows what has happened."

"It was a night in which anything could happen," said Bryce. "The worst storm we've had for years, and just about nightfall there was a heavy shock of earthquake. The whole town rattled as if it were coming to pieces. This is a deuce of a business, Dick. Shouldn't we have brought weapons of some kind?"

Barry laughed shortly. "You don't realise even remotely what we are up against, Hec. Weapons are no use against her. I pray with all my heart that poor child is safe—but—" and he said no more until they came in sight of the homestead. Then all he said was, "The shed's gone. Something's happened." The gate to the vineyard stood open, and they ran through with unchecked speed. As the car halted before the verandah the two men sat for a moment staring at one another in silence. From the open door of the homestead came the sound of a voice. A woman's voice that chattered, and broke off into merry laughter. Bryce whispered one word: "Marian," and the two leaped out and strode across the verandah and through the door.

She was seated on the couch under the window, and took no notice of their coming. "The red flower sprang from the ground at each step he took. I saw them. Bright red flowers, but they faded so soon. But they will come again," and she stopped and laughed quietly.

Barry stepped quickly up to her, "Marian, Marian." She looked up. "You are too late; he has gone. But the flowers—the flowers—" she paused and seemed to think. "I will not tell anyone where he has gone," and she laughed merrily and turned away.

Barry slipped out to the car, and returned with a small leather case in his hand. Bryce stood by in helpless silence, and while Barry busied himself over his instruments, the girl babbled without ceasing. Presently Dick stepped over to her side, and took her hand. She surrendered passively, and watched him with incurious eyes, giving no sign of feeling as he pressed the needle to her wrist.

"Bring the rug from the car, Hec," commanded Barry; and he wrapped her closely in it. Presently the restless muttering ceased, and Barry laid the silent unconscious form back on the couch.

"She'll do for a while," was his comment, "and now we must find out what has happened."

"What about Marian?" asked Bryce.

Barry's face darkened. "Complete collapse, nervous and mental."

"Will she recover?"

"Can't tell yet, Hec; too soon; but I hope for her own sake she never will."

They turned to the door, and Bryce stooped. "Look," was all he said, as he handed a stained and evil-looking blade to Barry.

"The red flowers," answered Barry grimly, looking from the knife to the sinister stain on the floor. "Hec, I fancy the world owes Marian a debt it can never repay."

They walked from the verandah to the spot where the shed had stood. Now there was nothing but a shallow, fire-blackened hole, without a vestige of iron or timber left, and where they stood they could feel the fierce heat from the ground through their thick-soled boots. Bryce looked at Barry with questioning eyes. "Your earthquake, I fancy, Hec," he answered. "I don't know what has happened, but everything has gone, and I thank God that it has."

Later they stood together by the river bank, and saw beneath them a smashed dogcart, with a dead pony beneath it. For a while they looked in silence. Then spoke Bryce: "Dick, can't you see what has happened? Alan was in the dogcart. The storm frightened the pony. It bolted, and went over the bank. Alan was thrown into the river. Marian saw it all, and—" He paused, and looked inquiringly at Dick. "How will it fit, do you think?"

Barry pursed his lips thoughtfully. "Yes," he answered slowly. "I think we can make it fit, but first there is work to do at the homestead."

The work was done thoroughly. It took nearly an hour to satisfy Barry that no trace of a dark stain was left on the boards of the floor, and no sign of use was left on a certain knife when he had restored it to its place on the wall. "You see, Hec, it's neglect of trifling precautions that brings trouble in arrangements like this. I've had to dust every one of those knives, so that the one should not look different from the rest, and I don't think I have left any finger-prints either."

At last it was finished, and the two lifted the sleeping girl tenderly to the waiting car. Then Barry closed the door of the homestead, and slipped the key into his pocket.

Scarcely a word passed between them as the car raced back to Glen Cairn. It was Bryce who said: "Dick, it's mighty queer to think of that other waiting for someone to find him."

Dick answered shortly: "Thank God, he will wait an eternity now."

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