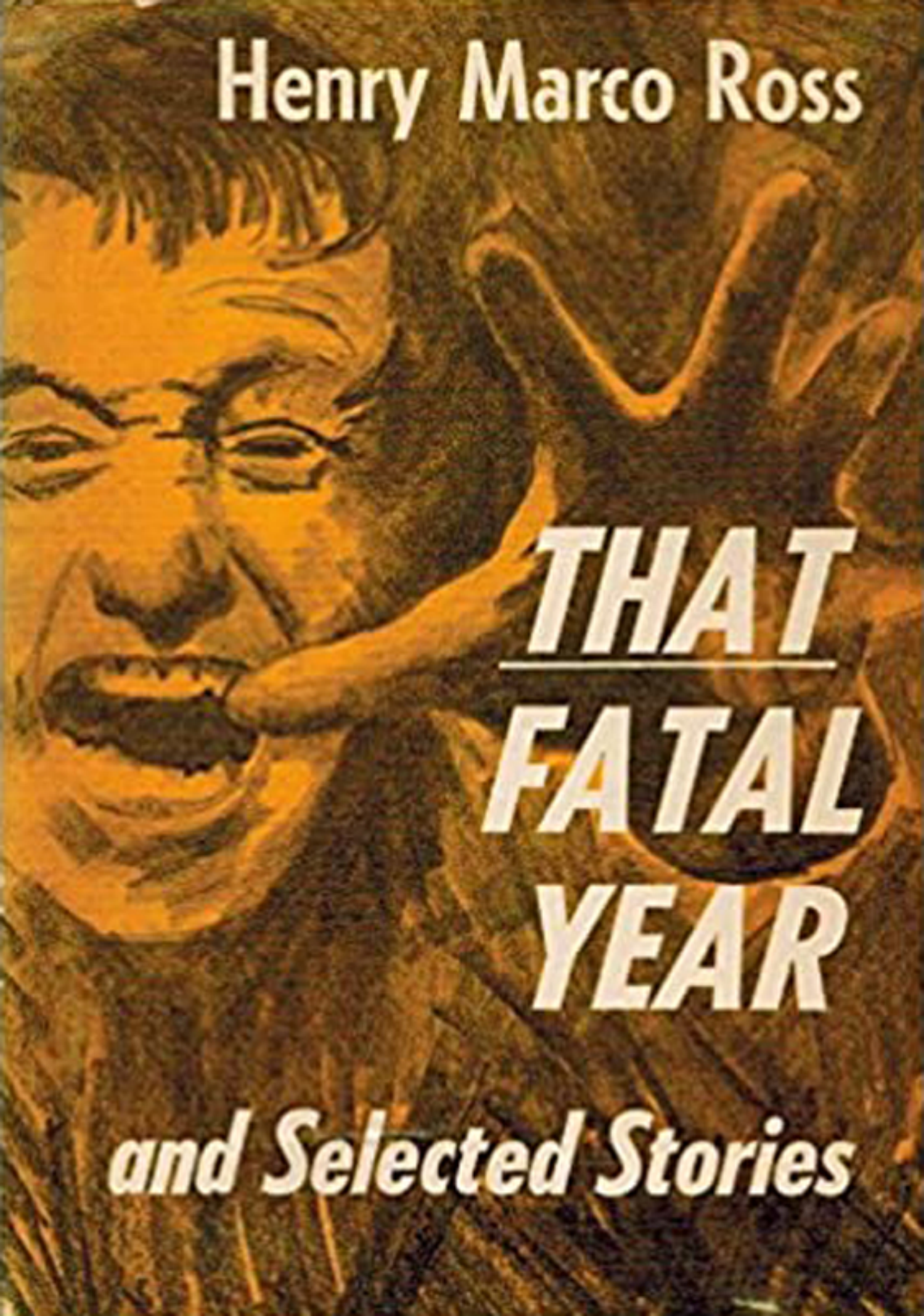
Henry Marco Ross



THAT FATAL YEAR

and Selected Stories

That Fatal Year

and Selected Stories

by Henry Marco Ross

EXPOSITION PRESS
New York

PS 3568
086
T5

EXPOSITION PRESS INC.

50 Jericho Turnpike Jericho, New York 11753

FIRST EDITION

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EP 46791

To the laughing gods

who exalt whom they choose

NC

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Prologue

Begun the first month of the first year in UTOPIA, MARS.

THEY WERE AFRAID of the atom bomb, the hydrogen bomb, the newly discovered cosmic ray, powerful enough to split the moon in half:

These things they perceived, feared, and tried to forestall.

Then came the unexpected:

Neither the Flood nor the wars fought by Earthman can match in scope the terror that took place on that memorable morning of the Great Panic.

The event is unique in the annals of history in that it brought death, chaos, murder, joy, relief, happiness, and confusion *all at one time* to planet Earth!

The greatest hoax in the life of man had been perpetrated, and no one quite knew what to do about it.

We here in this new colony consider ourselves fortunate to be living in an atomic age in which it is possible for man to migrate to Mars and begin a new civilization.

But science is not enough with which to build a secure and happy state.

We must be vigilant of the ever-widening hiatus that exists between science and human nature.

That is why it is necessary for this story to be written. And it is necessary that the facts be imprinted upon men's hearts, lest man again be misguided and fear catastrophes more than his own inner insecurity; fear wars more than his urge to complacency; fear destruction more than his instinct to hate. For until that far-off day when man shall have discarded his sanguinary Mephistophelian traits and know of his true identity and kinship with God, this story shall bear witness to man's intolerable stupidity.

But how should one begin a story that has many colossal events, many facets, many beginnings? Which one should he choose? Which will interest and hold the attention of the reader? Which will more clearly bring home the drama and pathos of a mixed-up world?

Before my mind's eye there keeps appearing one particular scene. I turn the shuttle of my imagination to other scenes, yet this one comes back stronger than ever! . . .

Part I The World Court

It is now four mornings after the Great Panic. The rising sun, bizarre, bloody, and extravagant, paints the United Nations' new home on Atlantis with a goriness that both threatens the soul and awakens the conscience. It is a fitting setting for the confusion and tumult that emanate from the Halls of Peace.

The Representatives, hastily gathered from all parts of the globe, are angry, bitter, and confused as the prisoner, Alexis Rathenau, President of Lurania and Chief Controller of the World Bank, tells why he was led to do what he had done. They have been here since midnight, and want of sleep and food aggravates the anxiety which they are at a loss to subdue. But they cannot close their session until they know the cause and extent of this diabolical, this stupid, this impossible yet effective hoax which has stymied the whole world and brought all normal activity to a dead stop!

"I could hesitate no longer," cried Rathenau. "I ordered—"

Suddenly a pistol shot rings out, causing an awesome silence to supersede the gabble and babble of the great assemblage. Alexis Rathenau slumps to the floor of the brightly lighted proscenium. Writhing in pain, he manages to call, "Wilder! Conny Wilder!" while from his inside jacket pocket he withdraws an envelope and holds it conspicuously aloft as if its contents were meant for this Wilder person and him alone.

But the United Nations guard, under some sinister direction, beats the foreign correspondent Wilder to the platform. Wilder's left leg seems to slow him down, and by the time he reaches the agonized Rathenau he finds a special group of Blue-Grays closing in on him.

Shouts, queries, and exclamations follow the stretcher-borne

Rathenau as he is carried out of the building and down the black Belgian marble steps, followed by another guard escorting Constantine Wilder. With their chief witness dead and the mystery of the great hoax now deepened, the Representatives gather upon the upper landing of the wide perron and lend drama to the reddening dawn.

Part II The Scapegoat

Chapter 1

"THAT'S NOT the assassin! It was a woman! A woman, I say!"

"Worse!" cried another. "I always thought this Wilder fellow knew more than he wanted to tell. He was frequently seen with Rathenau. He's the one Rathenau called to take those—those papers."

"I don't see any papers! But I see he limps slightly."

"'Course you don't! I saw the guards snatch them out of Rathenau's hand before he could get them."

"It can't be! I won't believe it," put in a stripe-trousered, frock-coated legate. "No mere newspaperman could have engineered this colossal debacle! The whole world—the whole world—!"

"Naturally, not alone!" remarked a turbaned gentleman. "You heard Rathenau before he was shot. This fellow seems to be a confidant of his—he may lead us to those responsible."

A bald-headed man, flailing the air with both hands, came halfway down the perron shouting, "Get back into the Hall. You stand here watching an incident when the entire world is confusion! We're ruined, ruined! You fools, don't you understand? *I'm ruined, you're ruined, we're all ruined.* Your money is *worthless, worthless,*" he sobbed pathetically.

Close upon Wilder and his guard flocked the questioning reporters. Wilder slowed his already impeded pace, but the guards nudged him onward.

"I say, ol' man, did you and Rathenau actually scheme this thing?" asked a trailing reporter.

"How about an exclusive, Conny—fifty per cent on the take?"

Heedless of the questions and the guard, Conny Wilder stopped descending and turned to look back at the throngs on the

upper landing. During his career he had had several run-ins with international authorities, but this—the suspicion in men's eyes—the denunciations— Now this time the captain shouted for Wilder to move on, but Conny lagged thoughtfully down the steps. . . . They will never believe how I tried to stop this thing, never! . . . Still, it wasn't his situation but the World's which troubled him. . . . He thought of his last incarceration, back in 1952, when Polish authorities—Communists, to be exact—provoked at his overt criticism, had accused him of filching information for Allied consumption. At that time his incarceration had lasted five days. . . . He nudged the elbow of the captain of the guard. "You'll not hold me long, once the *Syndicated Tabloids*, my paper, gets wind of this. And from the way the press gang and televisors are going at it, my boss and the world will know about this within minutes!"

The captain's glance was one of indifference; his foreign accent was thick. "Mr. Wilder, you are perhaps joking or the impression I have about newspapermen is misleading."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that you probably are not as smart as your writings make you appear! Your firm, like all other businesses, is probably bankrupt by now! The only authority that exists in the world at this present moment is military!"

Wilder had no reply, and the captain grinned in satisfaction.

"Say, Conny?" said a familiar voice. "What was in those papers?"

Conny turned and saw Red Mather of the *State Times*. "How should I know?" He thrust out his hands in despair. "I didn't get a chance to read them!"

A French newspaperman shouted sarcastically, "Mon oeil!" then added in English, "He will share every word—*after it is printed!*"

Wilder gave the heckler a burlesqued smile and followed the guard into the waiting Helio-car, meanwhile addressing Red Mather, "Double-check with Hennessey and tell him to get me out of this mess. If you get a chance, see me. I'll tell you what I know." The Helio-car shot forward, throwing him hard against the seat.

The tree-lined highway along which they sped was new to Wilder although he'd been here before when a youngster, long before the United Nations had purchased the island of Fayal in the Azores from Portugal and transformed it into a magical mass of chrome and glass and renamed it Atlantis. The royal poinsettias to the right and left brought to his mind that other time when he and sight-seeing tourists had shared a surrey to the bull ring. Where was the bull ring now? The natives? He remembered with what amazement he had gaped at the extraordinary large bare feet of the native women. Instantly his face became taut. Thinking of women reminded him of Lydia, Rathenau's daughter.

Where was she now? And how was she taking, if she had heard it by now, the news of her father's critical condition? Was she still where he had last seen her—in London? Were they holding her, too, as they now held him—as an accessory to Rathenau's confounding act?

As the car sped past the endless row of foreign offices, each separated from its closest neighbors by spacious lawns, flaunting the flags of their respective countries like knights *à panache;* past the judicial centers and the research laboratories, set like jewels in platinum-like mountings, past structures dedicated to art, astronomy, economics, and science, Constantine Wilder considered the contradictions that existed out there beyond the sea, among the nations of the world.

Here on the island of Atlantis was man's dream almost come true. Here was a more secure, healthier, happier world; while out there were people living in fear, struggling against fear, and using fear in the form of armaments to protect them from fear. He pulled on the lobe of his left ear, as it was his habit to do whenever he was perplexed. It was inconsistent, almost inconceivable, that human genius that could create such architecture and purpose could also revel in hatreds, jealousies, revenge, and ignominy.

The Helio-car swerved off the main highway, turned into an inclined dirt road, swerved again, and emerged on a promontory. Constantine turned his head and saw the UN buildings now miniature in the distance; beyond those lay Horta Bay, with its seaplanes and transoceanic liners. When he turned around, a mass

of gray stone loomed before him larger and larger. The Helio came to a screeching stop.

Following the other men out of the car, Constantine scanned the dark rock-pile, which in contrast to the buildings he had just passed en route, appeared uglier than it actually was.

"Why this hell-hole?" he demanded. "Of course," mockingly, "I would be more comfortable in my hotel. If you wanted to hold me, why not the prison on St. Georges?"

"We have our orders," snapped the captain, leading him to the house. "Besides, St. Georges is for the natives. The UN has no prison. You will remain here."

"The assassin, is she here, too?" asked Wilder.

The captain did not speak, but shook his head from side to side.

So he was not only a prisoner, but was confined in a place where no one would look for him or be able to reach him. He wondered which power behind which Security Council member had given the order. Rathenau had so many enemies; there were so many cartels that threatened world security. Was it someone whom he himself had mentioned in his exposés—some combine he had insinuated against in his writings?

"This way," ordered the captain, waiting for Wilder to step into the hallway. Inside, beside a stairway, a stoutish peasant woman in a printed dirndl was assisting an excited man into a white jacket.

"Going somewhere?" asked Constantine with a half-grin. It was his way of meeting a gloomy situation. The caretakers gaped at the prisoner, then at each other and lumbered up the stairs, opened a door, and began setting things in order, as though they had just received a new boarder.

Behind the locked door, Constantine observed that the room had two barred windows. Facing one of the windows was an iron bed; next to it was a night table on which sat a good-size seashell beside an oil lamp. In the center of the floor lay a rag rug; there were some magazines stacked beside the door and a worn-out broom beside the fireplace in the opposite wall. Someone had tried to convert an old prison into a dwelling. Not bad for a jail,

Constantine thought, but undesirable, nevertheless. He walked to the one unobstructed window and estimated that the distance between him and the yard must be at least twenty feet.

If he had had any thoughts of escape, they were dissipated by mental arguments to the contrary. He could hear the armed guards below talking. And even if he could escape—which they might trick him into doing—he had no intention of being made a target, or swimming the ocean, nor—and this was the strongest argument—was there any point in going into hiding. He'd have to see this thing through.

The first hour was tedious; the second, burdensome. The rotund lady brought some stew and coffee. He drank the coffee and left the stew untouched. Looking out of the window, he watched the fog lift from the island and coalesce into altocumulus clouds through which the sun shone like a great kleig light from some heavenly studio, spotlighting a building here, a house there, and an ocean liner in the bay. Was Boss Hennessey trying to reach him? Would he be able to get through the labyrinth that held him a prisoner?

After the allotted time in which he had expected to be released had passed, he pounded on the door. When one of the guards came, he demanded his briefcase and typewriter. There was a sound of heels clattering down the stairway which multiplied when they again made their way up.

"We have no typewriter," said the captain, on opening the door. "Our instructions are to keep you secluded."

"But you can't deny me the right to write! My briefcase must be in the press box and my typewriter in the press room."

The captain raised his cap and scratched his pate. "If we go there, we shall invite company."

This fellow's no dope, thought Wilder. He had hoped something like that would bring Mather or some of the others to him. "But I want my typewriter!" he demanded. "You can find some way of getting it to me."

"We'll see, we'll see," nodded the captain, inserting the key in the lock. "True, I am a neutral United Nations officer, but I have my instructions."

Constantine wondered if the captain would comply. He listened for sounds of departure. He heard the sharp click of an automobile door slammed shut; then the hum of whirling blades grow into a hurricane. So they were going to fly this time? In another moment he saw the Helio-car in mid-air, sailing into a nimbus sky that had suddenly come over the island.

When, later on, the motor's noise again brought him to the window, he noticed that the sky had cleared and the late departing sun had cast a golden-brown hue over the distant buildings and the ships in the bay.

Within minutes there was a scuffling, shuffling, and thumping on the stairs.

"How's President Rathenau?" Constantine inquired, when the captain walked in, followed by guards and the native woman, who was carrying a food-laden tray.

The captain shrugged his shoulders, threw a briefcase on the bed, and watched the guard place a typewriter on the floor. Turning to Wilder, he warned, "I must remind you that none of your writings will leave this place. Because of that I have no objection to bringing you your portfolio and this machine." Then, ordering the men and the woman out of the room, he followed, leaving Wilder to ponder his remarks.

Had the captain said that Rathenau was dead, Wilder would not have been surprised. (Rathenau had seemed to be dying when he tried to give Wilder the papers.) Nevertheless, the thought increased his concern for Lydia. And, too, he himself might now be the only living individual upon whom the Council could spend its wrath. In his time and experience he had seen too many scapegoats sacrificed on the altar of pseudo-justice; he had no ambitions to be a martyr, even if he should be in the position of having upheld Rathenau's views and his controversial act.

His anxiety engendered in him an urge for action. He paced the floor, then turned to the typewriter. In lifting it he noticed that the machine was not his own. Placing it on the chair and slipping his feet beneath, he observed that the old Oliver compared well with the chair. He wondered which was the older, and then for some unaccountable reason—except that minds have a

way of connecting things—he thought of the differential between his and Lydia's ages, and it annoyed him. Quickly he reached for the briefcase, drew out a few sheets of paper, thrust one behind the dried-out cylinder, and typed:

> This morning at nine-thirty A.M. the President of Lurania and Comptroller of World Currency was critically wounded by a shot fired from the balcony of the World Court as he tried to explain his part in the dilemma engulfing the entire world.

He stopped, considered what he had written, pulled the sheet from the machine, crumpled it into a ball, and threw it backward. Of what use was news that the world already knew? He replaced it with another sheet:

> At this moment I am a captive in an improvised prison that overlooks Horta Bay and, in the distance, the new magnificent home of the United Nations. I write this with some irony, because I am told that I cannot forward my writings, and I am being detained without benefit of counsel—a privilege any captive, even under less auspicious jurisdiction, would be accorded.

He stopped, tore the sheet from the machine, and again threw it aside. Why write about himself? His arguments, his defense, might be premature. And as for the Rathenau story, that, too, was premature with all the developments in the offing. Still, the writer's urge persisted. He lit a cigarette and permitted his thoughts to dwell upon the man who had so greatly altered his life and the lives of so many millions these last few days. Now the thoughts commandeered his fingers. Lightly, effortlessly, they pranced over the keys:

> This morning in the Halls of Peace, before the World Security Court, I heard accusations that branded the victim, Alexis Rathenau, a madman and a criminal. I heard the names of General Boddenheim, Professor Von Haas, and Ambassador Agronoff, all of whom have died within the

last few days while carrying out Rathenau's plan, mentioned with the worst derision and calumny. And I heard myself, and the great numbers who followed Rathenau, called dangerous madmen.

It is still too early to judge us. Only time and the outcome of the Dyssian revolution, which I maintain Rathenau's act precipitated, can vindicate our actions. Only time and the clarity of thought it will bring will show by retrospection the turbulent factors that led up to Rathenau's colossal event.

Perhaps then and only then will the world be qualified to judge whether Rathenau's disciples were guilty; or he himself mad; or whether the world, because of the circumstances that held it in its terrible vortex, was even madder. Then shall we know of Rathenau's guilt or of his heroism, of his madness or his martyrdom. Now, I only know of the motives that drove him to do what he did to prevent a confused world from destroying its liberties and civilization.

The same breath that ordered Rathenau's papers to be taken from me angrily asked me why Rathenau committed this deed, by what authority he dared to take such a responsibility, a responsibility that involved the welfare of the entire human race. I was hustled away before I could answer. I doubt if I could have answered then. I would now like to try. I could say that Rathenau wasn't the first individual to follow the dictates of his conscience. I might, in defense of Rathenau, quote the same questions that historians have asked down the ages. Why did Joan, the Maid of Orleans, lead her countrymen into battle? Or why did Napoleon think he should try to make a United States out of Europe? Or why did Luther or Calvin lead a people away from an established church; why did Lincoln decide, when still a youth, that his destiny was to free the American Negro from slavery; why did Washington decide to father a nation; why did Livingstone decide to convert a savage's beliefs?

If we knew the answers to those immortals' acts, we should have the answer to Rathenau. We can only conclude that the spirit within those persons impelled them to do what they did. Alexis Rathenau was forged of the same heroic metal. It was inevitable that he should have done what he did. And the fire that burned in Rathenau, the rage that drove him on and made him a historic figure, ignited a flame within us, too. Catching the spirit of his ardor, we were able to see the chaos that hung like the Sword of Damocles over our heads, over the world.

Chapter 2

WILDER's thoughts were invaded. . . . Someone was in the room . . . beside him. He looked up. It was the captain. With him were two guards. "You," barked the captain pointing to one of his men, "take the machine away!"

Constantine pushed the guard aside and rose to his feet.

"Relax, Mr. Wilder," grimaced the captain. "It was a mistake to give you the machine in the first place," he said, holding out the crumpled pieces of paper that Wilder had inadvertently thrown out of the window.

Constantine pulled the lobe of his ear. Wryly he watched the guards leave with the machine. Suddenly he called out, "Say, how about some cigarettes? I'm running low."

The captain returned to the doorway. "That you shall have, Mr. Wilder." He pulled a packet out of his pocket and threw it into Constantine's hands. "Freddie, how about you? Give yours to Mr. Wilder." Freddie threw his cigarettes on the bed.

There remained little for Constantine to do. He thumbed through the magazines, American and Portuguese. Then he went through his briefcase. All seemed intact. Here were clippings from international newspapers telling about the Rathenau debacle and how the great event had affected the respective countries;

several small dictionaries of foreign languages; some half-baked reports on events he had covered, and, what was even more valuable to him, dossiers and data on Rathenau the man.

With the coming of dusk, Constantine lit the oil lamp and drew aside the flowered coverlet and the blankets of the bed to see if there were any residents in the mattress. Assuring himself that it was reasonably clean, he roughly replaced the covers, took off his jacket, and, propping the three pillows behind his head, lit another cigarette, and blew out the lamp.

For a long time he lay there chain-smoking, looking beyond the barred window into space. The faded blue sky turned a deep purple, then velvety black, making the stars seem close and bright—bright like the jewels in Lydia's ears. Suddenly he was on his feet, in front of the window, his hands on the rusty bars. They felt cold, damp, and unfriendly. Between the bars the moon was rising out of the sea, large and luminous, threatening to engulf the whole world.

More cigarettes, more pacing, and again he tried reclining on the bed. This time the moon was directly opposite him, almost covering the window. It was like a large television screen on which the shadows on the blue-white light were about to become clearer, more animated. Gradually, the shadows took on the shapes cast from his own thoughts. He could almost see the tall, gaunt figure of Alexis Rathenau, with his one remaining hand caressing his iron-gray Van Dyke. . . . He could almost hear him speak as he had on that certain morning long ago while breakfasting on the terrace of Rhodora, Rathenau's mountain home in Lurania.

"I see," Rathenau had remarked, as he turned the pages of his morning newspaper, "that the lemmings are leaving their mountain abode in Norway by the millions."

The question stopped Conny from sipping his coffee. "The lemmings? You mean—?"

"Rodents," said Rathenau thoughtfully, "rodents of the genus myodes, or of the cuniculus. In Norway they are the size of a common rat."

Some subject for breakfast thought Constantine, and his head

shook with repugnance. Rathenau could be earthy at times. "Oh, yes," he rejoined, "they are the animals that head straight for the sea in droves, swim out until they are exhausted, and drown." He dismissed the subject and busied himself with the delicious strawberries.

"And now you are no longer concerned," Rathenau said, looking directly at Constantine.

Constantine lowered the spoonful of berries to the plate. "Should I be?"

"This may come to you as a surprise, Conny," said Rathenau, laying aside the newspaper, "but I do not see any difference between the genus cuniculus, who sporadically drown themselves in the sea, and the genus homo sapiens, who periodically annihilate themselves by war. There is only one difference. Man accomplishes his demise through more devilish means."

"Of course, you're referring to the A and H bombs."

"To be specific, I mean man's greed, stupidity, arrogance, and lust for power. Out of those come depressions, war, disease, starvation, and chaos." He hunched his shoulders. "The media whereby man destroys himself are merely incidental."

"Sir, I do not wish to appear disrespectful," said Constantine benignantly, "nor ungrateful for your kind hospitality, but doesn't that sound a bit tragic on such a beautiful, wonderful morning as this?" He looked to the clear blue sky and inhaled deeply. His thoughts were on Lydia, who more than made up for her father's dourness.

Alexis Rathenau shook his head disconsolately. "You Americans! So complacent! So confident! Your father was an American, but he would have understood my apprehensions."

Constantine felt too good to accept the challenge. "Wasn't it Roosevelt who said, 'All we have to fear is fear itself'? We always pull through somehow!"

"This time it will be worse, Conny. This race for armaments has achieved a false prosperity in your country. Taxes in your country have risen from one dollar and thirty-eight cents at the turn of the century to over nine hundred dollars per person. Each year they soar higher. We are spending our and your countries'

resources to fight a spreading Communism. The Middle East is a bedlam of conspiracies. Here in Europe the threat of Communism is far greater than is generally realized. Your capitals are infested with more communists than you Americans are willing to believe or admit. The China situation and the faith in the United Nations is being assailed from all directions. In Germany a new army is growing into power."

"Con-ny, I'm read-y," called Lydia from the other end of the long terrace.

Constantine dropped his spoon and leaped in the direction of her voice. He took three paces, wheeled about, and winged his arms to steady himself. "I'm sorry, sir. I just didn't want to keep Lydia waiting."

"Go ahead, go ahead, Conny. I was merely trying to convert your talent for writing into other channels, to awaken a lethargic world."

Constantine ran to meet Lydia, partly because of the way he felt that glorious morning, and partly, although he was unaware of it, because he wanted to appear much younger than his thirty-three years as against her eighteen. It was an involuntary action based on a long conditioning that dated back to the first time he had met Lydia. He had been twenty-two then, fresh out of college, visiting Rhodora with his father before settling down to work on his parent's *Chronicle*, and Lydia had been only seven. But he had been strangely drawn to the captivating, heart-shaped face in which sad, gentian-blue eyes were enhanced by teak-black hair that seemed to give off rays of violet when eclipsed by light. This fondness had grown with Lydia's growth and the intermittent letters and visits to and from Rhodora.

On one such visit when she was at the awkward stage of twelve, plump and odd in manner, and he an arrogant member of the beau monde at twenty-seven, he would have disavowed that he had ever given her so much as a thought. Then, when he saw her again several years later in Paris, her chic figure and its flowering womanhood inspired tantalizing thoughts. If at any time during their friendship he had wished that she were older,

he then wished the opposite for himself. And he frankly admitted it, jesting the while, but secretly regretting that it was not true.

He wished it as much today, as he gazed upon her sophisticated coiffure, the curving lines of her blue sweater, the boyishly straddling legs in black jodhpurs and boots, and the way she swung her crop against the Alpine breeze.

"Did I interrupt your conversation?" she smiled, taking his arm and leading him toward the stables.

"I'm afraid your father doesn't approve of my fiction. But," he grinned, "it keeps me in comfort as a newspaper man."

Lydia joined in the repartee. "You mean with this added revenue you can afford to be a foreign correspondent?"

"Not that bad—it helps if you like expensive things. But your father—he is either very critical of me or he is flattering me with his interest."

"Of course, you should feel flattered!" she insisted in deliciously accented English. "My father is *very* fond of you."

Constantine stopped walking long enough to click his heels and make an exaggerated obeisance.

Lydia laughed; then, "Father asked me if I read your books. I suppose he was wondering what I thought of your feminine protagonists."

"And—"

"Why, Conny, what could I think of them! I suppose the world is full of such women, who think only of furs, jewels, and how to charm men; they are the naïve anima type."

Conny arched his brows and glanced at her sidewise. "The what type?"

"You know, the mentally undeveloped sort, who are motivated by female instincts only and build a world around their feelings."

Constantine pulled the lobe of his left ear. Did she really understand what she was saying, or was this the assumed sophistication of youth talking? "Now, where did you get that from?" he asked.

"Oh, seeing and reading. You should read Esther Harding's *The Way of All Women*. She's an American, you know That is, if you want to really understand women." She looked at him;

her smile apologetic. "How presumptuous of me! I'm sorry."

"Don't apologize. I never will fully understand your sex. They—" As he and Lydia rounded the corner of the barn, he saw two saddled horses. "They are as unpredictable as horses, and as lovable."

"You love horses?"

Constantine hummed his answer.

"I see Urs has them ready. You will love Socrates. You may ride him today, and I shall ride Elsie." She stroked the filly's nose and took hold of the rein.

Constantine cupped his hands for Lydia's left foot, raised her into the saddle, and smiled up at her.

"You love—I mean," she stammered, "have you ever been in love?" She had managed the last of the question demurely.

"With a horse?" Laughingly Conny untied Socrates, placed his foot in the stirrup, and, grasping the pommel, swung himself easily into the saddle. "Well, to be honest—" But Lydia was already in the distance, beckoning him to come on.

After each canter or gallop, they would walk their horses and talk, then canter or gallop again. When they had reached the summit overlooking the entire province of Lurania, Lydia said, "To the right with its white-capped mountains is Switzerland, from where we Luranians get our Germanic tongue." Pointing to the left, she continued, "That is France on the horizon, from where we get our French influence, and beyond that in the far, far distance is England, whose language we also love to speak."

"Your country reminds me so much of Switzerland, with its varied languages and its love for democracy," replied Conny.

"Father says it is the mixture of our peoples and the languages that help make us so democratic. They often call us 'Little America.'" Dreamily Lydia added, "Someday I shall go to your America and see Broadway and Hollywood and—" She looked at Constantine, but his thoughts seemed to be far away.

The mention of Lydia s father had reminded Conny of their talk at breakfast. And yet, as he beheld this beautiful panorama, it was almost impossible for him to believe that the world was steeped in intrigue and mischief. Catching the query in Lydia's

eyes, he said, "Oh yes, yes, and I would love to be there to show you around."

"How kind of you," she said coolly, thinking that he had not sounded very convincing. "We must be getting home."

They wheeled their horses and started to descend. On the way back Lydia decided to take a short cut through the Lundengreen Forest. The sudden change from brightness to the gloom of the dense forest was like stepping from the sunlight into a cool wine cellar in which nothing is discernible except a large orange blotch that lingers on the eye's retina. The orange blotch had a black dot in the center and a wide, white ring around its circumference. Gradually, the dot became larger and larger and larger until everything was dark . . . dark . . . dark.

Chapter 3

CONSTANTINE'S nap was wickedly brief. A sharp stinging at the fingers shocked him into wakefulness. Swinging his feet off the bed, he saw the small red head of the burning cigarette that had fallen to the floor. He picked it up and threw it into the reflected rays that came from the seashell on the table. The moon was no longer in front of him, but its soft blue light permeated the world outside the windows. He did not light the lamp, but sat there half awake, still steeped in the reveries that seemed more alive than the realities that surrounded him. . . .

Thinking about that visit to Rhodora, he could now see how the most innocent and seemingly insignificant incident can alter one's life. How was he to know then that Rathenau had certain plans which included him? That those casual remarks he had made that morning were like little seeds of giant Sequoias, ideas that were to grow and keep on growing until one day the proselytism would be complete and he would wholeheartedly join Rathenau in a scheme that would shock the world. Nor could

he have known then that that day with Lydia would forever ruin his interest in other women.

Visions of past events filled the room. Scene by scene he relived the weaving of the events that composed the web which now held him captive. Meeting Rathenau at Geneva . . . Lake Success . . . Flushing Meadows. . . . Listening to Rathenau challenging Tanganyik and watching the chagrined expression on his face when Tanganyik laughed so derisively. . . . Rathenau talking to him in London . . . in Paris . . . everywhere they met . . . trying to convince him that the world was in a mess . . . adjuring him to expose through his writings the powerful combines and the culprits who were selling their countries short, blocking unison, thwarting the United Nations' efforts: names that made editors think twice and on the second thought discard information that would, if printed, be their last; names which Constantine felt himself inadequate to deal with . . . situations which he did not fully comprehend. And so he had made no issue of Rathenau's arguments, remaining as complacent as ever.

He recalled the turbulent threatening years that followed, years of Communistic uprisings in Europe in 1954 and of wranglings in Japan, China, and India in 1955 and 1956, culminating in 1967, when the sporadic wars along the Mediterranean coast threatened to ignite the rest of the world in the dreaded holocaust that the armament race had so feverishly tried to prevent. . . .

. . . The queer feeling he had had in counting out $300 for the suit he was now wearing, which but a short time back could have been purchased for fifty. . . . That great "WORKINGMAN'S STRIKE" in which all laborers, carpenters, electricians, and members of other trades and crafts had struck for higher wages and gotten them, taking home fabulous checks that were dissipated the moment they were cashed: $2.50 for a loaf of bread, $100 for a pair of shoes, and, if one were able, $18,000 for the cheapest automobile had helped no one.

Everyone fooling himself, thinking himself well off, even rich, with inflated dollars. And then there was that noteworthy speech he had heard given by the hoary Professor Von Haas, former head of German finance, before the United Nations General

Assembly. In a tired, thin, and plaintive voice Von Haas had warned the nations of impending deflation: "These times remind me of the inflationary period in Germany that preceded the Second World War. The time when every German thought himself a millionaire, and every millionaire thought himself a billionaire. And how they looked down on the 'Sixty American Families of Aristocrats.'"

He continued, "I tried to warn Briand then. I pleaded with Lloyd George not to make exorbitant demands upon Germany for reparations for the previous war. But they would not listen. They refused to listen, not believing that the problems of one nation are soon visited on the next nation.

"So we began printing dollars just as the nations are doing now. And the faster we printed them, the more we needed them, so high did prices mount. Then it came—the depression! The terrible depression in which the mark fell to one-trillionth of its former value. Mind you! One-trillionth! Then came Hitler and his followers, like an evil plague upon an already sick country. And the world was surprised! To us who watched and knew, it was no surprise. But the world! How they raved at their own doings! Now, many years later, I see that the same thing is about to happen again. This time it will be not only Germany—but all the world! All the world! . . . It must not happen again!"

Those remarks and the spiraling costs weighed heavily upon the mind of the UN leaders. Faced with a catastrophic financial situation, they set about establishing a world-controlled currency. Out of the conferences and debates that followed came a new order in the handling of currency. *For the first time in the history of the world one type of currency was established for all nations.* This currency was minted by an organization called the International Currency Printing and Distributing Agency, and its powers by far exceeded those given to the Bank of International Settlement founded way back in 1947.

After much deliberation, Lurania was chosen as the site of this tremendous function, presumably because it was the smallest and weakest of all the nations belonging to the UN and therefore less apt to give the other nations any trouble.

There the new currency was manufactured and from there it was distributed, according to designated quotas, among the nations. The new currency was different from all former money in design, manufacture, and texture. It was called "glass money," because it contained many of the ingredients used in the making of shatter-proof glass and was beautiful to look at, imperishable through fire or transfer, and thin, so as to facilitate its handling in both small and large quantities. Needless to add, the new glass money was a great success with everyone. Merchant, housewife, and banker alike found it delightful and expedient.

To top it off, Alexis Rathenau, President of Lurania, was elected administrator of the organization! Under his direction the currency was manufactured and distributed, subject only to the World Banking Commission and the World Economic Commission.

Immediately after the installation of this great function, Constantine Wilder was assigned by his syndicate to write "The Great Money Story," a series of articles telling how the new money was manufactured and printed, a feature in which all people all over the world were interested. Nothing could have pleased Wilder more. Although he had seen Rathenau in New York recently, circumstances had not permitted him to lay eyes on Lydia for more than a year. He was anxious, even jubilant, to start, not guessing that the assignment to Lurania would, before it was finished, lead to a series of events that would make him a part of a "sleeper apparatus"—a function used by secret organization to prepare the operator for some future maneuver.

His arrival at Lurania might have foreshadowed the sort of visit he was to experience. To begin with, no one met him at the Luranian airport that dull, rainy afternoon. When he phoned the I.C.P. & D. mint, a secretary informed him that he was to go directly to Rhodora, and that the servants would make him comfortable. But why only the servants?

"Ist Fraulein Rathenau zu haus?" he asked.

"Nein. Fraulein Rathenau . . . in Berne . . ." The rest eluded him.

That brief, drab cab ride to Rhodora Castle seemed to have been made through most any place but Lurania; everything was so radically changed. In place of the charming, pert chalets and the gaudily painted wooden statues in the center of the streets, he now saw through the muggy drizzle wet and shiny structures of steel and stone extending as far as the eye could see. The entire valley, without exception, was devoted solely to the processing and printing of the new glass currency. From the driver he learned that the villagers had been removed to a super-housing project on the other side of the mountain, from which they commuted to the mint by a series of new roads and tunnels.

As he entered Rhodora, the servants rushed out to him with umbrellas and welcoming smiles. They could tell him little more about his host and hostess than he had learned from the telephone conversation, except that Lydia was now engaged in assisting her father. She had become a busy fraulein negotiating business. So! Those serious remarks she had made from time to time were not just exaggerated presumptions, but honest expressions of her blossoming personality.

Constantine did no writing on the articles the following day, but, escorted by a UN guard of the I.C.P. & D. mint, he spent the entire day walking through the plants, observing the making of the glass substances used in the manufacture of the money, the large complex processes that did the mixing, sorting and printing, and the warehouses where millions and millions of dollars lay on the shelves of huge vaults. He also saw numerous other operations of the plant. He was unable to cover the entire plant and the special airport from which the money was transported to the ends of the earth. That would take several days. He did, however, get many good photos of some of the workers and of some of the functions he wanted to write about. He was very tired by the time he got back to Rhodora.

The servants, having been inducted into playful conspiracy, did not tell him that Lydia had returned from her business trip, had discarded her severely tailored black suit for warm soap suds, and was gaily humming in her part of the big house, as she applied the devastating niceties that turn pretty ladies into en-

chanting queens and kings into jesters. And so Constantine had not dressed for dinner but sat there in his tweeds waiting for the food to be brought in, when Lydia dramatically pulled aside the living room portieres and displayed her sylph-like figure sheathed in white.

Like most men who cannot probe the depths of a woman's heart, he did not know what was in her mind as she walked to him with outstretched arms. "It's so good to see you again," she said joyously.

"It's wonderful, now that *you're* here."

Of a sudden his mood changed from dreariness to delight. In this sudden acceleration he almost forgot his hunger. There was so much to ask, so many things to recount about today, last week, last year, and the years before and between their meetings. Never was he surer of his love for her, never more doubtful of her feelings toward him. Because they had known each other so long, he catalogued the affectionate glances, the effervescent mannerisms toward him, as in that category reserved for brothers, relatives, and platonic friendships. And so he did not permit his innermost feelings to express themselves in words. The difference of their ages, too, although his was no longer three times hers—not even twice, now—still held him passive.

The beauty of that night came back to taunt him as he tossed upon his prison bed. Why had he not taken her in his arms and told her of his love? Listened to his heart instead of his analytical mind? He knew now that it was possible to love too deeply, to immolate oneself as to a goddess, to be so much moved by beauty as to lessen one's self-esteem. He knew, too, that such idealistic love was not for this world or of the quality that clasps a woman tightly in a man's embrace, adoring her, awakening her, intoxicating her senses with the headiness of love. Why had he permitted the difference in their ages to interfere and to rob him of such love?

But even if that thought had not interfered, there were other things taking place that memorable night which did. The intrusion was followed by a series of events that never again gave

Constantine the opportunity he had forfeited. It all began with Rathenau's return about ten o'clock and the men he brought with him. Constantine recognized General Boddenheim and Professor Kinderman from the many pictures of these famous men he had seen in the newspapers. This was the first chance he had had to meet them personally. He was more familiar with the General and his supervision over the vast hordes of planes, jets, and supra-cargo jets created under the Allied Defense Act than he was with the professor and his remarkable invention, the Sun Machine, which for more than a year now had been providing the entire civilized world with electricity transmuted from the sun's radiating energies.

"I'm sorry I missed the inauguration of your power plants," said Constantine, shaking the professor's hand. "Have you determined your capacity?"

"As yet it remains a mystery, simply limitless!" beamed the bald little wizard. "The plant is rated for six trillion KVA. By the end of next year we expect to be able to project our energies to supply all movable objects, such as planes, automobiles, and ships. Yes, the sun's energies come to us faster and more abundantly than we can ever use them."

General Boddenheim had other thoughts on his mind, and he was not long in expressing them. "Rathenau tells me you are interested in exposing certain cartels and combines which are dangerous to world peace."

Conny had not recalled making any such remarks, and he glanced quizzically at Rathenau. Rathenau replied by peremptorily shutting his eyes and nodding.

"There is a mistaken idea abroad," continued General Boddenheim, "that all financiers are opposed to Communism. That is not so." He opened a little notebook and read off a few names. "You are familiar with these names, I am sure. These men are as desirous of power as is the Dyssian Premier Kkobba, himself. They think they perceive a new trend in the social order, and they mean to be at the top when that change comes into existence."

"I don't quite get you," said Constantine.

Rathenau hastened to inject his views. "You see, Conny, the

masses are also seeking power. They are getting it more and more each day. These unscrupulous men perceive that fact, and they believe that eventually the masses will inadvertently weld themselves into totalitarian states—a sort of feudalistic system in which only the *bureaucrats*, behind the mask of the State and the weak will of the masses, *will dominate*, as in Dyssia today. In that, these financiers may possess a strong weapon, because never in the history of man, biblical, ancient, or modern, has man en masse shown the ability to govern himself. The masses are still submerged in instinctive, superstitious, primitive forces. Only a small minority have achieved any perspicacity at all. Only here and there in the United States mainly, has man shown any inclination to rule himself, and if it weren't for your great Constitution, even there the ugly venom of deceit would find expression. And there is no telling what fear, hunger, and want can do to a free people!"

"Well put," said General Boddenheim. "Now, these men who wish to profit by man's underdevelopment have combined into cartels. Some of them are aiding Dyssia; all of them are aiding *themselves*. There are those who wish to crush the United Nations and the I.C.P. & D., which prevents them from making exorbitant profits on monetary fluctuations, as in former times they were able to do. These combines are dangerous to world peace and security. How you will go about mentioning these men in your articles is your business. Hm-mmm. . . . You cannot accuse them outright, because if you do they will destroy both you and the syndicate you work for. You will have to be careful. Your life will be in danger."

There were more conferences. The next night and the following days Constantine spent at Lurania completing his assignment on the new glass currency. During those days he became acquainted with new faces—faces he had seen around UN desks, embassies, and foreign offices.

One did not have to be clairvoyant to surmise that these men were secretly organized, presumably under the direction of Rathenau and General Boddenheim. But when Constantine tried

to verify his assumptions, he found Rathenau evasive and circuitous. . . . "They are alerted to the times." . . . "Realize that we live in a sick world," he would answer. And again, at another time he would taunt: "Some of us feel our responsibilities more . . . we are moved to do something that might sustain our freedom!"

Not that Wilder was not aware of the imminent danger. But life had provided him with insulated emotions, the equipment with which nature had endowed many a man reared in time of strain and trouble. He had as a child heard his father's dour opinions of the then pending war. Later on he had participated in another war, and he had written about that one and the one that followed, although officially the last war had been euphemistically called a "police action." Naturally robust, it was not likely that he would permit the crazy machinations of the world to interfere with his pleasures, pursuits, and love of life. He was of that rare and remarkable human species which, like the delicate cacti, clam, oyster, and tortoise, had acquired a hardened exterior to protect himself. But, being human, he too was vulnerable. His Achilles' heel lay in his love for Lydia.

Perhaps one does not begin to live or does not fully comprehend life until one begins to feel. It is only then, when one finds himself emotionally involved, that events and things take on color, meaning, and significance.

Such an awakening came to Constantine on the fifth day of his stay in Lurania. They had been unusually late in leaving the mint and their respective duties. Lydia and he were both tired and on edge.

"You're working too hard," commented Constantine, noticing Lydia's suppressed yawn as they slipped into the car. "You work as if you had to meet a deadline. That harassing group of women who called upon you this afternoon—who were they?"

Lydia turned the key to the motor, and the buildings, one by one, came and vanished. "I will tell you, Conny, if you will promise not to write anything about them for the time being," she said, watching the road.

"If you wish," agreed Constantine.

"Those women have important affiliations in church, indus-

trial, and political organizations in all countries. We discussed certain critical situations and how to bring those critical situations to the attention of the authorities in our respective countries."

"What do you call yourselves—what name?"

Lydia gave him a quick glance. "We do not have an official title. It is too dangerous to label ourselves. It will mark us—leave us open to criticism and thwart our objectives. Call us the defenders of civilization—that is our purpose."

"I see," said Constantine, biting his upper lip. "Do you think it is right," he queried admonishingly, "to have a secret organization? In view of the United Nations—"

"Father says anything is right if it is motivated by good intentions. And as for the United Nations, have you forgotten that Dyssia, our avowed enemy, is also a member?"

"And have you forgotten, Lydia," countered Constantine, "that if it weren't for the UN, Dyssia would have by now overrun Europe?"

Lydia was derisive. Her sentiments did not become such a sweet face. "That's the real danger," she scoffed. "The UN waits for overt aggression. Otherwise, it will not act. Do you think Dyssia could do us more harm than she is doing now—covertly? Has she not conquered Austria and threatened to take over half of Europe? Under the protection of the UN she operates most successfully. Need I enumerate all the crimes she has committed?"

"Still, I cannot say I approve of secret organizations," continued Constantine. "That leaves us open to other secret—"

"You do not seem to realize," interrupted Lydia, "that the threatened depression which has already begun with the slackening of the armament production will be the nemesis of the human race and will lead us into an unannounced war! A war which will destroy us all!" Her voice was unusually emphatic. "Conny, if *you* did not realize this, you with your knowledge of facts, how can we expect the many millions who are less informed to realize it? Oh, it is so discouraging! If the people in the world continue to refuse to be awakened from their lethargy, no A, H, or even an entire alphabet of bombs will save us. I am worried,

Conny. At times I lie awake at night—afraid of what seems to be coming closer and closer—"

"I don't like to hear you talking like this," said Constantine reproachfully, his eyes on the beautiful trees they were passing. "Life at best is a gamble. Why be so morbid about it? Aren't you over-imagining this thing? I'm afraid your close association with your father and his work has—"

Lydia suddenly lurched forward and pulled hard on the brake. The trees came to an abrupt stop. She turned, her face taut with pain. "It's all right for you Americans to speak that way," she said, her eyes flashing. "You've never really known what it is to be hungry—to be so scared that you can hardly remember your own name!"

He wanted to remind her that he, too, had undergone hardship as a soldier, but the moisture in her eyes and the way she turned her face from him kept him from speaking.

"I've known such fear!" she continued staring blankly ahead. "Father kept the echo of the First and Second World Wars in my ears with tales of horror. Father lost his left arm, and later mother disappeared! They murdered her! Murdered her because she wrote the truth!" Lydia raised her hands to her hot, wet cheeks and buried her face, sobbing uncontrollably.

Conny felt miserable. By the time he moved to embrace Lydia's shoulders, she had loosened the brake and her foot was pressing the accelerator. Soberly, tensely, they drove on to Rhodora.

At dinner Lydia spoke little, ate less, and retired early. Constantine felt wretched. When Rathenau returned, he had with him, as usual, some official with more grievances, more world problems. This time the guest was Von Haas, the former German economist, who had made that provocative prediction before the General Assembly regarding the imminence of a deflation.

"Conny," said Rathenau, "Herr Von Haas has some special information that may be of great interest to you. Up to now he has declined to make this knowledge public."

Von Haas seemed anxious. "My time is very short," he said.

"I am an old and sick man. I have facts that should be brought before the public, and yet it is impossible to get anyone to listen to me in my country. The Dyssian influence is that strong there."

Constantine listened, this time with an inner ear. Von Haas' information was no longer the concern of Lurania, France, England, Italy, and other less dependent nations. His disclosures showed how involved the United States was in this vortex. The United States! Home! The land of fabulous TV shows, baseball, hot dogs and steaks, when you wanted them! A land of miracles! Not just for the politician, the industrialist, the government worker, but for everyone! He also realized, as he listened, that if he were to write the story—and the story seemed to have tremendous possibilities—it would be necessary for him, according to Von Haas, to leave for England almost immediately.

"Sir Symington will give you further facts to augment mine," assured Von Haas. "He is holding my documents in his vaults."

And Rathenau was saying, "I can have a Jetosphere ready by three A.M. You must be in London by daybreak if—what do you say?"

Constantine was thinking of Lydia. He wanted to stay on, to see her and tell her that he understood her feelings, but instead he said, "Very well, gentlemen. Will you have someone wake me, around two-thirty?"

From those documents and the investigations that followed his visit Constantine created a new series of articles, entirely different from the reports and assignments he had been writing for his home office. In fact, those were the investigations that changed him into a fiery, vituperative, and accusative writer who was always asking questions and insinuating certain dire conclusions in his articles. . . . "Who is behind the cartel that last week shipped to Calcutta one million tons of steel ingots? And why to Calcutta?" And immediately, on the same line, merely separated by dots, was the name of some industrial representative reported landing at that port, leaving the reader to draw the implied connection.

Fully awakened to the dangerous undercurrents that were

constantly menacing world security, he now, much to Rathenau's satisfaction, gave the reading world much to cogitate upon. But, withal, his efforts were of little avail—mere drops of water on a burning house. Nor were his articles always printed. When they were, they were often altered and attenuated because so-and-so knew so-and-so, or because that particular so-and-so might do so-and-so to the publisher in retaliation.

But by this time Constantine was determined to carry on and expose the enemies of world peace. What disappointments and heartaches he suffered from the public's attitude toward his writings! Constantly he found himself confronted with complacency and indifference. . . . No one wanted the truth—not the full truth—so help me God! Such truth carried with it a belief, and with that belief would come conviction. And to have conviction is to be stimulated into action. Oh, no! Nothing like that! People read him just because he was interesting in a bold, caustic, Peglerian manner that satisfied to some degree their own masochism. The challenges inflicted by a free citizenship were still being met through escape into comic books, "porny literature," and vicarious adventure. Only when hunger hit the lower regions of the anatomy did people resort to action, and then only to strikes, demonstrations, and wildly misdirected outbursts. In Europe the previous wars, the following strife, and the current tribulation had so debased the human personality as to make the populace satisfied with crumbs—crumbs thrown by scheming demagogues.

All this was sickening and trying. At such times Constantine would question his own motives and compare them with the lessening revenues that his controversial writings now brought. "After all, I'm no Rathenau! Rathenau's got reason for such self-sacrifice!" Had Rathenau not explained how he had been reared in poverty, trained for the priesthood, and only through illness and circumstances had taken employment in a bank and there shown his aptitude for finance and leadership? And had he not maintained that he had never felt right about his change in vocations? The Church, the fathering of a people, had been Rathenau's true objective throughout his life. And Rathenau was doing and

would continue to do these things with or without ecclesiastical robes.

But he, Wilder, had not known hunger or want or felt a conscionable need for retribution. Then why was he carrying Rathenau's banner? Was it Lydia—was it because of her? Or had the seeds which Rathenau had planted borne fruit? Was he, too, becoming convinced of the danger? And, worse yet, becoming involved in Rathenau's plans?

Chapter 4

As Wilder drove out of Berne on his way to Les Verrières, the Swiss border city that would lead him back to Lurania and Rathenau, he thought of how this involvement had just now almost cost him his life! Two days ago he had been in Paris, where he had hailed a cab and asked the driver to take him to the Place de la Concorde. Soon he had found himself by accident or design in a narrow alley, with the driver running from the cab and disappearing around a corner! How well his army training had asserted itself! Throwing himself to the floor of the cab, he had waited for the shooting to begin, not knowing that the fates, in the person of two gendarmes, had frustrated his assailant's intentions. Seeing the driverless cab with its motor running, the gendarmes had come over and opened the door at the very moment when Constantine was thinking of Boddenheim's warning and saying to himself, "This is it!"

Now he took one hand off the wheel and felt inside his breast pocket. The .38 caliber snub-nose was there—cold, hard, reassuring. Then he lifted his sleeve and noted the time. It was six o'clock, and he had promised Rathenau that he would meet him around nine. When he looked up at the mirror, he saw a huge, black truck trailing him some two hundred yards back. This was nothing unusual, except that the truck was able to keep up with his new Atomic 101.

Just to make sure that he was not being followed, he slowed down to twenty miles per hour. The truck also slowed down, and on a road wide enough for four cars to pass! To further dispel his apprehensions, Constantine stopped at the first hostelry he came to. The truck sped by, and he rebuked himself for having had such ominous thoughts. When he again took to the wheel, he noticed that the road was becoming narrower and the day darker, and that he was gradually going into the mountains. He switched on the headlights and settled back into a comfortable position.

Within two hours he would be in Lurania, and if he were really lucky, Lydia would be there to greet him. He was humming a new refrain, when suddenly out of nowhere the truck once again appeared in his mirror. Was this mere coincidence or was he being followed? He drove on until the road became somewhat wider, then he slowed down, hoping that the truck would pass him. This time the truck did not take the initiative. It remained behind him, visible when the road was straight, lost when curves and bends occurred in the highway. This was no coincidence.

He considered the matter of making a U turn, but the narrowness of the highway and the abyss below gave him cause for continuing. And even if he should make the U turn, it would place him at the mercy of the truck, which could then easily shove him off the road. He'd have to take his chances with the road ahead.

Some miles on, the road opened up for a space. Quickly he swung the car around and jumped out. There was only one thing he could do now as against two things that might happen. His car could be shoved off the road. In that case he'd have to be in a spot from which he could jump. If shooting started from the truck, it would be safer behind the motor. He chose the side of the motor, drew his "blue steel," knelt, and waited for the oncoming truck. The truck roared by and kept on going. Nothing had happened.

Now he was faced with a decision. Should he keep on going? Should he return whence he had come, or should he follow the truck on the road to Les Verrières? Rathenau would be expecting

him soon. Again he took his fate in his hands and turned the car around. Traveling at a much slower speed, he continued on his way. There was no sign of the truck, and only a few passenger cars passed him on his left. Constantine relaxed, lit a cigarette, and observed the beauty of the serene, starry night. Then, just as he came around a bend, he again saw the truck poised on a hill to his right and moving to the road and to him. He took his foot off the accelerator and applied the brakes. But time and contiguity were against him. He felt himself being lifted from the seat and hitting the ceiling of the car.

That was the last he remembered.

When Constantine came to, he was lying in a bed, with Lydia sitting on a chair beside him.

"Where am I?" he asked feebly, taking in the blank walls and white hooded nun near the window.

"Shh!" warned Lydia, trying to smile. "You must rest. As you can figure out for yourself, this is no amusement hall. Such a scare you gave us!"

"How did—how did I get here?"

"Shh! You are fortunate that the man who saw your car somersault down an embankment happened to be one of those you photographed at the mint. He recognized you and brought you here."

"Am I all in one piece?" He looked at his hands and then tried to move his legs. His right leg seemed to be fastened to the bed. A terrible feeling crept into his heart. Frantically he rose from the pillow and threw the covers aside. "My leg!" he gasped. "My leg!"

Lydia took his trembling hands and held them firmly. The smile was gone and there was that pained look in her eyes. "Your leg is in a cast, Conny. We are hoping and praying that it will be as good as new when the cast comes off. You are a fortunate man to be alive."

Sitting on the prison bed and gazing steadfastly beyond the iron bars, Constantine murmured, "Fortunate!" Was it fortunate to be in love with someone you could not make love to? She

might even think him ridiculous! And then, too, what about those daily visits by Julius Agranoy, the young and handsome legate from Dyssia? Officially his visits were to see Rathenau—he seemed to be secretly in league with Rathenau; but Constantine knew there was another interest, too. Agranoy was forever bringing Lydia home, escorting her on horseback, coming unexpectedly upon Lydia and himself on the terrace, in the garden, or at dinner. One did not have to be psychic to know that Agranoy was enamored of Lydia. And, what was more provoking, she seemed to respond to Agranoy's overtures!

A feeling of resentment toward Agranoy rose within Constantine, a feeling he had never experienced toward anyone before. It brought with it a sense of guilt, because there were other times, when Lydia was not around, when Agranoy would present an entirely different personality and would command a certain respect. There was that night when Agranoy had come to the house truly anxious and perturbed; that time in which he faced Rathenau with a sincerity that bordered on fear.

"What is this tremendous change you predict?" Rathenau had demanded of him. And Agranoy had looked at Constantine as though he were an intruder before whom he dared not voice his thoughts. Rathenau was quick to discern Agranoy's attitude. "You may speak before my friend. He is the son of the late Frederick Wilder, the great humanist of whom I have spoken. Conny is slowly but surely becoming the likeness of his father. Already he has done much to warn the nations of the danger they are courting."

Agranoy's answer was an indifferent shrug of the shoulders.

"Here, see for yourself!" insisted Rathenau, pointing to Constantine's foot. "Our enemies have tried to get him out of the way—to kill him! Now what is disturbing you so?" He placed himself in front of Agranoy. "Have you word of open hostilities?"

At last the cautious Agranoy decided to speak. "Worse! I have been informed of great cash withdrawals in New York, London, Paris. Vast sums are being transferred to accounts and vaults in Switzerland. And it is from Switzerland that these accounts make demands for their withdrawals to be paid in gold.

Gold payments are being met at alarming rates but how long this can continue before the nations will be drained of this precious metal is a day-by-day guess.

"Unless this drain can be stalemated the situation becomes increasingly critical! We are facing a situation that has preceded all financial catastrophes, former depressions."

Rathenau's eyes went wide with concern. Nervously, slowly, he stroked his beard. "So, it is coming—the thing we dreaded most!"

Agranoy looked solemnly at Constantine as he continued. "The great prosperity, the great inflationary balloon your country has built out of ethereal dollars will burst. Tomorrow will be the day of reckoning. The Black Friday of 1929 will seem like the fall of a piggy bank by comparison."

Rathenau became grave. "This is indeed terrible news! It is the day Dyssia has slyly awaited!"

"Yes," said Agranoy, "I'll wager there is great jubilation in the Embassy. I perceived a voracious gleam in my colleagues' eyes as I listened to them yesterday in the Paris offices."

"How fiendish! How superbly fiendish they have played the game!" groaned Rathenau. "Instigating riots here, wars there, driving the world on to an armament race that would exhaust its resources! Playing possum, easing up when facing open warfare, making the world believe that no war will ever materialize. This is more dreadful than a shooting war. It is the real secret weapon upon which Kkobba and his cohorts rely. Wars coalesce people into fighting for self-protection, but depressions, hunger—they bring disintegration, internal disorder, and strife and vitiate the strongest of nations."

Constantine could not refrain from adding, "Guess General MacArthur had the right idea back in 1951, but they pussyfooted him out of the East and placed him on a pension."

"Such bungling!" averred Rathenau. "Now Dyssia will be stronger than ever! And your plans, Agranoy?"

"What plans?" answered Agranoy, with a futile thrust of the hands. "Can we under such conditions hope to free our people? Not only will the bureaucrats be more successful in Europe, but

they stand a good chance of proselyting the entire world into Communism. And the hungry, tired, confused world will capitulate like a lamb overrun by wolves!"

"Terrible! Terrible!" groaned Rathenau. "This could mean the end of everything! Take us back a thousand years—maybe more!"

"We must get in touch with D.O.C.!" Agranoy's suggestion sounded more like a command.

Before the thoughtful Rathenau could reply, Constantine was saying, "This organization, D.O.C.—meaning Defenders of Civilization—is the one I have been a part of without knowing the full details but have nevertheless helped, is it not?"

"You have helped yourself," retorted Rathenau, "you helped the world! And whatever was printed—whatever you wrote—was the truth! Remember that, Conny!"

"Well, this secret organization is under men like General Boddenheim, Von Haas, Professor Kinderman, and your—"

"Yes, yes, we have friends in all nations. We will not rest and see our civilization destroyed."

"But these men—the General—he is Commander-in-Chief of all Allied air power! How can he be loyal to the United Nations and still be head of a secret organization?"

Agranoy's keen eyes shifted suspiciously from Rathenau to Constantine and back to Rathenau as he listened to Constantine.

"I know that neither Boddenheim nor Kinderman is the real leader," said Constantine, looking directly at Rathenau. "I know that you are the leader, your Excellency."

"So!?" Rathenau studied Wilder. "I do not think that you will expose us, Conny. You could not prove a thing."

"Still, I am opposed to secret organizations—any secret organizations."

"And, too," said Rathenau, as if arriving at some mathematical formula, "I know of your fondness for Lydia. Also, in spite of yourself, you are no longer as complacent and immune to world problems. Work with us, Conny!"

Constantine rose and placed the crutch under his armpit. "If you will excuse me, sir, I do not wish to learn more." He started

for the door, but a menacing revolver held by Agranoy stopped him.

"Put that away, Julius!" demanded Rathenau, coming between the two men and placing his hands on Constantine's shoulders.

"You said we could trust him!" Agranoy was adamant. "He's a newspaper man! I should have known!"

"Yes," said Constantine, Rathenau's hand still on his shoulder, "but not a conspirator! As members of the United Nations your sacred duty is to resort to that tribunal for aid, and none other. But don't worry, I shall not write anything about this. As you said, no one would believe my accusations, there are too many such groups now in existence. Your motives, sir, are good, but your methods, wrong."

Rathenau withdrew his hand and motioned Agranoy away. "Listen, Conny, for years we have appealed to the UN and warned it of the danger that is now coming to a head. But we could not accomplish a thing. The Council could not stem the rising tides of inflation or prevent our enemies from operating from within. Is this not the very world situation for which the hierarchy in Dyssia have waited? When the stock market opens tomorrow, the world will be thrown into chaos, chaos!"

"And how do you propose to prevent it," Wilder asked dubiously.

"That is our problem, Conny! Yours, too, if you are awakened to the consequences. But we haven't given up fighting. Agranoy here stands to lose his life, even if he should win his cause. He wants to liberate his people, has been waiting for the opportunity to overthrow the bureaucracy that enslaves his nation. Should he, too, give up trying? He could do otherwise and ride on the crest of Dyssia's success. But he has chosen the other course—the course of justice—and he is willing to hazard all for the sake of an ideal. But you! You want to return to your comforts, evade the issues, and find words and arguments to excuse not taking right action!"

"And what do you call right action, your Excellency?"

"To do that which you believe in, against all odds, against all

prescribed sanctions! To do that which your conscience commands! Our methods do not seek to use force—atomic means—if that is what you surmise. Our aims are solely to stalemate a world hell-bent on destroying itself—"

After that, Constantine limped from the room.

But he could never forget those words. They were with him when he took leave of Rhodora that very afternoon without so much as waiting to say good-bye to Lydia. They were with him when he got back to New York and saw the turmoil caused by the depressed world markets. Everything that Rathenau had long ago predicted, long ago feared, came into actuality, taunting him, challenging his conscience and his convictions: the queues of hungry men and women receiving alms outside of churches, the angry, marching, threatening crowds on the avenues, in front of closed factories, in the parks, around city halls. Rathenau's words followed him to London, to Paris. They were in his ears as he watched the demonstrating agitators, the frustrated populace, the dejected businessmen, the dissension and uprisings everywhere. No longer aided by a United States, the nations of Europe were again faced with the old problem of survival that had divided them in former times, that had created their previous wars. But war now was out of the question. The weapons they had created during the lush years of the armament race were now obsolete, and the people were clamoring for food, not guns. No longer believing their leaders, no longer concerned with their neighbors or neighboring nations, they were concerned only with the necessities that would keep them alive.

In these physical needs lay a great danger. From the pursuits of learning, working, and creating, it was possible for man to revert to a beast-like existence, where loyalty to self, one's brother, and one's country would be utterly submerged.

It was as though the great industrial age, that era which had established prosperity and provided things for the living by and though the machine, was about to collapse. In that, the world was like a giant automaton, an automaton made of man's in-

genuity and metals taken out of the earth; but lacking the vision, the faith, the creativeness, which can come only from the spirit.

Constantine was in Tel Aviv covering the new war that had broken out between the Arabs and Israel when he received a cable from Rathenau, asking him to meet him in Burgdorf, Switzerland. Anxious months had passed since Constantine had last seen Rathenau and Lydia, and the note evoked conflicting emotions. He wanted to see Lydia—to show her how well he could walk now—and he also wanted to confirm in his mind the reasons that prompted Rathenau to call upon him from time to time. The fact that he had written and exposed some of the world's worst culprits by Rathenau's direction was not enough. There must be other reasons for Rathenau's continued interest in him. He had a foreboding that any further association with Rathenau and his colleagues would lead to some unforeseen disaster. Still, he had to go.

He arrived at the Kurhaus, Rothohe, situated high above Burgdorf, which Rathenau had been able to reserve exclusively for this meeting because tourists no longer came to the Kurhaus. A husky madchen, who insisted on carrying Constantine's luggage to his room, smiled broadly as she drew aside the draperies and pointed to infinity. "Dot's Jungfrau—the mountain," she said, using her best English.

Wilder took a look out of the wide bay window and could see nothing but falling snow and a dull gray sky. "Ya." He nodded. "I will look when the storm is over."

She laughed, blushed, and skipped to the door. As she opened it, Rathenau stepped in.

"I want to see you alone," he said, "before the others arrive. I want you to know what to expect."

Constantine thought this was a good time—at least as good a time as any—to ask Rathenau a few questions, but in deference to the older man he waited.

"You have perhaps been wondering why I keep on calling upon you from time to time," said Rathenau, seating himself. "It is no secret. You have been a great help in bringing certain names into the limelight, people who will bear watching. Then, too, I

must admit a fondness for you, and I do not wish to be an obstacle between you and my daughter."

"Has she—?"

"No, no—what her ideas are concerning you I can only imagine. I do not try to sway her in such matters. That is something for her to decide. There is another matter which to me is of great importance, and I should like to discuss it with you." He hesitated for a moment.

"Certainly, sir, please do."

"My colleagues and I have formulated a plan that might turn out to be my undoing. But it may accomplish our purpose." He rose and walked to the window, stroking his beard. "I have a premonition I may die soon." For a moment it seemed the world stood still. "And that could happen from natural causes," he continued, "since I have already outlived the age of any of my ancestors."

"You want me to write something—something special?" asked Constantine. "Men like yourself are always written about."

"Yes, yes, but the cold facts, they impugn me, they wrong me. I wonder if you understand what I mean?"

"I'm trying," said Wilder ironically. "That is why men in your position have kept diaries, have written books about themselves. I suppose they, too, wanted to leave the *right* impression. Presidents, generals, kings, and judges have written diaries expressly for the world to—"

"I do not keep a diary," cut in Rathenau, "And I have not done this thing for myself! You know that. I have done it for the world and the world is entitled to know the truth—the motivation!"

"I couldn't have any objection to what is news—and you are news."

"There is another thing, Conny."

"Sir, if I am to do it, I must be free to say what I believe."

"I have no objection to that, Conny. I leave that entirely to you. My only request is that for the present you write nothing about me or our plans. That would spoil everything."

"I see."

"If that is agreeable to you, I shall make it possible for you to learn more about our plans and to sit in on our meetings. You shall be the only correspondent familiar with the true facts." He came over to Constantine and held out his hand. Constantine was deliberate in responding.

"You have faith in me," Constantine said quietly.

"You earned that faith by not disclosing facts that you already know, and I guess you know more than we surmise."

"I know, sir, that your motives are unselfish. That is mainly why I could not permit myself to indulge in liberties."

"I knew I was right about you," smiled Rathenau. "Now, this evening you shall meet my collaborators, some of whom you have already met."

"Will Lydia be here?"

"No, Conny; she is in Lurania. I had to leave here there. I am very proud of her, son. She is of great help to me."

Chapter 5

THE MEETING turned out to be far more interesting than he, Constantine, had imagined. Of the eleven men besides himself who seated themselves around the square table that night, he had already met three. The rest he knew from what he had read and heard about them. They were all key men, official representatives of their respective countries in some high capacity, either to the UN or to some foreign office. Constantine could not help noting that Rathenau was the thirteenth man to enter.

Although Constantine considered himself well informed as to world situations in general, he was surprised at the interpretations rendered. These men were not only familiar with world situations, but were able, like champion chess players, to perceive future moves and events. Within a short time the main issue and purpose of the meeting became quite clear—a demand for concerted

action. *Just what this action would be and what shape it would take was conspicuously absent from the discussions. That seemed to be the group's top secret, mention of it being taboo.*

For a long time Constantine listened intently, said nothing, asked no questions. He was absorbed with General Boddenheim's insistence that now was the time to act; that his men stood in readiness; and that to delay further would only weaken the allied nations and make them easier prey for Dyssia.

"We must act now," demanded the General. "My men are ready. The longer we wait the worse conditions get. From Sinkiang, on a site four hundred and fifty miles from the Dyssian border, comes word of a detonation two thousand times greater than that which hit Hiroshima. If these two enemies begin striking at each other the Pentagon will *have to act.* Will she defend China or Dyssia?" The slight pause that followed only added to the tense atmosphere. His next words were sombre and foreboding. . . . "In a matter of hours the entire globe will be a searing mass of heat, radiation and charred rubble!"

"That is most true; most possible," averred Ho Chi Tong, his head nodding. "To subbue our people from escalating this civil war now in progress, Peking will declare a war against an outside enemy, any one of ten, to divert our people against another nation will coalesce us into a unified country. Such is the strategy resorted to by all leaders in time of chaos. But we, if we are to avert this catastrophe we must act! And act now!"

It didn't seem real to Wilder. Was he dreaming this? Was this actually taking place? In this time? This life? And now he found himself listening to the inventor Kinderman telling how he could stalemate the world into inertia. He learned the part Professor Kinderman, the inventor of the amazing Sun Machine, was to play, and how at Rathenau's signal he would stop all energy from being directed into normal channels and public use and divert the energy so as to cripple and demoralize communications the world over.

This came as a startling revelation to Wilder as he heard to what devilment this supplanter of electricity could be diverted. "I cannot guarantee how long," said Kinderman, "I can keep the

newer machines, which the allied nations have permitted me to experiment with, a secret. Those newer machines were secretly to be used against Dyssia in case of war. If I am to put them to use for our cause, we must decide to do so now, this week."

Julius Agranoy did not wait for Kinderman to finish. "I, too, think we should act now!" he demanded. "My friends in Dyssia are willing to chance it. Dictator Kkobba and his bureaucracy grow stronger by the minute. We must act before the Dyssiasts begin to stampede over Europe, this time not by propaganda, but by force—with paratroopers, atomic bombs, and ten million soldiers, which they consider expendable, to say nothing about the forty million they have under arms, the vast horde of jets and stratosphere bomb carriers—"

By now Wilder's curiosity was getting the best of him; his body was tense with excitement. He leaned over and asked Rathenau, "Just what is this thing they want you to do?"

"You heard them," answered Rathenau nonchalantly. "They want me to tell them to go ahead."

"Yes, but what will your order put into action?"

"Ah, my boy, now it is your turn to have faith. You will find out in due time. Be patient."

Rathenau rose and directed his attention to the group. "You harass me with demands for action. But I do not see my way clear as yet. I do not have the conviction for action. Perhaps that is not a sufficient answer for you, but for me it is enough. If you will recall the early stages of our organization, you will remember how quiescent and tranquil all was on the surface. Still, during that period I had a strong conviction of what was to come in the future. That future is today. My convictions were strong then—they still are with regard to our purpose—but I have no convictions when it comes to going into action.

"I must have that inner conviction before I give the word. It would be easy to give the command for action, but we must consider well what we do and when we do it. While our plan does not include destruction by force, who can say or foretell what devilish machinery it will set into motion? I have always said that there are more potent weapons than bombs. We have that

weapon—" He left the table, walked to the French windows, and drew them apart. Pink patches of dawn smeared the eastern sky. "Gentlemen," he said, without so much as looking back as he walked onto the terrace, "I must have that conviction, I must have. . . ." He was out of sight. . . .

A member got up and moved to where Rathenau had stood. "Gentlemen," he said, hesitating for the grandfather clock to strike its fifth chime, "we are all tired, and some of us must be on our way if we are to be in our offices this morning. This is no time for further argument. We must remember that Rathenau is our avowed leader. He has been right all along. We must trust him now."

With that the meeting ended. Agranoy, Kinderman, Boddenheim, and several others left immediately. The four remaining members retired to their respective rooms—and Constantine to his.

He had hardly taken forty winks when he was awakened by anxious rappings on his door. "You are wanted downstairs, sir," the voice said between knocks. Constantine heard rappings on other doors and the same request repeated down the hallway. Not delaying to dress, he slipped into his shoes and robe and followed the other half-awakened men down the stairway.

Rathenau was pacing up and down, nervously pulling on his beard. "Here, here, gentlemen," he said, directing them toward the teletypewriter. They all closed around the machine and craned their necks to see what report could be so momentous as to warrant disturbing their sleep. Constantine rubbed his eyes and read the report:

> THE THIRD PARTY IN THE U.S. SEEMS TO BE GAINING IN POWER. . . . ONLY TWO WEEKS LEFT UNTIL THE ELECTION. . . . WHILE THE MARKETS OF THE WORLD KEEP DROPPING AND UNEMPLOYMENT TOUCHES A NEW LOW THE EXPORTS OF NORTH AND SOUTH AMERICA CONTINUE TO RISE. . . . HADDINGTON OF THE U.S. CHAMBER OF COMMERCE SAYS IT IS THE ONLY FUNCTION THAT HOLDS ANY HOPE FOR BUSINESS.

"What do you make of it?" asked Rathenau of a fog-eyed member.

The man shrugged his shoulders, "The third party is gaining strength—"

"I don't mean that," interrupted Rathenau. "I am referring to the export item. What do *you* think?" he asked, turning to Constantine.

The yawning correspondent was still somewhat in a fog. "I can't say."

"Well, Rothenberger, how about you?"

Rothenberger, a short, heavy-set legate from Germany, was prepared to expound at length. "Well, you know, the Americans are the only lands having any resources left and—"

Rathenau was not satisfied, and he interrupted with, "Gentlemen, I have always made it a policy to be wary of world movements I do not fully understand. This report requires explanation. Let us suppose that all of these shipments are being coalesced by one agency. And let us suppose that that agency might happen to be our enemy. That would be something to consider, eh? At a time like this, with business so depressed, this item seems to have sinister implications. I have already asked Agranoy, en route to Berne, to return. Perhaps he can give us some light on the subject."

They were still drinking cognac and black coffee and listening to Rathenau speaking to Boddenheim, who was enroute to the States, when Agranoy rushed into the room. Throwing his hat onto a chair, he walked straight to the teletypewriter pointed out by Rathenau. He studied the report for a minute and then looked at Rathenau. "You have some suspicions—you think that those exports are going to Dyssia."

Rathenau's lips pouted. His shoulders shifted inquiringly.

"Of course," continued Agranoy, "my country has been trying for years to build war materials. That is no secret. But to be able to increase exports to such proportions as indicated by recent reports requires gold! More gold than Dyssia has—more than she would be willing to part with if she had it, unless—unless—"

"Unless what, Agranoy?" Rathenau tilted his head slightly backward, his eyes burning fiercely.

"She has accomplices in all countries," answered Agranoy.

"She could be helped by those, too, who always want to be on the winning side—in case—" He turned to the communication. "Those scientists who have been working on atomic calculations—they are no longer in Bakutsk. Not even I know where they are, but I am sure they are working on some great project, something other than destructive devices."

"Aha," intoned Rathenau, "now you are thinking, Agranoy, but this is only guesswork. We must know—and quickly." He lowered his voice as if bestowing a blessing. "Agranoy, Dyssia's savior—you must return to Dyssia. I will have a Sabre jet at your immediate disposal. With conditions as they are, you can have a hundred arguments for returning. Contact your friends, the scientists. It is not likely that you will find the answers in Dysoff, the capital. But somehow you will unearth leads that will indicate to where these shipments are going. I have just sent messages to our agents in Cairo, Singapore, Algiers, and the South American ports. Use Codes 4, 6, and 8, alternating to decode. I just talked to Boddenheim. He will follow through all shipments of machinery and materials made from the States. Julius, if our suspicions are facts—"

Agranoy seemed to comprehend the full importance of his mission. He grabbed his hat and seriously shook Rathenau's hand and the hands of the other three men. When he came to Constantine, he said, "The next few days will be the most trying of my life. If I live through this ordeal, I shall return to Lurania and Lydia. If not," he hesitated, "well, in that case, I hope you will." With that he hurried out of the room, leaving Constantine pulling the lobe of his left ear and gazing into Rathenau's eyes.

"He is a noble fellow," remarked Rathenau. "Both your fates are in the hands of the gods."

"Don't you think I should have something to say about that?" asked Constantine, wondering if he should take Julius' remark as a compliment or a threat.

"I still say your fates are in the hands of the gods. Will you remain and see the developments?"

Constantine remained. He saw the men coding and decoding messages to and from distant operators. He watched the busy

Rathenau as he worked over figures and charts and listened to him speaking to distant lands over the telephone, giving orders, advising, restricting, and commanding. He even helped Rathenau, surprised that he, Constantine, should be doing it, but doing it nevertheless.

On the second evening, numb and weary, he suggested to Rothenberger that a good hike in the snow would do them both good. No sooner had they fastened on their boots and stepped onto the porch when Rathenau rushed out of the hallway brandishing a message. Decoded, it read:

SUSPICIONS JUSTIFIED . . . QUANTITIES OF MATERIALS . . . ARRIVING FROM DEVIOUS ROUTES . . . FARM IMPLEMENTS AND SUCH WHEN ASSEMBLED BECOME IMPLEMENTS OF WAR . . . STARTLING DISCOVERY . . . SCIENTISTS TRANSMUTING BASE METALS INTO GOLD . . .

"It is now or never!" said Rathenau emphatically. Determination and conviction showed clearly on Rathenau's face as he gave Rothenberger final instructions and beckoned Wilder to follow him into the house. The others were no longer there. Even the teletypewriter was gone.

"Conny," he said, swinging a picture away from the wall as one would a door and disclosing a wall safe, "I just got word that General Boddenheim is being watched closely." As he worked the combination, he continued, "Telephones are being tapped and all that sort of thing. He is quartered at the Waldorf Hotel, New York City." He pulled some papers out of the safe and laid them on the desk. "These documents have to be in the General's hands before I can give the signal. They contain the precise and different times in which the act will take place around the globe. I am going to ask you to get these papers to him. Before you decide I want you to know what is in them. When he signals me that he is ready, this is what will happen." He opened the papers and began to read:

"On October 24th, at exactly 4:55 A.M., New York City time; 6:55 A.M., Rio de Janeiro time; 9:55 A.M., London; 10:55 A.M., Paris; 12:55 A.M., Ankara," he looked up, "planes for Dyssia will leave from there and, timed accordingly as outlined here, planes will leave Mexico City, Buenos Aires, Tokyo, Algeria, Delhi, in fact, from every airfield the I.C.P. & D. uses in its usual distribution of currencies. Supra-Cargo Atomic jets will fly, and they will be laden with billions of dollars in twenty-, fifty-, and one hundred-dollar denominations, ten times the currency that is now in circulation but when delivered within one hour, equal to one thousand times as much buying power."

Rathenau rubbed his hands together vigorously. A strange, penetrating light came into his eyes as he folded the papers back into the envelope. A weird laugh exuded from his innermost being as he said, "For the first time in the history of man, money shall rain from the skies!"

"Incredible!" breathed Wilder.

"Wait, that is not all," gloated Rathenau excitedly. "Under coverage provided by Professor Kinderman's machines, our planes will operate with reasonable safety. At my command all power from the Sun Machine will cease, and the new machines for which the nations have so lavishly appropriated money will send out enough energy to interfere with communications—radio, telephone, and radar—the world over. This will make the great world-wide event appear as a local happening or accident and give the people a chance to spend the money, while also preventing the authorities from interfering with the plan."

"But how will this affect Dyssia?"

"Aha! Dyssia will be the center of my attack. If I could only be there to see it and watch Agranoy go into action with his revolutionists! What confusion! What chaos I shall bring to Dyssia! Already Agranoy has every armory, every munition plant, every strategic atomic center watched. When both of our plans go into action, Dyssia will be thrown into turmoil."

"But why are you directing this flagrant discharge of currencies also over the Allied nations?" demanded Wilder.

"Because the rest of the world is also corrupt," shouted Rathenau. "Because our enemies are not only in Dyssia, but everywhere! Because the world is confused—sick—it must be brought

to its senses! I cannot stand by and see hungry faces when I can provide out of Lurania the means for a new start in life. If money is the lifeblood of a nation, then I shall give it enough, for I have printed plenty. This thing will stop Dyssia and all our enemies. Oh, how I have pleaded with them to listen to me! But they only grimaced at my plans. Now they will have to listen! I will act! This time they *will* listen—"

"This is madness," countered Constantine. "There must be some other way!"

"Do you have a better way to stop Kkobba and his madmen?" Rathenau's voice was almost hysterical. "To stop the world from annihilation? It takes war to fight war, doesn't it? And is not war madness? It takes madness to fight madness. By the time you and the UN think of some innocuous way by which a mouse can kill a lion, Dyssia will have bought up all the world's goods! Do you want to wait and see what will happen? Dare you take that chance with all civilization at stake?"

Wilder turned from Rathenau and walked to the window to clear his thoughts. He could see Jungfrau, its crown pink and white in the distance. He was still fighting the thing he dreaded: becoming Rathenau's tool; being involved; giving up his complacency. There remained one way out. Now that he knew about Rathenau's plans, he could try to prevent their execution. Should he take them to Washington? To the President? With the interest of every senator and office boy centered on the coming election, who would listen? And President Adamson was such a difficult man. Almost hourly he was being confronted with tales of strange submarines along the coast, of sporadic uprisings across the country. Threats of war had been rampant for years. Would anyone believe him? Believe this madness? How could he prove it? And, too, this was an international matter. In meant that the United Nations would take months for debate, bungling, and delay. *Dyssia might act within days—hours!* Wilder faced Rathenau. "I'll do it!"

Rathenau opened a desk drawer and from it withdrew two envelopes and a typewritten card. "Here is a list of cities that I want you to cover after you have given my instructions to Boddenheim in New York. You shall be my eyes." He handed Wilder yet another envelope. "I have prepared for you visas for all countries listed. Those and your status as an international reporter should prevent your being detained. Agranoy will contact you at Istanbul after it is all over. And I, too, shall contact you at Istanbul."

Constantine smiled. "You knew I would help you; you prepared the envelopes in my name!"

"Yes, son. I know the values not only of money but also of men."

Six hours before the zero hour set for the great event, Constantine Wilder and his pilot landed their jet plane at Kennedy Airport. From there they proceeded by helicopter to the Hotel Waldorf's roof. General Boddenheim was in conference with several of his colleagues when Constantine entered his suite. Constantine gave the General the much anticipated envelope. He immediately read its contents to those present. The men seemed not at all disturbed. Stoically and quietly they left, one by one. Boddenheim's time also seemed to be limited, and he and Constantine parted company at the elevators, Boddenheim taking the first and Constantine the next elevator down.

On the street, Wilder checked his wristwatch with a clock in a window of a Western Union office. He had five hours to spare. He walked up Broadway with a strange feeling in his breast. Could all this be true, or was he in the midst of some weird nightmare? Within a matter of hours all this would be changed; the whole world would be thrown into a maelstrom, and what the outcome would be was something only to be conjectured. He passed a crowd gathered around a vociferous speaker who was shouting invectives at certain candidates who were up for election. How would these people react to the monies which would soon fall from heaven? Would they believe their own eyes? Would they be joyous? What would follow?

He turned into Forty-Eighth Street and stepped into Leon & Shor's Night Spot. After having several drinks, he handed the waiter a twenty-dollar glass bill and wandered off to make the

rounds of several other clubs in the vicinity to kill time. At about 4:00 A.M. he returned to the hotel roof, got into the helicopter, and drove off to the Bronx. He wanted to see how the people would take it—the people who had not had money in their hands for weeks—maybe longer. At One Hundred Forty-ninth Street and Willis Avenue he alighted on a helicopter parking tower and nonchalantly paid his fee to a sleepy caretaker.

With a pair of binoculars hanging from his shoulder, he remained standing on the platform, casually smoking a cigarette and chopping off the seconds on his timepiece . . . 4:52 . . . 4:53 . . . 4:55. . . . He could hear the rumbling thunder of the approaching planes. In another instant they were overhead, thundering their way across the metropolitan area, their sirens screaming. There was an eerie feeling inside him, a tingling sensation in his fingers, as he waited for the showers of glass bills to appear against a pale morning sky. They were not long in coming. He watched them turn, twist, and sail downward into the street. He watched them being picked up by a few early risers, who dazedly and unbelievingly turned them over and over in their hands. He regretted that he could not clearly see the expressions on the finders' faces through the lenses.

He did not have to wait long for their reactions. Within minutes, as the night screen lifted, the streets became an ant-like mass of milling humans in pajamas, robes, unlaced shoes, some with coats thrown loosely over their shoulders, all shouting and scrimmaging for the bills that still fell belatedly from windblown roofs, crevices, and cornices into the street. He had never been so moved, so shocked by the antics of human beings. The shouts of the confused mobs reached the parking tower, and the crowds around the still unopened stores filled him with a troublesome foreboding. Excitedly he perceived the good this thing would do and the good it would undo. Had he been able to foretell what terrible instincts Rathenau's plan would bring into play, he might never have gone through with it.

Later, when he again alighted on the Waldorf's Roofport, the frantic sounds from the street below electrified him anew. Almost instinctively he took to the stairs. But it was almost impossible to

make normal progress, for these, too, were full of excited people. Only now could he see their faces and hear their varied expressions of joy, disappointment, or amazement. When he finally reached the lobby, he elbowed his way to the Park Avenue exit, only to be stopped by a frantic woman who grabbed his coat and cried, "The fortune my husband left me is worthless—worthless!"

On the street he came into a City of Babel in modern dress, a torrent of wild, shouting, laughing, arguing people who shoved him from side to side. When he got to the Empire State Building, he saw several people lying in a heap on the sidewalk, and bystanders pointed to the top of the building, from which an individual had thrown himself onto the crowd. Some said that he had been a financier, driven insane by the deluge of money.

Edging into the entrance of the Empire State, Constantine noticed that the electric bulbs were on and that there were lights in the lobby stores. If such were the case, then Kinderman's counteractions had lasted only for about two hours. Then he remembered that the Empire State generated its own electricity. He looked for a brokerage firm, of which he knew there were several, and found one. It was jammed to the door. Lights were changing figures on the boards, and the teletype machines were in operation. So it was not just a matter of local power. The wire lines and airwaves were restored to service, and Kinderman's intervention had been brief, although long enough to prevent interference with Rathenau's scheme. When he got to the teletypewriter, he read, among other facts, the following:

FRENZIED MOBS ARE DEPLETING STORES OF STOCKS. . . . THERE IS STILL MUCH SPECULATION AS TO WHERE THE MONIES CAME FROM AND WHY. . . . BANK DEPOSITS WITHIN THE LAST TWO HOURS ARE PHENOMENAL. . . . WALL STREET OPERATORS ARE FRANTIC. . . . IF THE SUMS SPENT IN OTHER CITIES ARE IN ANY WAY EQUAL TO THOSE BEING SPENT HERE, THE VALUE OF THE DOLLAR WILL FALL TO ZERO. ALREADY GREAT FORTUNES ARE CONSIDERED LOST. . . . RIOTING, RECKLESS SPENDING, RELIGIOUS ZEAL, AND ROBBERY ARE THE HIGHMARKS OF THE MORNING. . . . MIGRATORS TO THE HINTERLANDS ARE BLOCKING ROADS,

TUNNELS, AND BRIDGES. . . . APPARENTLY THESE PEOPLE THOUGHT THE EVENT TO BE LOCAL AND TRIED TO ESCAPE WITH LARGE SUMS OF CURRENCY. . . . LAST-MINUTE REPORTS SAY THAT . . . BANK AUTHORITIES AND FINANCIERS ARE DEMANDING THAT PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES DECLARE A MORATORIUM. . . . REPORTS FROM CHICAGO, ST. LOUIS, ALBUQUERQUE, SAN FRANCISCO, AND LOS ANGELES TELL OF THE SAME DELUGE OF MONIES. . . .

On the way back to his helicopter, Constantine purchased the first extras that had appeared on the crowded street. When he got to the Waldorf roof, he got into the plane and read some of the accounts rendered.

From the *Chronicler*, Thomas Latham—Brooklyn, New York.

The eerie screeching of supra-cargo jets accompanying earsplitting sirens brought a sleep-fogged populace to the windows early yesterday morning. By the blue-gray morning light they beheld a bespeckled sky, out of which dropped swarms upon swarms of curling, dallying minutiae, made silvery by the rays of the still invisible sun. Already, the sidewalks and thoroughfares were littered with this matter, now appearing to be none other than green pieces the size of an average dollar bill.

Some of the sleepier ones, believing this to be another publicity stunt of some sort, returned to their cozy beds, only to be shocked out of their lethargy by wild cries arising from the streets below. In a matter of moments, they too, half dressed, with coats over pajamas, were in the streets gathering up, examining, and exulting over this money from the skies. As one early eyewitness, a milkman, put it:

"I was on the third floor and was just emptying my tray, when I heard those awful screams. They were so loud and close I felt them going through me. I stopped halfway down the stairway and looked around, my skin getting goosey. My next thought was that there had been an atomic warning, but in spite of that I found myself, a moment later, on the street. The sky was full of small objects falling to the ground. When I picked one up and looked at it, I could not believe my eyes. 'It's money!' I gasped, 'money!' But it couldn't be! So I compared it with some I had in my wallet, to make sure I wasn't nuts! Before I could pick up enough of the stuff to fill my pockets, I saw people coming out of houses up and down the street. . . ."

In *The Brooklyn Worldcaster* he read:

Mrs. Murphy, who lives on Tenth Avenue, had been up for hours before the deluge of money, attending a sick daughter and wondering how she was going to convince her grocer that almost any day now her Old Age Pension check would arrive—her first. Looking out of the window to see what sort of a day was in store for her, she perceived large pieces of falling matter. "This can't be snow," she murmured, "it's too large and peculiar." One of the pieces lit on the window sill, and out of sheer curiosity she raised the window and drew it in. "My God! My God!" she exclaimed. "My great and kind God! I knew my prayers would be answered." She rushed to show it to her daughter—a crisp, new fifty-dollar bill. She returned to the window, and then to the street. . . .

On Ninth and Main the police found a bullet-riddled car and its dead passenger shortly after the great debacle. Under the seat were several hundred fifty-dollar notes which the highjackers had overlooked. Harry Schroeder, the passenger, is only one of many such victims who met his death at the hands of frenzied thieves or mobs who are taking advantage of this peculiar situation.

The New York Carrier bore a most significant headline:

GENERAL BODDENHEIM FOUND IN CRASHED PLANE

PEORIA, Illinois (AX).—A Supra-Cargo Atomic Jet X16, identified as that belonging to the I.C.P. & D. mint, crashed within fifty feet of the Le Tourneau plant sometime this morning. Beside the dead pilot lay the mangled body of

General Boddenheim. His condition is reported to be extremely serious. It is doubtful that he will live. What his business was with the I.C.P. & D. plane is still a mystery, since his official capacity is in no way related to . . . of greater importance is the convicting evidence found in the plane . . . sums totaling millions of dollars. . . .

So he had gotten to Boddenheim in time, and now that gentleman and martyr was no more! There was no need to read further. Wilder threw the newspaper aside and started the plane. Arriving at Kennedy Airport, without waiting to check with the tower, he got into the jet and ordered the pilot to fly to Rio de Janeiro. He spent several hours in that excited city, making out reports for Rathenau. From all appearances and reports he could gather, all of South America had been thrown into the same confusion as the States. If Dyssian agents stationed there had any ideas about sending more materials to Dyssia, it was certain that for the time being their efforts were stalemated.

He learned while there that the President of the United States had ordered a general moratorium, demanding that all United States banks and business places be closed until further notice. The same procedures were in effect in the countries of South America.

Getting out of that country was not as easy as getting out of the United States had been. When Constantine got back to the plane, he found it surrounded by military police, who immediately took him and his pilot to headquarters. At some length he finally convinced them, with the help of his credentials and approved visas, that he was an international correspondent assigned to cover the world event. This time the police escorted him back to the plane with motorcycles and he was soon off to his next stop —Rome.

Rome provided the strangest and most moving sight of all. Great crowds were gathered in Piazza San Pedro, opposite the Basilica, awaiting the appearance of His Holiness, Pope Pius Leonardo. Hourly masses were being offered to our Father in Heaven. Similar gatherings, Wilder learned, were taking place in

Saint Mark's Piazza in Venice, in Piazza delle Signora, Florence, in Piazza del Duomo, Milan, and in practically every city and meeting place in Italy. Some who had been helped by the rain of money insisted upon comparing it with Jesus' former acts, in which the fishes were multiplied for the hungry multitude or in which similar miracles had been performed. They were ardent in the belief that this was an indication of Christ's second coming, and they spent the entire day in making mass confessions so that their souls might be cleansed and ready for His audience. . . .

At an American Express office Constantine learned of great religious gatherings that were also taking place in the Etoile, Trafalgar Square, Times Square, Michigan Boulevard, and other leading world centers. This unquestionably was the greatest religious revival ever experienced on the face of the globe, a fact that had to be credited to Rathenau and which compensated to some degree for the other unfortunate things this event had caused.

Wilder, completely exhausted the night he arrived in Istanbul, now checked in at the Istanbul Hotel, at which place, according to Rathenau's instructions, Agranoy was to contact him. Reclining on a couch beside the telephone, he waited for whatever means Agranoy might choose to make contact. Hours went by. There was no call, no sign of Agranoy. He dozed off. When he awoke, it was broad daylight. After hurriedly bathing and shaving, he went directly to the Dyssian Embassy. It was closed. A quick check with the local authorities and the English and United States consulates disclosed that the Dyssian legates had suddenly left for parts unknown. What was of greater importance, a revolution had broken out in Dysoff, Rieve, and other cities. Like a colossal forest fire, it was sweeping over the entire Dyviet, a development which had been Rathenau's main objective. This was exhilarating news.

But why no word from Agranoy? Still, a revolution is no ordinary thing. It turns a country upside down, inside out. Agranoy was probably too busy to check with Rathenau's agent. This was a time for patience.

Buoyantly Wilder entered the offices of *The Istanbul News*,

presented his credentials, and asked to see a teletypewriter. His joy was short-lived. The machine was full of new reports, mostly about Rathenau and his mysterious disappearance since the twenty-fourth. From every country and authority came demands for the high officer of the I.C.P. & D. to come forward and explain the flagrant discharge of monies over the world. The strongest demand came from Atlantis, the capital of the United Nations. The demand for Rathenau to come forward was followed by demands for other associates of the I.C.P. & D. to appear for questioning. A full description of Rathenau, from his Van Dyke to his lone arm, had been broadcast around the world, and anyone knowing his whereabouts was requested to contact his local authorities immediately.

Wilder knew that Rathenau's plans included a meeting of all supreme authorities after his act had gone into play. But where was he? Had he met with an accident? Death? He banished the thought . . . a little patience and everything would soon be clear.

Anther check with the English consulate close by brought no more news about Dyssia or how the revolution was faring. The English legates were trying by radio and phone to contact their embassy in Dysoff. The fact that they were unable to do so was of some significance, because in any case the Dyssian bureaucrats would want to keep a placid front, if only to prevent the outside world from becoming suspicious about their internal troubles. No news was good news, in that it was becoming evident that the house that Kkobba had built was rocking precariously.

Wilder again checked with the hotel to ascertain whether any message had come for him; then he made the rounds of the cafes and bars to see what he could learn from the milling foreign representatives. At the Lion House he came across an old acquaintance, a Dyssian newspaperman, who had just escaped with three Dyssian flyers from across the Night Sea. The fellow was full of hashish, but he pulled a newspaper from his pocket and pointed to the front page. "Here, my friend, is what started it all." Wilder could only determine the date, indicating that the paper had been printed two days previous, the day of Rathenau's act. "Once the people were aroused," shouted the inebriated one,

"there was no stopping them." Then he began in a carelessly loud voice to translate the article for all those present:

> HUNDREDS OF MEN AND WOMEN WERE KILLED THIS MORNING WHILE RIOTING IN DYSSO SQUARE. . . . BY SOME GROSS NEGLIGENCE MILLIONS OF DOLLARS WERE DROPPED OUT OF DYSSIAN PLANES TRANSPORTING THE GOVERNMENT'S MONEY. . . .

"What liars," injected the linguist:

> WITH THE CONFUSION THAT FOLLOWED, THE POLICE HAD NO ALTERNATIVE BUT TO SHOOT UPON THE MADDENED CROWDS, WHO, AFTER FIGHTING WITH EACH OTHER FOR POSSESSION OF THE MONEY, INSISTED ON BUYING UP EVERY BIT OF FOOD AND EVERY STITCH IN SIGHT. STORE WINDOWS WERE SMASHED AND STORES LOOTED. THE AUTHORITIES DEMANDED THAT ALL MONIES BE RETURNED TO THE LOCAL POLICE AT ONCE. . . . REFUSAL TO DO SO WILL MEAN DEATH TO THE OFFENDERS. . . . MERCHANTS MUST RETURN THE MONIES THEY TOOK IN EXCHANGE FOR GOODS . . . AND THE PURCHASERS ARE WARNED TO RETURN THE GOODS THEY BOUGHT WITH GOVERNMENT FUNDS. . . .

"What does this say?" whispered Wilder in the reader's ear, as he caught sight of Julius Agranoy's name in another column. The man was too drunk to be cautious.

"Dot," he shouted, "is about the Ambassador to Lurania. It says that he was found consorting with dangerous characters, that . . . he was long under the watchful eye of the M.P.D., . . . and that he had been shot. . . ." He tried to focus his eyes on Wilder, "You know this man Agranoy?"

Wilder scrutinized the people at the bar. "I am a newspaperman. I know many people—so what?"

"So you are—my friend," acknowledged the man, attending once more to the item. "It gives warning to all comrades—that they should ferret out all enemies of the State!" With a gesture of disgust he threw the newspaper aside, cursing. "The State! Why don't they all drop dead!"

"Take it easy," warned Wilder, cautiously slipping off his

chair and walking toward the exit. As he reached the revolving doors, he heard a shot and quickly turned around. The fugitive to whom he had just spoken was slowly sinking to the floor. The fellow's escape from Dyssian influence had been brief indeed, thought Wilder.

He pushed the doors, and, once outside, leaned against the building, his hand on the "blue steel" inside his pocket. Several men and women rushed out of the cafe, but none of them seemed to be the assailants. Whoever the attackers were, they had apparently disappeared. Reasonably sure that he wasn't hunted, Constantine released the hold on his gun, lit another cigarette, and lost himself in the crowd.

There was so much to think about. . . . How much longer could he give Rathenau? And now with Dyssian agents added to those enemies he already had, he was becoming dubious of his chances of getting out of Istanbul and to Lydia. Wasn't that what Agranoy had suggested the last time they had met? Poor fellow! Had he had a premonition of his death? And Lydia? Was she terribly fond of Agranoy? Had they made plans? He wanted so badly to know! Perhaps someday he would find out, if he ever got out of Istanbul, the sieve through which all eastern and western intrigue flowed! And for many a foreign agent—the last mile!

He arrived at the hotel. On entering the lobby, he remained standing. Furtively, under the guise of lighting a cigarette, he surveyed each person: the thick-lipped maharaja chewing on a cigar, the blonde lady coloring her lips, the bald-headed man seated with a newspaper in front of him but reading the curves in the tight-fitting gown opposite him, the dark-eyed, earringed sheik, keenly observing the guests as closely as he was doing. Dozens of such impressions registered upon his brain. But in such a heterogeneous group, gathered from all parts of the globe, it was impossible to detect the one who might have a bullet or knife reserved for you.

But he might as well chance it. Constantine walked directly to the mail clerk's desk and gave his name and room number.

The clerk handed him a cablegram. In the elevator on the way up to his room he tore open the envelope. It was an innocently worded message signed "Aunt Roberts." Decoded, it was a request from Rathenau that Wilder meet him in London, "Roberts" being the name of a hotel they had met in once before.

At the airport his pilot warned him that all planes had been grounded except those chartered for Atlantis, where all representatives of the United Nations had been suddenly summoned to discuss the present chaotic condition. "We can't stop now, Jerry," said Wilder, getting into the jet. "Give her the gun and may luck be with us."

High above the confused world, serenely sailing into the deepening blue, Wilder relaxed and turned on the audio-visual just as the announcer was introducing the world audience to the Security Council on Atlantis. After a few long shots around the vast Liberty Hall and some close-ups of prominent members, turbaned and unturbaned, the camera centered upon the expansive platform and the double rows of elevated desks, from which a secretary stepped and approached the mike-laden table. The bespectacled gentleman again made the requests that Wilder had read previously on the teletypewriters for Alexis Rathenau to come forward. He repeated this request several times, and Wilder wondered how Rathenau was to come forward if he was where he expected him to be at the moment. After Rathenau's name and those of others connected with I.C.P. & D. had been called for, another speaker came to the mike. He immediately launched into a tirade against Lurania, the I.C.P. & D., and the International Bank for permitting the outrageous squandering of international funds. His lengthy speech wound up with the statement that his country was withdrawing from these agencies, and that it intended to print its own money in the future. These statements were followed by similar arguments and propositions offered by other enraged members, until Wilder, bored by the repetitious demands and arguments, turned off the machine.

What he was mainly concerned with now was how his plane was going to land at Northolt with all coastline defenses alerted—

which, of course, meant that any unscheduled plane crossing its radar border would be shot down. In addition, he wondered how he was going to get to Rathenau without Scotland Yard trailing him. He had been frequently seen with Rathenau, and at a time such as this no one was above suspicion. But things most worried about are often the least troublesome. While crossing the English Channel he kept announcing: "Foreign correspondent, Constantine Wilder, asks permission to land at Northolt," etc.

At Northolt they were met by a police escort headed by a Captain Blueberry, who knew Wilder but, nevertheless, scrupulously inspected his credentials. Within twenty minutes Wilder was knocking at Room 609 in the Roberts Hotel, specified by code in the cablegram. When the door opened, Wilder saw an aged lady dressed in hat and gloves, as though she had just come in or was about to leave. Her black suit was buttoned at the neck, and from her feathered hat hung a long black veil, making her features indiscernible, but she seemed to be of considerable age, for she leaned heavily upon an ebony walking stick, as she invited Wilder into the room. Not seeing Rathenau in that compartment, he ventured beyond the draped archway that led into the next room and peeked in. It was empty. When he turned around he saw Rathenau holding the veiled hat and wig in his hand.

Rathenau lost no time in coming to the point. "My efforts to get Dictator Kkobba, President Adamson, and the supreme leaders of all nations together have failed. There is one more way. If I can get to the Prime Minister, Williston, we may yet achieve our purpose. You can well understand that as Rathenau I should not even have come this far. It is doubtful if at such turbulent time this disguise could get me an audience with Williston. You can do that for me. Escort me to him. As foreign correspondent you can arouse his curiosity with the inference of highly important news. And I, as your aunt and secretary, could come along."

Rathenau fussed with the disguise in front of a dresser mirror, lifted a handbag from a chair, and preceded Wilder from the suite. On the street they hailed a taxi and drove several blocks

before dismissing it and hailing another one. Minutes later they were at No. 10 Downing Street.

After a lift deposited them on the fourth floor, Wilder had time to observe the august personages that peered out of gold-framed canvases on the walls, the delightfully bright crystal chandeliers, and the translucent glow they shed upon the carpeted, turquoise-blue sea at their feet before His Excellency made his appearance with two secretaries.

Wilder made a respectful bow and asked the Prime Minister if they could be left alone. As soon as this request was granted, Rathenau began removing the wig and veil, much to the embarrassment of the Minister. "Rathenau!" he gasped. "Why aren't you in Atlantis? And why this deception?"

"My only way to reach you, sir. I have come so that you may do what I have failed to achieve—arrange a meeting between yourself, Premier Kkobba, President Adamson, Du Gere of France, and as many of the supreme authorities as you can muster."

Prime Minister Williston did not reply directly. Cautiously he was moving back to the desk and, coming into contact, placed a finger on a button. "And why should I do this?" he asked suspiciously.

"I have a great plan I wish to present, a plan that will—"

"Have you gone mad!" interrupted the Minister. "The world is waiting for an explanation of this flagrant discharge of its currencies," he pressed the button several times, "and you bother me about nonsense!"

"I see," said Rathenau, drawing upon his beard. "You do not trust me and—" There was no need to finish. Three Scotland Yard men stepped mystically out of paneled walls. Rathenau nevertheless continued with his persuasion. "Is it not obvious that I have averted a war? Stalemated Dyssia? Thrown her into an abyss? Made way for the revolution?"

"If revolt were imminent," retorted Williston arrogantly. "don't you think I should have known about it?"

Rathenau was equally defiant. "Did Chamberlain know that

Germany was plotting war against England when he so proudly waved those pseudo treaties before the eyes of the world after meeting Hitler? Did Roosevelt know about Pearl Harbor? Did France know about the Fifth Columnists? And does President Adamson now know to what extent the United States is being usurped by enemies from within? I am not at all surprised that you are not better informed—!"

Prime Minister Williston did not care to hear more. "Place this man under arrest," he ordered. The Yard men stepped forward and surrounded Rathenau. "It is quite clear that you are responsible for this dastardly act!"

Rathenau was bitter. "If at any time I had any regrets as to what I have done, I now rest content that further appeals to such as yourself would have been useless."

Williston clasped his hands behind his back and walked up and down the carpeted sea. "Rathenau, I have no alternative. This audience you desire is preposterous—" To the Yard men, "Take him away!"

"Wait, I will not bore you with my opinion on that," said Rathenau, holding his ground. "I can only tell you that my plan concerns world finance. And as for your intervention being construed as collaboration, you need have no fear." He looked to Wilder as though including him in his answer. "There is no need of involving anyone! Not anyone!" In another minute the guards had taken Rathenau away.

Wilder was unable to reach Rathenau the next day or the day after. He wanted to learn what the plan was that Rathenau had wanted to propose to the international leaders. The Prime Minister at his morning press conference told the reporters about Rathenau's request, but although it was printed and broadcast all over the world, no comment was heard to have come from those whom Rathenau wanted to meet. On the second day of Rathenau's confinement, the Minister, because of the pressure and world-wide interest shown in the case, let it be known that Rathenau would be flown to Atlantis to make a statement before the Security Council.

More than a billion people tuned their radios and television sets to Atlantis to hear Rathenau defend his act. There was ample reasons for such keen interest. Hardly a person alive was not affected in some way by what had happened. Wilder was there in his capacity as foreign correspondent, and he would never forget the dramatic apeal that Rathenau made before the barrage of telecameras and kleig lights:

" . . . And so the audience I sought has been denied—an audience which through its expediency might have done much to prevent further chaos. This refusal is not unusual. It has been thus all along. No one wants to take the initiative, to face the responsibility, but each holds to his own conceit, his vanity, his power, while a disconcerted world and its people go wanting.

"I speak to you no longer as Alexis Rathenau, President of Lurania, Chief of the I.C.P. & D. Those offices are now something belonging to the past. Today I am a voice in the wilderness, a voice pleading and warning, seeking homage in the hearts of men—men who have lost their orientation because they are hungry, bewildered, unhappy, afraid."

His lips pouted, and his shoulders rose and fell as if he were in a quandary.

"They say that my act was an aberration of the mind, and so I, and my colleagues through me, without benefit of trial, are already deemed guilty." The palm of his hand faced the audience. "Let me hasten to assure my colleagues, whom I hope will forever remain unknown, and the world at large, that the purposes for which the act was intended have been achieved. The act has averted a war—a war which Dyssia and her cohorts in France, England, the East, and the very seat of the United States government had planned on executing this very week. It was for no little purpose that Dyssia's aircraft had been deployed in strategic positions on the globe and her submarines were seen in foreign waters. That evidence shall come to light. Unfortunately, such matters take a long time to prove.

"And we have no further time for deliberation, for more bungling and delay. That alone was reason enough to prompt me to action. But I hesitated even then, hoping that the UN would

take action. But the UN, hypnotized by thirteen years of deliberation, politics, and cold-war tactics, was in no position to act. Is it any wonder that I felt within me a responsibility I could not ignore, an urge so strong that it bypassed the labyrinths of parliamentary procedure and left me accountable only to God?

"But what was I to do? I am no wielder of swords, no dispenser of atomic bombs. I am a financier. I have sometimes been referred to, exaggeratedly, of course, as the financial wizard of the era. All I had at my disposal was money! The monies of the world and the power to produce as much as I wanted if I could outwit those to whom I had to give an accounting.

"When my colleagues and I suspected that our resources, our industrial output, our wealth, especially that of the United States, were being surreptitiously shipped through circuitous routes to Dyssia, we were alarmed!

"Some will question how Dyssia had enough gold with which to buy vast amounts of material. Need I remind you of the ancient alchemists' search for gold? Need I tell you that a mercury atom contains eighty protons, that an irridium atom contains seventy-seven protons? Are you aware that if uranium lead can be persuaded to throw out one electron from its nucleus, followed by two helium nuclei, the lead will also be transformed into gold? Gold? That precious metal which Dyssia has been sorely in need of contains seventy-nine protons. By changing, subtracting, or adding the protons of any given atom so that they number seventy-nine one will transmute it into gold! Pure gold! The day had already arrived when with the splitting of the atom base metals could be transformed into gold. The alchemists' dream had become a reality.

"Dyssia was manufacturing atomic weapons. But, as always, her objective of world domination was to be attained by stealth and intrigue. Why risk war? How much easier and better to weaken her enemies! So, while the Allied nations were devoting all of their energies to the *making* of bombs and the like, Dyssia was concentrating on a program by which she sought to buy the world's entire output of raw and finished materials. With the aid of greedy industrialists in our own Allied countries, *she began a covert program of depleting us of our resources, our materials, our economic strength, to make us all inferior to herself! There lay even a greater danger than war!*

"When I was finally convinced that the increase of allied exports was due to Dyssia's diabolical machinations and became fully aware of the danger such depletion of world stocks meant to world security, I could hesitate no longer. I ordered—"

Alexis Rathenau never finished that speech. A shot fired from the balcony found its mark. Rathenau staggered backward, clutching the sheaves of papers he had brought with him to the platform.

"Conny, Constantine Wilder!" he cried as he slumped to the floor. Members and guards rushed around the dying man. "Conny," he gasped, "where is—" His eyes closed.

Constantine reached the platform. "Here I am, sir!" he said, kneeling beside Rathenau.

Rathenau opened his eyes and gazed blankly into space. "Conny," his voice was barely audible, "take these." He slowly raised his hand that held the papers and gasped, "Do what you can—to have these reforms—"

Wilder drew the papers out of the pale fingers as he watched Rathenau's face. Never in all his life would he forget what he saw there . . . Jesus nailed to the cross . . . Jeremiah stoned . . . Gandhi shot . . . There comes a time in the lives of such martyrs, standing between man's judgment . . . and the gods . . . when they stand alone, and alone make the supreme sacrifice.

A sense of futility swept over Constantine as he realized that he had done nothing, could do nothing, to prevent this lonely man from suffering. He was like Peter, who had thrice denied the Master—for up to this moment he, too, had denied his part in this drama.

He heard voices . . . commands . . . and the papers were snatched from him. "Rathenau," he cried leaning over the dying man. "Rathenau, this is Conny Wilder! Rathenau! Rathenau!"

Chapter 6

WILDER'S own voice awakened him. Bewilderingly he looked around him. The room was flooded with sunlight and he was alone, lying awry on a bed that faced an open window lined with bars; and beyond, in the distance, lay the shimmering blue Atlantic.

A rumbling sound of motors grew louder and louder . . . tires skidded on gravel and came to an abrupt shop. . . . Mixed voices brought him back to the present. He sprang to the window, but could not see a soul. Three empty limousines and a helicopter stood in the court below. The voices were already on the stairs . . . at his door . . . and the door was opening.

Before he could fully realize what was happening, the room was crowded with people. Some were in uniforms, some had pencils in their hands, some were wearing striped trousers. Hennessey, the boss, was congratulating him. Red Mather and Senator Strickland were talking and laughing; and Lydia, the lovely Lydia, was in his arms holding him tightly, sobbing.

"Your father?" asked Wilder timorously, still somewhat dazed at the sudden turn of events. "How is he?"

Lydia's head shook fretfully on his shoulder. "He's dead. They murdered him! Murdered him as they did Mama!"

Constantine tenderly stroked her head, the fragrance of her hair in his nostrils. For a heavenly moment he stood there comforting and caressing . . . to have her in his arms was enough to obliterate the crowded room, everything. . . .

Now, Senator Strickland's hand was on his arm, his voice strong and authoritative: "President Adamson ordered your release. He was at his television set and saw Rathenau's assassination. He says Rathenau's reforms will be given serious consideration by the United States and the UN, and in view of what is happening in Dyssia because of your . . ."

Wilder did not wait for the rest. He was walking out of the room . . . down the stairs, toward the cars . . . his arm around Lydia. Red Mather was saying, "You know, it's an uncanny thing. The very moment that Rathenau died, Dictator Kkobba—well, they're saying the shot that killed Rathenau entered Kkobba's heart. They both died at precisely the same moment."

STRONGER THAN LOVE

"SIDNEY! YOU'RE SIGHING!"

THE FIST

UNEXPECTED ACCOLADE

STRONGER THAN LOVE

Chapter 1

As THE TAXI pulled up to the curb, he finished briefing his chief aide, "Now, Bradley, as soon as you locate Angela Howard, you're to bring her back with you. You know where to find me." And to the driver, "Hurry, please. I must make the six-forty *Mainliner*, to Chicago."

For the second time in his life, John Wadsworth Thorndyke was running away from Cumberline Valley. This time, almost sixteen years later, impeccable, distinguished, and affluent, he fidgeted impatiently as the taxi stopped for a red light. Ominous cries invaded the cab, but they hardly diverted his concentration. Only mechanically did he hear the corner Salvationist proclaim, "Seek ye first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness and . . ."

The cab moved on, with John Thorndyke thinking of his own kingdom: the publications, the television stations, the mines, mills, and foundries, but mostly about that troubled spot in Montana—the one that Stanton and his cartel were trying to appropriate.

If they could get control of those railroads surrounding the "Conglomerate" properties, commitments to deliver uranium would be curtailed. . . . "Cutting us off, eh? I'll buy everything Stanton's got. . . . Everything! . . . White from New York . . . Harris from Philadelphia. . . . We'll buy and sell, wheel and deal! . . ."

At the depot a gray-haired whistling porter informed him that the *Mainliner* would be nine minutes late. "What's nine minutes in a lifetime?" laughed the redcap. "If you'll jest set somewhere here, son, Is'll pick ya up in time," and he sauntered away whistling.

"Thank you," said Thorndyke, wondering how on earth a man could be so happy. The fleeting thought gave way to his own problems. . . .

If only he'd taken a plane. . . . But no, Doc Bamberger had warned against that. "You're not to fly any more; and when a man's supposed to be slowing down, trains are fast enough." A newsboy rushed by and thrust a daily before his face. Thorndyke gave the boy a quarter and shooed him off. The headlines were of the usual vintage:

RUSSIA AGAIN WALKS OUT OF UN
STOCKS REACT UNFAVORABLY TO TAXES
WAS IT SUICIDE OR ACCIDENT?

Slipping the paper into the outside pocket of his suitcase, he sat down to mull over the things he'd have to do to stalemate Stanton. And he most certainly was in no mood for the idle gossip that spewed from the lips of the corpulent matron at his right, whose monologue had something to do with the suicide headline, to which she was pointing:

" . . . Dear, dear, I knew the lovely thing—so sensitive and as fragile as a flower . . . and so lonely . . . tried to make friends with her, but you could see she wanted to be left alone. . . . there's many more like her, more than people think. . . . The papers tell about the many jobs women have, but they don't say much about the increase in divorces . . . and the loneliness. That's what fills the bars . . . sells carloads of pills—pills for composure, pills for headaches, pills for sleeping. *Suicide* I'd say!— Sure, we had our lonely women, but not like this. . . . At least, the men treated us like ladies. . . . Guess our women aren't yet adjusted to this atomic age like you men are." She stopped abruptly and studied the dignified man beside her. "Sir, don't you think I'm—"

John Thorndyke smiled, absent-mindedly crossed his legs, and looked in the opposite direction. The genius that had made International Conglomerates a multi-million-dollar corporation was not easily distracted. And if there was anything he didn't like, it was intrusions. Long, long ago he'd learned to bypass intrusions, the thing that kept most men mediocre. . . . I must get in touch

with White before the market opens. . . . Again he wished he'd taken a plane, and again Doctor Bamberger's face loomed up, large and threatening. . . . "You've got to slow down. Your heart can't stand any more of this pressure. Angina pectoris is a dangerous malady. Here, take these pills with you, and don't forget to get this prescription filled. . . . Your home town, that peaceful valley you're always talking about; and that old sweetheart; *but you've got to get away!*"

Peaceful valley, eh? Wonder what Doc would think if he could see it now. The disappointment of his arrival two days previous returned to vex him anew. . . . Gone was the ivy depot. Gone the nostalgic, verdant valley.

Tall, huge derricks, working the oil in the land beneath, assailed his view everywhere. True, things change, of course, of course! But how he'd wished they hadn't! He knew *now* why the cab driver he'd directed to Cumberline Manor had studied him so closely. "Did *you* say the Cumberline, sir?"

His answer had been positive. Wasn't that the swankiest resort in town? The one from which, as a child, the doorman had shooed him away?

After New York's Waldorf, London's Ambassador, and Berlin's Avalon, the Cumberline turned out to be a "moth-eaten tuxedo." Nevertheless, he registered.

"I've only got a seven-dollar single," the moon-faced clerk looked over his glasses and grinned, " . . . and the bridal suite."

"I'll take the bridal suit," said Thorndyke casually. "Right now I want to look the town over." He turned to go.

"The bridal suite!" gasped the moonface. "Why, that's twenty-nine fifty a day! It's been kept up."

"That will be all right," said Thorndyke softly, "and send my things up."

Walking around town, he wondered why he hadn't come across the Town Common. In answer to his query, the building diagonally opposite was pointed out. "Guess that's where it must'a been."

Crossing over to cluttered store windows, Thorndyke marveled at the block-square building and the milling crowds that flowed

in and out of its doors. It seemed but yesterday: the square, a billiard green . . . roses, azaleas, children playing around a water-spouting nymph . . . giant oaks, hemlocks, guardians of tranquility. . . . He shook his head.

When he was midway between the sidewalks, a honking automobile brought him back to the present. "So *this* is my peaceful valley!"

Farther up the avenue a wooden Indian, unperturbed by the passing throngs, held his bold stance. Thorndyke smiled inwardly; at least everything hadn't changed. The Tobacco Shop had belonged to Angela's uncle. . . .

Thorndyke entered.

"What's the name?" queried the counter man. "Howard? David Howard? Don't recall—oh, years ago, maybe . . ."

Wherever John Thorndyke stopped to inquire, he met new faces—and negative replies. He withdrew an old postal card and examined it thoroughly. No address. On occasion he'd received similar cards . . . merely signed "Angela." The days of rapport and letter writing between them had long since diminished under the pressure of business, success, and time. From a street phone booth he tried contacting as many Howards as the heat and his patience would permit. None knew of an Angela Howard. Was she married? . . . Name changed? . . .

A sudden weakness made him quit the booth. If only he could lie down for a few minutes— He had to content himself with one of the nitroglycerine pills from his vest pocket. As he slipped it under his tongue, he remembered that he must get the prescription filled.

At the hotel that evening he left instructions for a reservation on the next night's Six-forty to Chicago. He'd keep trying one more day. . . .

The following morning, refreshed and again himself, he decided to spend the intervening hours before train time in seeking out the old Cumberline and, if possible, the whereabouts of his old friend. Angela was becoming more vivid with each recollection. She was there with every step he took. Tenacity, one of his established characteristics, refused to discard the idea of finding her. As he walked along, new possibilities presented themselves,

and he made more phone calls, more inquiries. Still, no Angela.

On he walked. Strange how a man will cling to memories at a time like this and try to recover the enchantment they once afforded. Soon he reached Eagle's Flight, the steep-sided hill that he and Angela had often climbed together. It was natural that he should come here—as natural as the experiences others had had on returning to the scenes of their youth. Ascent of the mount was not so easy as he remembered it once to be. The slow going and his racing heart indicated a vast change of time and history.

At last on the top, he smiled with satisfaction as he wiped his perspiring brow. The smile soon vanished. Gone were the romantic woodlands, his dreamlands, his peaceful valley! Oil derricks and smoking factories, wooden shacks—expedient shacks—filled the area below. Only one giant oak, standing close to the cliff's edge and defying industry's threat, sounded a chord in his heart that the world and ambition had tried to silence.

He walked over and touched the rugged trunk. It might have been Aladdin's lamp. From this spot the world had always seemed unreal. . . .

Here he and Angela had dreamed and planned a future. . . . And from here he had made his memorable departure. . . . She had wanted it that way. He had left her with moist eyes on a smiling face. . . . For a long time they had sat here on the cliff's edge . . . not saying a word. . . . Then a gust of wind had swept her burnished tresses across his face—the scent of her hair returned to haunt him now.

"Copper, try to understand. Uncle Albert wants me to come—I'm his only living relative. This is my big chance. Do you want me to pass it up?"

"No, John, not if you want it so badly. If I stood in your way, I'd never forgive myself."

"You're not in my way."

"Only—"

"Only what? What? Angela."

"Remember the last time he was here? You forgot to meet me and I ran to your house. . . . How indifferent, cold, and like

a machine he was." Suddenly she was holding him tight, her head on his chest. "John, forgive me," she drawled. "You—you won't become like that? I know you're terribly ambitious—you just have to be first in everything—school, games—I'm afraid, John; you're all I've got."

"You're talking like we're never going to see each other again!"

Angela lifted her cameo face to his. "John, you won't forget?" For a long moment their lips met and lingered. "I love you so much, John. I'll be waiting, I know I'll be waiting. That's the way I am, John."

A sense of guilt disenchanted him, and he moved away from the tree. Soberly, nostalgically, he watched the vermilion-crowned summits fade slowly into a sad cerulean blue. Far below in the murky valley, tiny technicolors in sporadic crosswise designs glowed through the rising mist and chimney smoke. Somewhere . . . somewhere down there she must be. . . .

It was long past his train time when Thorndyke returned to the Cumberline. He was both displeased and confounded by his moodiness. To gratify an emotional fascination he had wasted another day. This indeed was contrary to the realistic exactitude he had demanded of himself and others. . . . It must not happen again. Accordingly, he left orders at the transportation desk for another reservation on the next evening's Six-forty *Mainliner* to Chicago. It he couldn't locate her by then . . . well, *this time he'd be there!*

His first thoughts on rising were of Angela. Free from harassing business chores, appointments, and responsibilities, he was thinking more and more about the only girl he'd ever cared much about. Where was she? He'd have to know; else, he wasn't a Thorndyke.

About ten-thirty that morning, in search of a city directory he entered the city library. No sooner had he chosen the book and was about to sit down when he noticed an auburn-haired lady sitting some eighteen or twenty feet away behind the librarian's check-out desk. He couldn't be sure. Ever since his arrival in Cumberline, he'd been looking, and turning to look, at faces in

hopes . . . He rose and came closer. The burnished brown hair-do now high on her head was unfamiliar but the cameo features, the perfect nose and azure eyes, were unmistakably Angela's.

With the assurance that was so much a part of his success, he grasped a nearby book and approached the desk. Without looking up, the librarian automatically reached for the book.

"Could you change the title to read, 'The Return of John Thorndyke?'" he said.

The librarian dropped her pencil. . . . Slowly, tensely, she lifted her face and stared.

"Angela," he whispered.

Unanswering she arose, her cameo face paler.

"I should have known I'd find you here," he said joyously. "I've been hunting you for two days!"

"John!" she murmured, her hand over her heart. "John Thorndyke!" She looked around for a relief librarian. They were all busy. Nervously she left the desk and came around to where Thorndyke stood. "It's been a long time, John, such a long time!" Falteringly she held out her trembling hands.

John clasped them tenderly. "I almost gave up finding you—even made reservations on the Six-forty to Chicago."

"I, too, kept wondering when I'd see you again. . . . Reservations? You're not leaving today!"

"My, but it's good to see you! Seeing you has made me realize how much I've missed."

"You're terribly successful, John . . . like you wanted. It scares me to think how important you've become. But you aren't at all as austere as those pictures in the magazines make you appear. You're just dignified—and very . . . handsome." She tried to laugh, took a deep breath, and blurringly saw someone at her desk. "John, a moment, please. I must—"

"Oh, no, you don't!" said John, still holding her hands. "I'm not letting you go, ever! You're coming with me. Give up your job, right now!"

"Resign?" She thought of the long years she'd been there. "Why, John, in another month I'll be head librarian. It's already been—" Turning her head to one side: "It's been so long, John, so long!"

His smile was the fullest it had been for years. "So my little copperhead is to be made head librarian?" Then with eyes widened and almost within touch of her nose, "I'm offering you a kingdom, Copper, a kingdom. The gods have been good to me." Then, most earnestly, "I'll make it all up to you. You'll see." He looked around. "Where can we talk? I have so much to say. Come on, Copper, let's go!"

"This minute, John? You've got me all confused!" She made an effort to regain her poise. "I lunch at two, John. But, John—"

"All right, all right, I'll be back at two o'clock to get you. It's nearly eleven now. Remember, now, you're to quit. You're coming with me!"

Angela could say nothing. All the things she had wanted to say she had said to herself long ago, over and over again. If she remained standing there another minute, something embarrassing was sure to happen. Quickly releasing herself from John, she turned and ran to her desk. With her head bowed, forcefully withholding her tears, she reached for the next book.

Chapter 2

JOHN WADSWORTH THORNDYKE was never more lighthearted than that noonday when he pushed the revolving doors of the Cumberline Hotel and entered the lobby. At last he knew what mattered, what to do. From now on he'd relax, live, have fun. . . . Lucky he'd found out in time. . . . Yes, the gods were good to him. . . .

Vaguely he sensed that someone was at his side, carrying something black. "John, John Thorndyke," said the phantom. "Sorry, had to see you."

"Yes, it's a wonderful day, wonderful," smiled John Thorndyke, completely detached as he sauntered on Olympian clouds into the elevator.

The bespectacled man with the black briefcase was puzzled. "It's cloudy, J. T., might rain. . . . Sorry to trail you, J. T., but the

day you left Chicago, Stanton got wind of it and began pulling some of his old tricks. He's a raider, you know—"

Thorndyke looked down from Olympus and saw his chief aide. "Bradley, what are you doing here? I told you all that I wanted to be left alone!" The elevator doors opened and Thorndyke strode down the corridor with an alacrity that amazed his follower.

"It's sure good to see you looking so spry, J. T. Never believed you were as bad as Bamberger made out. Those doctors always exaggerate."

"Bradley," said Thorndyke, twisting the key and thinking how coincidental that he should be entering the bridal suite. "Bradley, I want you to send a few telegrams. But first call the desk and order one more reservation on the Six-forty to Chicago (this Bradley understood to be for himself and J. T.); then wire Fowler in Peoria to promote Samuelson to the Board and transfer Hershy to our Lincoln, Nebraska, office.

"That will take care of that vacancy. Then try to get Henderson on the phone. I've something special he can handle. He knows something about homes—"

"But, J. T.," pleaded Bradley, his emotions mounting. (He, too, had several axes to grind. Not only was his job at stake, but his concern too was for the stock he had taken years to accumulate. Already rumors of the tycoon's withdrawal from I.C. Corp. had sent the stock plummeting. What would I.C. Corp. be without its proliferating genius?)

"Bradley," continued Thorndyke, "after I tie up these details in Chicago, I may be gone for a long time. I'll keep you posted with my itinerary before we leave Chicago for Europe."

Bradley's thermostat could take no more. "You're not going anywhere, J. T.," he exploded. "You can't."

"What's that Bradley?" His tape finally cut. Bradley seemed indignant. He'd never seen his aide that way before! "Why did you follow me?"

Bradley hesitated, surprised at his own bullishness. With outstretched arms, his voice back to normal, he punctuated, "J. T., Stanton's building a combine—some new French capital— Wants

those roads surrounding Montana and Idaho properties— In three months we won't be able to meet our copper, zinc, silver, and uranium commitments. Guess he's sore you didn't take him in. Now he thinks you're retiring; can't you see, J. T.?"

Thorndyke cocked his head, squinted his eyes, and asked softly, "What would you estimate our investment up there to be?"

"Roughly, J. T., about sixty million, and with the increasing shortage of silver and copper, I'd say it would triple in three or four years." Bradley opened his black "executive" and withdrew a swollen binder. "We'll be sued if we don't deliver, J. T.," he added, passing the memorabilia.

Thorndyke took the omnibook, backed into the divan, and silently studied the various statistical reports and the Pinkerton file on Stanton's maneuverings.

"You'll have to move fast, J. T.," urged Bradley. "This is an infringement on your rights. Harrington suggests you see McNurney—take it up with the Governor." He watched Thorndyke closely. It always fascinated him to see how the genius of International Conglomerates took up a challenge. It was like watching a general preparing for a crucial offensive. He waited for the familiar fires to flare in the Tycoon's eyes. Impatient, he added the ignition, "One hundred eighty million at stake, J. T.! One hundred eighty million! Stanton thinks he—"

Thorndyke looked at Bradley sharply, or rather, looked through him. The fires were there. "Oh, he does, does he!" flared Thorndyke. "There's a few things I can teach Stanton. First, we've got to kill those rumors about my retiring. Tell them our goal is a billion-dollar corporation. That will make them think twice before they sell our stocks."

Bradley's palms itched to be rubbed.

The Tycoon continued, "So he's trying to squeeze us out, eh? Wire Hanley to meet the *Mainliner* when it arrives in Chicago. And send one to Zeiter, Billows and to White, to contact me tomorrow." He rose and paced the floor. . . . The momentum begun by his thinking now moved his body. Soon it would whip itself into a hurricane worthy of the tycoon, and Stanton and the world

would know that John Wadsworth Thorndyke had made a decision. Tomorrow morning with the opening of the market, he would start buying everything that Stanton owned. He would buy and sell; he would buy through his agents from sixteen cities; then, when the market got too high, he would sell and create rumors that would create selling. When it dropped back to what he wanted to pay, he would buy again and again until he was the master in control of the situation, and when he got through, not only would Stanton be subject to International Conglomerates, but a score of new enterprises would be added to his galaxy.

The habit of a lifetime was upon him. John Thorndyke was back in his world, the world he had inherited, multiplied, and ruled. He shot telegrams and phone calls here, there, and everywhere, to the far corners of his kingdom . . . briefing and being briefed, commanding, advising, creating, merging, but most of all, right now, buying, using every faculty, every instinct, talent, and knowledge, to achieve his objective.

The hands of the clock moved on to its meridian . . . on and on to the time he had promised to meet Angela . . . passed on, and moved downward. Still he worked—worked as only he, the magnate, the financier, the tycoon of more than thirty nationally known organizations, could work.

Wilting under the pressure, the secretary suggested, "Would you like something to eat? Shall I call room service?"

Thorndyke turned, oriented his thoughts, and studied Bradley, "What time is it?"

Bradley looked at his wristwatch. "Gosh, J. T.! Six-thirty! We won't have time. Your train leaves in ten minutes."

"Six-thirty? Six-thirty! Bradley, call the library!"

"What library?"

"The Public Library, of course!" barked Thorndyke. "And get Miss Howard to the phone!" He got up and snatched the instrument out of Bradley's hand just as a voice warbled through. "Hello, Angela? I want to speak to Miss Howard. She has left? What's that? Did you say ILL? Never mind." He put down the receiver.

"Bradley, you'd better remain here and contact Angela—Miss

Angela Howard. Get her address from the library. Explain my reasons for not meeting her. Make it convincing—explain how much was at stake. Buy what she needs—pay all her bills. You're to bring her back to Chicago as soon as you can make the arrangements."

Bradley's acquiescence came slowly, under arched eyebrows. He'd had some assignments in this direction before, but not to this extent! "Yes, J. T., will do."

Before stepping into the taxi, Thorndyke again briefed Bradley, "Remember, you're to bring her back with you. And, Bradley, use a little finesse. This little lady is to be my wife."

It was on this ride to the depot that Thorndyke heard the adjuring preacher proclaim, "Seek ye first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness . . ." Thorndyke was thinking of his own kingdom: the publications, the television stations, the mills, factories, and skyscrapers; but mostly about that troubled uranium mine in Montana that he was in danger of losing. At the depot a happy, whistling redcap informed him that the *Mainliner* to Chicago would be nine minutes late.

Thorndyke began to realize his physical condition when he tried to keep up with the much older and happier porter. "We're all porters," thought he, " . . . only my burdens are mental."

The redcap was singing:

> "Compartment seven O seven, come ritsch dish way,
> but I think, dear boss, ders another delay.
> Five mo minutes, added to nine—
> dats fo'teen minutes behind da time . . ."

"And what's this new delay for?" cut in Thorndyke, breathing heavily.

Taking this for his cue, the happy man sang:

> "Sorry, boss, about this delay,
> but don't you know
> President's train is due dis way? . . ."

As Thorndyke slipped into his seat, he could not help wondering how this sexagenarian, whose earnings were meager, if not limited, could feel so carefree and secure . . . while he, who had so much wealth, was foreign to joy and security. He opened his wallet and proffered the bill he withdrew.

The happy man's countenance became wide-eyed discovery. "I ain't got no change fo' a twenty, son—"

"That's all right," waved Thorndyke. "I just realized I've been served by a very successful man, and I'm paying you accordingly." The porter raised his red cap, scratched his head, and backed out of the compartment, singing, "Thank yous, very, very much."

"Thank *you*," emphasized Thorndyke, reclining for a moment's rest. When he did not hear the click of the door, he opened his eyes.

At first he saw only the red purse, then the neatly slim suit of soft wisteria . . . and then—Angela!

"Why, Copper, so you did come after all!" Slowly, he started to rise. "Come in, come in."

"Thank you, John. I remembered you saying something about reservations on the Six-forty."

"Good, good. Your compartment is next door." Finally erect, he reached out his hands to embrace her.

"Don't, John, please; I don't want to forget my purpose in coming." She moved to the nearby sofa.

"Where's your luggage? Is it . . ."

"I didn't bring any," was her straightforward answer. "I'm not coming with you, John."

Thorndyke's brow knitted as he took in the situation. This Angela was entirely different from the Angela he had met that morning. Her poise and directness made her even more attractive. "You're joking, of course."

"No, John, I'm returning to the library in the morning. That's where I belong. I just wanted you to know that everything is all right between us."

"But, Angela," insisted John, "I'll make it all up to you. The long years— Like I promised. Think, Angela, think! a kingdom!"

"John, that's all I've been doing since eleven o'clock this

morning. Thinking about us. At first I was helplessly confused. When I finally realized you weren't coming, I panicked—felt sick. Then when I recovered, I started walking. Where do you think I walked to, John?"

"I know, Eagle's Flight," muttered John, seating himself again. "I did the selfsame thing the other day."

"Yes, John. That's where I got the answers. You have your place, and I have found a niche for myself."

The cries of "All aboard, all aboard" came from up and down the platform. Angela rose, looked at her watch. "And, John, thanks so much for coming to Cumberline. It helped me, although a little belatedly, to grow up."

From the other side of the door, in the passageway, she called, "So long, John, I'll be seeing you in the mags and newspapers."

Before John could arise and meet the situation, Angela was gone. He could feel the first lurch of the starting train. Although the movement was slight, it unsteadied him. And, although he was in an air-conditioned train, he had a deep psychological need to open the window—which he did just as the train passed the corner Salvationist, who now was proclaiming, "What shall it profit a man if he gain the whole world and lose . . ."

The train moved out of hearing. A nameless fear accelerated with every difficult breath he took. He fell back into the seat. . . . What if he should die? . . . What would happen to his kingdom? . . . "Angela—Angela—"

Above the train's rhythmical grind he heard raucous laughter. The laughter grew louder, nearer. The gods were mocking him! He'd had his chance and passed it up! He struggled to get his fingers into his vest pocket. Frantically, he searched the other pocket. Finally, he produced the little plastic vial and opened it.

It was empty!

When the runic laughter was followed by several knocks on door 707, the conductor and his assistant entered. Slumping to the floor and gasping for breath was a well-dressed passenger.

"SIDNEY! YOU'RE SIGHING!"

Chapter 1

THE ITCHING and heat under Professor Sidney Miller's new toupee (Amelia's idea) was growing increasingly uncomfortable. So was the conversation aboard the southbound Los Angeles plane. Ever since the "Atomic Group" had left San Francisco Airport, they had been rehashing man's plight on planet Earth. What had begun in awe and whispers now accelerated to high-pitched differences and admonitions. If this continues much longer, thought he, my ulcers will react with a vociferousness all their own.

That morning at Yucca Flats he had witnessed a thousand suns burst forth with a fury and foreboding that had unsteadied his legs and tightened his viscera as he watched a red cyclopean Satan turn white, mushroom upward, and then spew its black venom across a meek morning sky.

He had come away from that unforgettable experience with mighty thoughts, concerning his own contributions to atomic fission, impinging on his consciousness. Slumping low in his seat, he tried to shut out the guilt, the doubt, the questions that hurled themselves around him. But sanctuary would not come. Voices emphatic and emotional painted lurid montages across his tiring mind. He envisaged the whole human race disintegrating in atomic heat. . . . He envisioned dope pushers soliciting his children; gangsters molesting Amelia; inflation eating away at his savings; and young Savios commandeering the college campuses. . . .

Not only had the events of the day taken their toll of the scientist; they had scorched and dented the father, husband, baby-

sitter, and taxpayer in him as well. He was strongly tempted to tear away the toupee and give himself a good scratching; yet he sat there submissively and heaved a deep sigh.

At the nadir of fatigue, Morpheus usually takes over; but Sidney Miller was still reeling from his tussle within and without. He raised his eyelids and gaped westward. The setting sun, now on a level with his eyes, made scrutiny impossible. It had been as difficult to look into Amelia's eyes on the morning of his departure. Not only had she frowned on this journey, but she had evinced disappointment at his not taking her Christmas shopping. If only she were not so downright indifferent to his work—so complacent where he was concerned (Sidney never realized that only a complacent person can live with a worrier)! Nervously recrossing his legs, he accidentally shoved his portfolio to the floor. On lifting it he could not resist the thought that it weighed approximately two pounds—the equivalent, if transmuted into pure energy, of 25,000,000,000 kilowatt hours. The gold imprint "Sidney Miller" came into focus. "Sidney"! Ever since Amelia had read somewhere that Sidney in Anglo-Saxon meant *troubled*, she would on occasion use it with an inflection that could be most disturbing. Even now, midst the din of words, he could hear her insinuating, "Sidney, you're sighing!"

In an effort to free himself from the taunt, he again looked to the sky. This time the setting sun, a huge orange-red half-circle, cast a hypnotic glow over the clouds and himself. If only he could walk out there . . . away from this burdensome world, with its ever-burgeoning problems. . . . He blinked his eyes again and again. On the sixth blink Morpheus finally took over. . . .

And now, unaided by plane or contrivance of any sort, he journeyed on through space. In the distance, on the most coralline clouds he had ever seen, appeared a vast multitude of diversely costumed people. The thought that he might be approaching a Hollywood group on location came and vanished. On coming closer, he observed that the vast crowd was actually separated into sporadic groups. Yet he had a tremulous conviction that all the groups were convening there because of some great cosmic

problem. That Harry Truman should be discussing a ban on nuclear armaments with Emperor Hirohito pleased him very much. Farther on he came across Abraham Lincoln, dressed as he had seen him a hundred times in pictures and paintings, with the exception that he appeared extremely thin and at least twenty feet tall. Sidney looked up and, in trying to get the President's attention, stretched out his hand to yank his trousers. It did seem odd that he could touch nothing, feel nothing!

In the next group that attracted his fancy were Jeremiah, Moses, and King David, just as he had imagined them to be from his Bible readings. Only the varied color vibrations emanating from their costumes were more pronounced and beautiful than any he had ever experienced before. Just as Sidney was wondering if his uncouth presence was discernible to these ancient patriarchs, he suddenly found himself in front of Christopher Columbus, Charles Darwin, Arthur Schopenhauer, and a person with a divine radiance by which he recognized him to be The Man From Nazareth, He whom Pontius Pilate had ordered crucified.

With an awareness that he was watching them and himself as out of a dream, he drew closer to hear their conversation. But before he could tune in, the heavens and the heavens' heavens gave forth a series of melodic sounds that sent his body vibrating with both ecstasy and apprehension.

Trembling, he listened as a voice authoritative and sonorous permeated the entire cosmos. "Beloved," sang the voice, "the Interplanetary Plenipotentiary wishes to advise that there will be a slight delay in getting your next assignments to you. Since the few minutes involved is equivalent to one complete day on Planet Earth, whose problems they are now discussing, the Honorable Council suggests that those who wish to be better informed of the problem may visit that planet and return immediately."

"Not I," mocked Schopenhauer. "If it were up to me, I would let the Earthmen destroy themselves, if that is their bent. Think of it! Having discovered one of God's unique secrets, the atom, they employ it for destruction. What a mess!"

"I should love to visit the place of my apprenticeship," said Christopher, slapping the palms of his hands. "What say you, Master," turning to Jesus, "wouldst come along?"

Before Jesus could answer, Darwin was saying, "Pray, do not listen to Christopher. He is only interested in discoveries. I tell you, Earth is a mess, and besides, wasn't it the Earthmen who caused you so much suffering?"

"List not to this materialist," insisted Columbus to Jesus. "His viewpoints are so contrary to yours. The world is still reeling from his Darwinian theories. Are Earthmen to be blamed if such teachings keep them from knowing that their true origin is spiritual?"

"Perhaps," argued Darwin, "but that is the way of Earth, and I was an Earthman then. It is all the more reason why it is best done away with and forgotten."

"Recently," cut in Schopenhauer, "Titian told me of his visit there and the things man is painting! I think they call it cubism, or subconscious. Anyway, he came away with a headache."

"There you go, still the pessimist!" admonished Columbus. "For some reason known to God alone you are such as you are. Perhaps you are a stimulus to the ultimate truth. I wonder! Come, Master, we must decide quickly if we are to avail ourselves of Earth time."

Jesus, who up to now had patiently listened to his friends argue, raised two fingers of His right hand in pontifical fashion: "I have often thought of my children on Earth, wondered how they are getting on. Now that their very existence is in jeopardy, I would like to see for myself how it is with them."

Christopher was jubilant. "Bravo! Bravo!" he shouted as he danced a turn. "Come, Master, we must check with the transmigration officials and get our earthly attire."

"Remember, I warned you," admonished Schopenhauer to the departing couple. "I only wished to spare you more disappointment and pain."

In the twinkling of a star, Jesus and Christopher were in the halls of the Transmigration Bureau.

"What attire do you choose?" inquired the attendant.

"Ah, yes," answered Columbus. "I'll choose this immaculate Grecian robe. I always was partial to the Greeks."

"And I," said the Divine One, "will choose that Earthman's business suit. I do so wish to remain commonplace, inconspicuous. After all, this is an unofficial visit."

Now, in front of a replica of Earth, Christopher anxiously nudged Jesus. "Hurry, Master! Point your finger to the globe." Jesus did as bid and they watched the sphere turn wildly. When it finally stopped, Jesus and Christopher found themselves in the center of Pershing Square, Los Angeles, California. Night had already come to the City of the Angeles.

"Magnifica! Magnifica!" cried Columbus. "See! The light of the sun is coming from within those buildings! And also from those announcements set up upon the roofs and walls!" he gasped. "Amazing! In my wildest dreams I couldn't have imagined!—And look, those moving vehicles! How quickly they dart to and fro! They move of their own volition! Voilà! Surely, thou art pleased with these wonders, Master?"

The Man of Judea was slow in answering. As usual, He was unconcerned with material things. "Observe the faces of these men," He said finally. "These people appear to be imprisoned within their own unhappy thoughts."

"Hmm, 'tis so," muttered Columbus. "They do look sullen. Hast thou an understanding of this?"

"Whilst man may have learned how to split the atom, his knowledge of himself, his birthright, his destiny, is still quite obscure. They appear to have the same conflicts I perceived during my apprenticeship here. O, when will man awaken to the yearnings within his own heart?"

Columbus's hand touched the Master. "Those men—in the horseless, four-wheeled chariot! They are pointing to us. Now they are stepping out and approaching! What shall I say if they question me? I would not like to embarrass them. And we are heaven-bound to tell the truth."

"To be sure," answered Jesus. "Say little. 'Tis wisest. They cannot understand themselves. How then shall they know of us?

The shorter of the two considers himself a sort of impresario. The taller one is familiar. Seems to me he was a procurator of the Roman Guard in the days of King Herod."

"Lucky for you and me that that traffic light stopped us," said the shorter man, pulling out a black wallet from his checkered jacket and extracting a visiting card, which he proffered to Columbus. "Here you are. I'm Coxnic, and this is Ploxnic of the Ploxnic Studios. We are about to produce a third-dimensional version of the Crucifixion." Meanwhile, turning to the taller man, he said, with a smile, "Cecil B. De Mille never lost a cent on a religious picture." Then to Columbus, "You will make a wonderful Christ, so tall, so handsome, and so important-looking."

"But, I, that is, I am not—" sputtered Christopher, pointing to his associate dressed as a civilian. He could say no more; the Master's thought waves had cut into Christopher's cortex. It was apparent that He wished to remain incognito.

"Come, my friend," said the voice in the checkered suit, "this is the opportunity of your life! Meet me at the studio, or, better still, why not come with us?"

"But, you are the—" insisted Columbus, looking blandly at the Nazarene, who immediately interrupted with, "Hast thou so soon reverted to a mortal and forgotten I wish to remain anonymous?"

"Did you hear that, Clox?" asked the taller man, nudging the shorter man's elbow. "I think they are a pair of crackpots—escapees from some mental institution. Come, let's go. I think I'll get Paul Newman for the part."

"Where's your sense of humor? These fellows are all right. And besides, Paul has too much sex appeal."

"Well," insisted the taller man, "I've got too much money at stake to see you going around picking up vagrants. We need a big *name* to put the picture over."

"Take it easy, Ploxnic. Is this my part of the job or isn't it?" demanded Cloxnic. "Trouble with you financiers is that you lack art."

"I tell you, these fellows are zanies!"

"So! Now you want to dictate to me!" Cloxnic's hands

circled in the air with dramatic protest. "If you don't have confidence in me, you can get another director! Remember, I'm an Academy Award winner!" His warning fingers almost touched Ploxnic's nose. "And don't forget it!"

By this time Jesus and the Grecian-clad Columbus had moved several paces away.

"Wait a minute!" shouted Cloxnic, catching up with them. "Please!" holding on to Columbus's robe. "This is the chance of a lifetime! What sort of a man are you that you can pass up a chance at being a great movie star?"

Columbus's steps faltered. "Please, I will see what my friend says."

"I know what is in your heart, Columbus," said Jesus. "You were always one for new things, inventions, and adventure."

"True, Master," answered Columbus. "I would like to see how this is done. I will confess that I am intrigued. In my travels above I met one John Barrymore and one Valentino, who were famous on earth, and their conversation about Hollywood was most exciting. Wouldst come along?"

"Nay, it is you who are so taken up. Go then, if you must. But remember to meet me here tomorrow night at twelve o'clock sharp."

Cloxnic was already urging Columbus down the lane and into the chauffeured car. Seated between the director, Cloxnic, and the producer, Ploxnic, Columbus shouted to Jesus, on the sidewalk, "There's nothing like this on Jupiter, and I must say it is good for a change to depend upon a vehicle for locomotion."

Cloxnic caught Ploxnic's confused expression and whispered in his ear, "Now, now, don't lose your sense of humor."

Jesus watched the car merge with the Hill Street traffic and disappear. Reaching the curb, He was about to cross Fifth and Hill Streets, when a sharp whistle and an outstretched, white-gloved hand stopped Him. "How'd you get to be this old?" remonstrated the uniformed man behind the glove. "Watch the signal lights!" A flurry of color, wind, and sound whisked by, awakening Jesus to the danger to which He had just subjected His mortal body.

Before He could determine what and where the signal lights were, He perceived a mass of vehicles moving toward Him from the opposite direction. Bewildered, He waited to see what the other pedestrians would do. Suddenly He was propelled forward by a hard object coming in contact with His buttocks. Looking back, He saw a woman carrying a small evergreen tree.

"Oh, dear me! I beg your pardon!" said the lady with the tree, darting off in the opposite direction.

Jesus reached the curb and safety, to be confronted by the hilarious laughter of a small lad of about ten, who was pointing directly at Him.

"Boy! How you jumped!" screamed the lad.

Jesus smiled one of His rare smiles. "I presume it is strange of me. But tell me, son, why does the nicely attired lady carry a balsam tree? It is not good for kindling."

"Don't ya know? Dat's a Christmas tree. Say, you're kiddin'!"

"Kiddin'? A Christmas tree? What's that?"

"G'wan! Haven't you ever seen a Christmas tree? Where've you been? Com'on, I'll show ya. I'm going to Bullock's store. They say they've got the tallest Christmas tree in the world just outside the store, and it's all decorated. And you'll see Santa Claus, too! Com'on!"

"Store? Santa Claus?"

Jesus took the friendly lad's proffered hand. Thought He, "And a little child shall lead them."

Through the busy throngs, down Broadway to Seventh Street they went. Jesus asked questions about Christmas, the gaily lit stores, the bundle-carrying shoppers. And the youngster answered every question with the authority which only a youngster can display.

Jesus got His first thrill when the lad, after pulling Him through the crowded store, drew Him into a waiting elevator.

Someone shouted, "Express to the seventh floor—toys, Santa Claus—" Then, suddenly, He had the sickening feeling of having left His stomach somewhere below.

The doors opened before Jesus could utter His disbelief. In

front of Him on a high pedestal sat a white-bearded, corpulent man clothed in red. In a semicircle in front of him and his reindeer stood a mixed throng of adults and children.

As the two drew closer to the individual whom the lad had identified as Santa Claus, Jesus perceived that the beard and uniform were part of a costume symbolic of the holiday which the lad had been telling Him about. No sooner had He heard the questions of the children to Santa and joined in the laughter and repartee of the throng, than He noticed that all eyes, even those of the Santa, were upon Him.

Away from the bustling crowds of the street, away from the demands of the body and greed for possession, free from all animosity and open to constant wavelengths of LOVE, these people found themselves attracted to its strongest exponent—Jesus.

Aware of this and feeling at one with all present, it was natural and fitting that He should approach the Santa and take the seat the disguised man offered. For a time He listened patiently to the demands of the children, making mental notes of the greater needs for health and spiritual sustenance which He would grant unbeknown to the children. Then, not wishing to intrude upon the hired man's office, He suddenly disappeared, much to the disappointment and surprise of the gathering, and especially to that of the lad who had brought Him there.

Again in the street, He sauntered up Temple Street until He came to a simple and unadorned house of worship. Entering the synagogue, He noticed the holy books on the benches and the lighted candles on the unpretentious altar, and He observed that of all He had seen so far on earth, this was the only scene that resembled in any way His recollections of old Judea.

A lone, bearded man, wearing a skull cap and prayer shawl around his shoulders, was occupied in reading from the book he held in his hands. Jesus approached him and, after waiting for the proper moment to speak, said, "Sholem alachem! Pray tell me, what is this holiday for which the populace is preparing? I understand it to be in the name of that individual whom Pontius Pilate crucified in Judea. I am also led to believe that they have another

holiday for Him, which they call Easter. Is it true that these followers no longer observe Passover? As I see it, man is still in bondage and—"

The surprised listener looked at the speaker spellbound. He felt the power and the magnetism of the Man, the all-consuming Love that radiated from His being. Yet he found it difficult to reply.

Jesus continued, "While this may be a demonstration for good, I am of the opinion that the Rabbi of Judea did not seek to glorify Himself; His purpose was to glorify God."

The bearded listener furrowed his brows and tried to gather his wits. He asked, "Who are you? I mean, what is your parental lineage?"

"I am a Hebrew."

"Then you should know that He of whom you speak was one of our greatest prophets. Our sin is in not accepting Him as such. We have lost a great son, and the world has gained a god. It is doubtful if He ever proclaimed Himself to be one. But the mortal world has need of gods. Our faith has only room for the One and only Omnipotent, Omniscient God. As you see, man still hates man, and the wars and unhappiness of man are worse than ever upon earth. Can you blame us for not accepting Him as the Messiah? He who was to end all wars? But our sin is great. We sinned when we delivered Him to Pilate; we sinned when we failed to understand His teachings. We should never have forsaken our own. But then, again, where were the seventy or so of His disciples when He hung upon the cross?"

"I see," said Jesus. "While you do not observe those holidays, you do not find fault with him."

"How could we? Jesus represented the highest form of spiritual man. It is an attainment we all must reach before coming to God. Contrary to mortal belief, no man can die for us and, in so doing, absolve us of our sins. We do live and do die for each other—serve each other—but no man can do that which we must do for ourselves, individually."

"That is truly the Messianic idea," said Jesus.

"But all things, all avenues, lead to God," said the Jew. "And when man begins to understand the true significance of the Messianic idea, man will find God."

"That which man seeks he will surely find."

The man in the skull cap heard the voice, but he no longer saw the speaker. In awe and trembling he fell upon his knees and cried unto the heavens, "*Shami Yesrooeal!* What have I seen? What have I heard? Help me, O Lord, to understand!"

Walking along Wilshire Boulevard, Jesus came across a United States soldier who was hobbling along with the aid of crutches. Jesus spoke to the young man. The young man was bitter, frustrated, confused. He spoke of the war in the East, of his sweetheart who had married another while he was gone, of the mess he had found in his beloved country upon his return: the soaring taxes and the rising cost of living, and the ruthless profiteering by men in power, the conniving and thievery by men in high places. . . .

Chapter 2

Jesus called upon His divine powers and visited other cities. He passed through hospitals and saw the sick and dying. And then, to complete His survey of Earth, he transported Himself to Europe, to Asia, and then to the South African countries.

Each step He took, each city He visited, filled Him with greater and greater sorrow. The sight of starving children seared anew the scars of old wounds; the unhappy, misguided men and women He met everywhere brought deep furrows to His face. He was a tired and bewildered old man by the time He met Columbus at twelve o'clock in Pershing Square.

When Columbus espied the Master, He was taking off his shoes, surrounded by a group of curious onlookers. "Here," said Jesus, handing the shoes to one of the men. "You will have more use for these on earth. May they lead you in the paths of peace."

"Peace!" grumbled the recipient, "I ain't known nodding but trouble all me life!"

"Indeed," said Jesus, "trouble is to the soul what rain is to the flowers. Thou art indeed a blessed man."

"Blessed!" ejaculated the man, "Look, Mister, I'm a sick and lonely old man, and you say I'm blessed! Well, I'll be—"

Columbus tried to get to Jesus, but the individual standing in his way eying the Grecian white robe shouted, "What are you supposed to be? Have you no manners?"

"My humble apologies," said Columbus, "I would speak to my friend." Jesus was now taking of His jacket, which the Seventh Transmutation had provided for His earthly journey.

He was about to place the jacket in an old man's waiting hands when Columbus interfered. "Not yet," he said. "There is still some time left. Come," he continued, drawing the barefoot Jesus away from the throng, "I have much to tell you."

Jesus looked at Columbus's beaming countenance, marveling that he could be so elated.

"Think of it," said Columbus. "When I was a mortal, it took me thirty-two days to go from Portugal to Chipango—I mean the West Indies. Do you know how long it takes them nowadays to circle the entire globe? A matter of hours! And I saw marvelous—"

"What happened at the studio?" interrupted Jesus.

"Oh, there? When they found out that I couldn't pretend, that is, act, as they call it, they gave me what is now known as 'the brush-off.' They left me standing idle, so I wandered off, glad to get away. I visited many places, saw many wonderful things."

"Did you visit the other nations?"

"Yes! You did, too, didn't you?" said Columbus excitedly. "What wonders! What inventions and discoveries! What dost Thou think of it all?"

"Aye," sighed Jesus. "Truly, thou art a man for discoveries and such. As for myself, I can now understand the Heavenly Council's concern for Man."

"Thou seemest displeased, Master," said Columbus, noticing

for the first time Jesus' sober mien. "Art Thou sorry Thou didst come?"

"I don't quite know," said Jesus. "I'll have to think about it. I'll have to think about it."

"Here, there!" shouted a voice from the darkness. "You, both of you!"

The visitors turned to the speaker. He resembled the uniformed man who had admonished Jesus that previous morning. The man held a cudgel in one hand and a flashlight in the other. "It's time you fellows got going," said the man. "Time to get out of the park."

"But," countered Columbus, "are not the parks for public use?"

"So! A Communist beatnik, eh?" barked the policeman. "Listen, you, I've got me orders. It's nearing midnight, and I've got to clear the park. Now, git!"

"Come," said Jesus. "It's about that time anyhow. Render unto Caesar that which is Caesar's."

Chapter 3

No sooner had Jesus and Columbus arrived on the Seventh Transmigration than they found their skeptical friend Schopenhauer waiting. "Well, well! I can see from your expressions that I was right. I told you not to go, but you wouldn't listen. Well, well, what did you find?"

"It was wonderful!" ejaculated Columbus, "simply amazing! The trains, planes, electric lights, Hollywood! I wouldn't have missed it for anything!"

"Bah!" chaffed Schopenhauer. "You would! That is all you are interested in: inventions! But you, Master, tell me: it is a mess, isn't it?"

"I found it rather interesting, and good," remarked Jesus, casually.

"Interesting? Good?" exclaimed the wide-eyed Schopenhauer.

"Aye," said Jesus.

"But You, the Christ! You say it is good?" bellowed the chagrined Schopenhauer. "Millions starving, the entire globe poised for another war and possibly complete destruction of God's experiment, and you say to me you found it *interesting*! 'Good'?"

"Well, at first I was sort of confused. For instance, the Jews, from whose loins I came and whose teachings I expounded, hardly recognized me to be their Messiah. On the other hand, those who are supposed to believe that the Messiah—the Christ—has come to them, who call themselves Christians, well, they, too, deny me in action and in thought; they, too, are blind, greedy, selfish, and constantly striving and at war. It would appear as if all of my labor had been in vain, and that I shall have to go through the ordeal all over again on my second official coming."

"There, there"—Schopenhauer chuckled—"that's more like Earth!"

"Well," continued Jesus, "these people have two holidays for me, something I never intended nor ever expected to find. But I am not opposed to it if it makes them remember my purpose in coming. All in all, I found the Earth to be strongly materialistic, and I was deeply pained until I began to take account of the good things and to weigh them against the bad ones."

"What's that? You, the Chosen One, approve of that mess?"

"You must remember, Arthur, that it is still God's experiment and that, while we assist and do His bidding, we do not know all of His secrets, His methods. But of this I am assured: Earth is the *best place of all to start making Souls.*"

"This is beyond me!" cried the pessimist. "Am I glad I didn't waste my time! Once was enough for me, and yet—Thou, whom I dearly honor and love, say that it is good! Why?"

"It's like this, Arthur. When I first saw all of those steaming factories and smog-ridden cities, it did seem to mirror the color

of the Earth's behavior. Then I perceived how it all conformed to the Divine Law."

"What law?" demanded Schopenhauer, with outstretched arms.

"Man, in his own way, was actually duplicating God's law of creation. I saw people taking raw substances out of the ground and, after much labor and thought, shaping them into wonderful things—those very inventions which I, too, at first, disparagingly accused our friend Columbus here of being too absorbed in. Perhaps it was ordained that he should visit Earth with me and help me to see things in their true light. Well, I learned about sulfa drugs, air conditioning, and a great many things that assist man to live a healthier, more comfortable life. As I studied men at their labors on Earth, while I was praying to God that He give me understanding, it all came to me, as it always does when we call on Him. I saw God taking the raw material of human flesh and brain, and with a little suffering, a few problems, a few challenges, molding it into a Soul. Remember, Arthur, we too went through the same metamorphosis, and are we not better for it? I also saw many touching things that reflected the Creator's handiwork and likeness, things of profound beauty and great spirit."

"What, for instance?" queried Schopenhauer. "I didn't see any beauty!"

"You would have, had you sought it, Arthur," gently admonished Jesus. "Goodness, because of its likeness to God's creation, is often overlooked, underestimated. Yet it is the things of truth and goodness, small as they may be, which alone have immortality and greatness. Behind the turbulent, gross, over-all picture confronting me I began to perceive godlike things: A scientist here, working endlessly to find a solution for some evil brought on by man's sinning, a benefactor there erasing all doubts and fears, a small boy sharing the day and the world with me, a soldier dying so that others can be free—'no greater love hath man. . . .' I saw some wonderful children, too. It is they who have the faith. . . ."

"You were always partial to children," said Columbus.

" . . . so necessary to the future of Earth," continued Jesus. "I saw the sun come up, first red, then golden yellow, on a field of corn. In places I saw the rain rush down to meet the hungry, thirsty soil. And I saw new flowers—one they call 'the bird of paradise.' And I saw many happy people."

"Happy people?" exclaimed Schopenhauer, "Happy people! I don't remember seeing happy people!"

"You only saw the mundane sciences and arts. Now, what can be more beautiful or wonderful than a happy person?"

"Beautiful happy people? Why were they happy?

Jesus's face lit up with one of his rare smiles, "Because they have Love in their hearts."

"But you'll admit that they weren't *all* happy," said Schopenhauer, shaking his head.

"Only those who were not aware of their true heritage—the great and simple things. Unfortunately, those lives are still motivated by fear, insecurity, and earthly myths."

"So," sighed Schopenhauer, "you still believe in the human race!" He shook his head and lifted his arms imploringly. "Would you please tell me why?"

"Of course," replied Jesus. "It is so simple. It is always simple if we but stop listening to our doubts and give our inner voices a chance. I came upon it first in Judea. I forgot it for a moment when I was nailed to the cross. Yesterday, for a moment, I again forgot it. Then, in questioning my doubts, I once more remembered God's promise, our heritage, love. Throughout all of man's struggles, his search is for God and His love. No matter what man's endeavor or aspiration may be, it is *that* which he is seeking and nothing else. Look deeply into the hearts of men, and that is what you will find them seeking, my friend."

"But why must man suffer so?" asked Schopenhauer. "That is something I don't understand."

"Haven't I already told thee?" (Jesus glowed.) "Each human upon Earth is constantly challenged by alternatives and temptations; I ought to know! The choice one makes determines one's progress. Yes, Earth is God's laboratory for souls."

The sound of the trumpets again filled the heavens. Again the sonorous voice. This time it sang, "Sidney Miller, Sidney Miller, Sidney Miller."

Sidney Miller stirred in his sleep, then opened his eyes. Beside him was the airline hostess.

"You looked so happy in your sleep, I hardly had the heart to wake you, Professor Miller. We're approaching the Los Angeles airport. Will you please fasten your safety belt?"

THE FIST

IT WILL TAKE many events and mutations for the people of Chicago to forget the Hotel La Salle fire. Among the many notices of persons who lost their lives in the holocaust was the little-publicized obituary concerning a certain Michael Flauvias Barroni, better known to legend and his cohorts as "The Fist."

As a leg man for the *Recorder*, I was infrequently assigned to cover the tinglers that bore the insignia of his technique. But to me—and you shall soon learn why—the imprints were of even greater significance.

To begin with, Mike had an insatiable appetite for power. And he had the courage to back it up. Not that I ever doubted his courage. It was his conscience that I doubted. When he discovered that he could lick anyone in the district, he began a crusade that eventually led him to a career of infamy. Not that there is anything wrong with the fight game. In fact, a fight promoter once tried to professionalize Mike's fists. Mike tangled professionally in twelve fights: he lost eight of them in the ring and won the other four out of the ring. One of the challengers, Archie King, was found dead in an alley, but no one came forward to prove what so many believed. Mike just couldn't stand losing. Of course, he lost his agent, but that didn't faze Barroni a bit. He got himself into what he called "the big time," collecting protection money from intimidated store owners and factory bosses. And the Big Boss he worked for found that Barroni's fists were quite convincing and profitable.

And so, after progressing from mauling to mowing (gun-

type), he graduated to a lieutenancy over a flock of vultures dominated by one Al Capone, the twentieth century's shrewdest mobster, whose only mistake (the one that got him into Alcatraz) was an improper tax return. When Capone was removed from competition, Mike Barroni elected himself via bullet ballots to Capone's intangible, questionable, yet lucrative empire. The Fist had now learned that if it held a gun, it could command even greater power.

But I had known Michael long before that. We had been reared in the same parish; catechized in the same church—on the same day. So it was quite natural that I, too, should have known and admired the lovely, coppery-headed Christine Navarro, who at that ancient date was the model of virtue and beauty of our neighborhood, and who, for some strange reason known only to the gods who write the script, and to my chagrin, became Michael Barroni's sweetheart.

But that was only the beginning of an attraction that began in the clouds, parachuted to earth, and later—much later on—developed into an alcoholic, whose flotsam and jetsam meanderings took her to and through the bordellos and cafes of all Cicero.

There was little I could do. On rare and tenuous occasions we were, as they say, like "ships that pass in the night." I knew from the start that I was an outsider. And no one hates an outsider more than when he starts looking in.

But I never lost my interest, and when it got around that Christine had left town or died of TB, I tried to find out. The Fist wouldn't talk and, if he knew, he took the secret to his death.

Now, I'm no fatalist. I doubt if everything we do is written in the stars. And yet, there I was, on the night of the fire, on duty, checking on the victims and identifying Mike Barroni by what I found clenched in his charred fist.

In someone else's hand it might have been pitiful and pathetic, considering the circumstances; in the hand of one more familiar with a gun, it tells a strangely tragic story. I shall try to reconstruct it for you.

On the night of the holocaust, Mike Barroni and his henchmen were engaged in a poker game in room 1422, one of the many reserved on that floor for himself, thugs, bodyguards, affaires d'amour, and affairs sub rosa. Frank Cossta ("Betcha" to his cronies), one of the few who jumped—he became crippled, but he managed to live—whispered from his hospital bed that Mike had appeared mean and uneasy throughout the evening. Seemed like something was on his mind, and it wasn't the game. Everyone knew that Mike was touchy and superstitious, but when he bluntly asked if anyone had deliberately put a certain book in his suite, they were a bit nonplussed.

Jake Fresser, called "Blackjack," queried, "What bookie, boss?"

"Don't be funny, wise guy," Mike's fist jolted the Blackjack's jaw. "I said a book, a *plain, printed* book!"

"I dunno, boss," said "Betcha." Turning to the other players around the table, "Any of you punks know what the boss's talking about?" They all shook their heads.

Mike got up, said, "Count me out," and left the boys. He entered his own suite, crossed to a table, and withdrew a cigar from the humidor. Lighting it, he noticed the book he'd been talking about, lying there. Again he read the title: "YOU CAN'T GO HOME AGAIN," then he read the author's name: Thomas Wolfe, all the while wondering how the damn thing had gotten there. Of late, Mike was always reading special messages into things. That dream about a bullet missing him by inches—hadn't he been gunned-for that next day? Again missed by inches? Sure enough, this was a sign of some sort, but what kind he couldn't dope. *Home again! Home again!* Where had he heard that before?

He went to his ornate bar and poured himself a stout Bourbon. He took another and another. But the eerie feeling kept gnawing. "What the hell's bothering me?" He couldn't recollect. He'd spent too many years subduing that little but relentless voice that knew of his heinous secrets.

Again in his bedroom facing the mirror: "Ain't I the big boss? The guy who gives the orders?" Habitually he clenched his thick fingers into a massive hammer and, weighing it mightily, growled: "I've got the world *in my fist*—in my fist, so why should I want to go home again, when there ain't no such thing!" He opened his

fist and waved away his reflection. "Dope! Gwan! Take a powder!" He threw himself across the bed and fell fast asleep. Mike Barroni dreamed. . . .

"Wassamatter, Mike? I remember when you could really go for me. There never was another like me, Mike, huh? Here, have a drink."

"What's happened to your hair, Christine? It used to be— Ya look like hell! They're telling me you're running this cat house!"

"What? This is a club for leisurely— Say! Aren't you a little late to be worrying about what I'm doing? Aren't you?"

"You're just a cheap whore, and you're the one used to preach to me!"

Christine bit her lips. The words came slowly, bitterly.

"What did you expect, Mike? What *did* you expect?" She came close, flailing her arms. "Got a short memory, you! You were the one who showed me how to get into the 'big time' . . . how to use my talents. . . . For you I—"

"The big time— Huh! Here's some dough. I want you out of here—"

Christine's eyes were large, defiant. "I don't want yer dirty money!" she cried hysterically. "I earn mine! I earn mine!" she lashed out her palm and struck Mike violently on the cheek. . . .

Barroni awoke—his hand on his face. Blindly, he stared into the dark. It took him seconds to emerge from his dream and commandeer his hand to the bedside lamp. It wouldn't light. Hadn't he left the light on? Now on the ceiling orangelike shadows were doing a macabre dance. Suddenly, as if a hole had been torn through his ennui, obstreperous cries and lamentations reached his consciousness. . . . This was no dream!

Springing to his feet, he faced the window. Hellish tongues of grasping flames licked the pane. In another instant he was at the door. Already his throat was resenting the rampant fumes and foul odors. Running toward the elevator, he tripped over a soft mass at his feet and landed on his knees. He thought he saw Monty, the "lady killer," rush by. He didn't stop him. All he wanted now was out of this furnace. Again on his feet and running, he clearly heard the cries of a familiar voice above the din. He

hurried on. Only a yesterday ago, they had laved in each other's lust. Now that tragedy had vitiated his desires, she and he were remote entities.

When he got to the elevator and the shouting mob around it, instantly he knew—no elevator would reach that fourteenth floor that night, if ever. . . . He dove for the stairway he'd never used. For the first time he began to worry. The acrid smoke bothered him. The more he coughed, the more deeply he needed to breathe. A fiendish, tormenting cycle. With burning eyes and swollen throat he reached the stairway . . . it was an impossible mass of black fury streaked by occasional bursts of flame . . . "There must be fire 'scapes" . . . The doors that gave way disclosed groaning bodies at his feet and flashing flames at the windows. . . .

Again his knees buckled and he landed on his stomach. Intense heat infiltrated his clothes . . . excruciating shocks pulsated through his body. . . . His lungs, as though having a life all their own, pleaded for air . . . air . . . Jabs convulsed him. This time he knew he was fighting against odds he couldn't beat. . . .

"No! This can't happen to me! I don't want to die—I don't want to die!"

Behind the leaping flames his scared, confused mind saw strange things in the smoke: "Hey, there, Hendricks . . . and you, Skolnick, you god-damned junky . . . I ordered you rubbed out! What are you doing here?"

At moments he lost consciousness. At other moments he fought to extinguish a flame in his ignited clothes and to hold his gutted throat. . . . Then from the far reaches of his mind an idea grew and urged him on. He just had to reach his own suite. . . .

Time and eternity were the same before he got to his bedroom. . . . In frantic desperation he pulled out each dresser drawer and searched for the thing he sought. . . . Then he thought of the old satchel behind the bed. . . . Finally he touched a cold piece of metal. Holding it tightly, he was unable to pray.

Of a sudden his mind cleared . . . and it came to him . . . the thing he'd been trying to recollect all evening. It had been trying to speak to him, and now he remembered . . . Only now, her

hair was a shining golden copper and she was young and beautiful and crying. . . . Her words came clearly: "You'll think of me . . . and of God . . . BUT YOU CAN'T COME HOME AGAIN . . . YOU CAN'T COME HOME AGAIN. YOU . . ."

And now he knew, like the smoldering rat that ran across him, that he was going to die. . . . He clasped the crucifix tightly, in his once-mighty fist—the little gold crucifix found in his charred fingers!

Inscribed on the back of the cross was the name "Christine." And now, too, I knew, Mike the Fist had a conscience.

UNEXPECTED ACCOLADE

"MIGHT AS WELL tell me I'm useless," murmured the aging lady upon reading the Board's decision to retire her. They had suggested as much years before. Now the wording was firm, decisive. ". . . You are no longer to report to class . . . you must rest your eyes. . . ."

Rest! That's for the dead! I'm a Missourian! Never knew any of my people to retire! . . . In her estimation, retirement was the quickest way to the cemetery. Why, no sooner had Tom Landsberry stopped delivering mail than there he was. Wasn't her health still good, her mind keen as ever? True, her eyes of late had been slowing her down. What puzzled her most was that she could see fairly well at a distance; but put a printed page in front of her and—well—it made her mad. But that was the way of creeping presbyopia.

Well, the Board got their way—a way that led into days, weeks, and months of diminishing interest. And if it had not been for the occasional letters from former students, her life would have been futile, indeed. These letters were her pearls of great price, and she'd have them read time and again by considerate neighbors who dropped by daily to be of service, and who also usually had some questions that needed answering.

It really was something to follow the numerous careers of those whom she had known in her classes. There was the rising starlet on New York's Broadway. . . . The once-unruly lad who had since transmuted his drive and aggressiveness into managing a successful chain of shoe stores. . . . And, most of all, the genial lad with the bow tie and horn-rimmed glasses who had risen to the presidency of these great United States.

Yes, memories were something to cherish. But not quite enough for one who still desired to be of use to this world. The tiniest of clouds settled on her thoughts, but it did not get a chance to shower. Negation was something that had to be met immediately. It was the special "something" she had instilled along with the academic subjects in her students.

And now she had to remember that for herself. With determination she grabbed the Bible from the mantelpiece and sat down near the window. Without even opening the book she began to quote from memory the Ninety-first Psalm. Halfway down the great poem she lost track of its continuity and subconsciously opened the Bible, thinking, *"any moment now someone will drop by and finish the psalm for me."* . . . She tried again, only to be interrupted by the slamming of an automobile door, muffled voices, and footsteps coming up the walk. And although she heard all this, she was startled by the clanging chimes over her front door.

"Come in," she called. "The door's open."

The gentleman who stepped into the room removed his fedora and said kindly, "I just had to see you while passing through. How are you?"

"Guess I'm all right, young man. The voice is mighty familiar. Come here, closer to the window, so I can see who you are."

"Oh, I'm the fellow you once kept after school for throwing a book across the room," he said jokingly, coming closer to the window. "Really, I wasn't the guilty one."

The lady's eyes widened as she discerned the horn-rimmed glasses, the bow tie, the genial smile. "This is a fine time to tell me." She laughed, pointing to a chair.

"Of course, I wanted to see for myself how you're getting on," he said, seating himself. "But truthfully, the job is getting tougher all the time. Always, hourly, there are decisions to make, and, brother, how to make the right one!"

"Moses didn't think he could make them," remarked the lady. "Neither did Solomon, nor Washington, nor Lincoln. They all asked for Divine guidance."

The great executive rose as though he could not contain his thoughts while sitting placidly. When he spoke, his voice was grave. "I have it in my power to end the war—yes, end the whole war! Never was man faced with such decision!"

"You sound as though this act demands great sacrifice or price."

"Yes, a great sacrifice, a great price. . . . Many lives, many! . . . And yet, not half or a tenth as many as if the war continues."

"Young man, if you will pardon the breach of 'protocole diplomatique,' I'd say, 'First things first.'"

"And by that you mean?"

"The very first thing you promised before taking office was to protect and defend . . ." She did not finish what he well remembered.

The Chief Executive put his right forefinger to his lips and sat down. For a seemingly long time he did not speak. Finally the lines of his face relaxed into a smile. "I haven't changed much. Here I am telling you of my problems, as I probably did eons ago. There should be, there must be, something I can do for you."

"Indeed you can," she frankly stated. "You can read the Ninety-first Psalm for me. Seems I've forgotten part of it." She handed him the book.

"I'd love to," shrewdly aware that there was always a method to her requests.

And so the brown-eyed lad who had grown to be the most important man to his country began to read from the Bible. On he read, thinking, as we all do, that the words were especially written for him:

> I will set him on high, because he hath known my name.
> He shall call upon me, and I shall remember him.
> I will be with him in trouble;
> I will rescue him and bring him honor . . . .

He finished, clearing his husky throat. He tried closing his eyes to retain the moisture in them.

"You read very well, sir. And of course you'll stay for lunch, like you used to." She leaned over and relieved him of the book.

His answer was tardy. "That would be fun; but there are some gentlemen waiting for me outside; we've a plane to meet." He rose and smiled his full, gracious smile—the smile for which he was so well liked. "Do you know something? You ought to be on the government payroll." He turned toward the door. "I'll be seeing you—soon, I hope."

"Please do, son. It was so good seeing you. And remember, we're from Missouri."

The high executive laughed. The aged lady laughed. When the door closed behind him, the lady lifted the Bible to her heart and hugged it fondly, her face glowing with happiness. How wonderful to know that she was still of use to the world!