

SUPER SCIENCE STORIES

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**By Margaret
St. Clair**
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BRIDE OF ETERNITY

She had waited eons for her subjects—until the dark day she awoke to a world too cruel to love her, yet too fond to let her die!

THE METEORITE, Galton and Phillips decided when they began to excavate, must have fallen after Ganymede had lost its atmosphere: the damage it had done was too extensive for the impact to have been cushioned by air. It had plowed into the craggy surface of the planetoid like a slingshot into a ball of mud. It had hit so hard that it had brought half the mountain down over the chamber where the queen and her followers lay.

Galton and Phillips had to work for days, even with power tools, to clear the debris away from the opening. And when they had got inside at last, yesterday morning, they had found the chamber's vaulted roof crushed in. Almost the whole vast room had been choked with rock. The queen's followers must have died under it, without waking, while still in the imago-state. Only the queen herself, lying alone at the extreme end of the chamber, had survived.

The insignia of her royal rank had

fallen into dust eon upon eon ago. Only the green smarag on her thumb told who she was. Now she lay on the naked rock, her limbs relaxed but icy cold, and she smiled a little. She must have been smiling when she went into the imago-state. Her heavy black hair lay in ringlets over her golden shoulders, and her mouth was a dusky rose. One of her four-fingered hands had loosely gripped a square tablet of rhodium.

Phillips, shaking with excitement, had drawn it from between her fingers and read the message on it. The simple script of the great race—the race that had built cities on Eschaton and Pluto, and had an outpost on Ganymede—was easy enough for an archaeologist to decipher. Rather grudgingly Phillips had translated it for Galton. This was the way the message ran:

"Dejaleira to Crysaor: Greeting. The relief ship you were to bring us is long overdue, though we are confident that it will come. Our supplies are running low. Therefore, as was agreed, we are going into the Sleep. Awaken us. My love, my love! Do not be long!"

She had written the message to Crysaor and then lain down, smiling a little, for her long sleep. Galton, looking down at her relaxed golden body lying on the bare rock, felt awe tightening the scalp on his head.



Once more the older man made an adjustment. And this time there was a response. Dejalastra stirred.

How long had she been lying there? She had come to Ganymede when the sun had been a star so hot that Pluto and Eschaton, the farthest planet, were warm and green and habitable. Earth and Venus and Mars had been incandescent blobs then and Ganymede, the cold dead moon, must have been nearly as hot as Mercury was today. The time was so vast that Galton felt his mind reeling back dizzily from contemplation of it. Millenia, in it; had been less than the seconds scattered lightly by a ticking clock. And through all that time Dejaleira had lain on the bare rock, waiting. She had lain there waiting for Crysaor, who did not come.

"Do you know what this means?" Phillips demanded harshly. He was almost choking with emotion. Galton, turning to look at his chief, felt a twinge of uneasiness. Phillips was always nervous, highly-keyed; but now he was jerking so much that he could hardly talk.

"Do you realize what it means?" Phillips repeated. He knotted his gloved fingers together and dragged at them. "We've found a living member of the great race! Who knows what she'll be able to tell us when we revive her? Phases of the science of the great race that we've never been able to comprehend will be clear to us. The star drive, for example, and their fourth-dimensional surgery—dozens of things! Perhaps she'll be able to tell us what it was that emptied the cities of Eschaton and Pluto in a day, emptied them so that no one ever came back. The historians have been arguing over that for years. And the Engulfment, and the natures of admixed pure negatives. She'll be able to explain so many things!"

Phillips halted, his gray eyes blazing. A little more calmly, he continued, "Cosmic matters, too. What makes a

star, how a solar system is born. This is a great day for science, Galton. I don't think we can overestimate its importance. Do you realize this, that her people may have witnessed the creation of our sun?"

Galton shrugged. Phillips' enthusiasm vaguely repelled him. "If she can be revived," he said cautiously.

"If!" Phillips replied buoyantly. His tension seemed to have given place to expansiveness. "There's no if about it. Animals found in the Sleep in the museums on Pluto have been revived successfully. There's no need to anticipate trouble with her."

"They weren't highly organized animals. Only one of them was a mammal. We don't understand the imago-state perfectly yet. The process is full of difficulties."

"Oh, nonsense. I'm perfectly confident that I can carry it out satisfactorily."

Galton stared incredulously at his chief. After an instant he said, "Do you mean you're going to try to revive her yourself?"

"Certainly. Why not?" The older man's eyes were challenging.

"Because—well, in the first place, Phillips, you're not a biologist. You haven't got the knowledge, you haven't got the skill, to try a thing like this. If she's to be revived, she should be taken back to Terra for it, where the finest brains in terrestrial science can collaborate on the job.

"In the second place even if you have the technique and the knowledge, what would you use for power? There's nothing, not even rust, left of the machines the queen's people would have used to revive her. They used Ganymede's magnetic currents as a power source. What would you use? And in the third place, reviving her here might be dangerous to us. The

revivification process sets up severe ground stresses. Ganymede's crust is none too stable. Do you want to bring the mountain down on us?"

Phillips showed his teeth in a laugh. "How thorough you are, my boy," he said nastily. "To take your points in order, one, I consider myself quite the equal in knowledge and skill of any scientist on Terra. Two, I intend to use the power units from the ship and both lifecraft, and I think I can just make it. I shan't have any power to spare, but it will be adequate. And three, if I see any evidences of strain, I'll use repulsors at the proper places. Have you any further objections?"

"Phillips, listen, you're acting—" Galton bit back the words. Once, by a clerk's mistake, he had seen Phillips' psychological rating card. In the space marked "General Estimate" some psychiatrist had written, "Brilliant, but inherently unstable."

Galton tried again, forcing himself to speak calmly. "Phillips, it's dangerous. You might hurt her—you might kill her."

"Hurt her?" Phillips' face changed a little. "Hurt her?" he said again. He walked over to where Dejaireira was lying. He bent over and, very lightly, touched her bare, round knee. "Beautiful," he said softly, "beautiful. Isn't she lovely, Galton? Have you ever seen anything like her? And you think I'd hurt her! Why, I'd sooner lose my right arm. I wouldn't trust anyone but myself to waken her."

Galton's eyes widened. So that was it!

For a moment he hunted for the right words. "I know you'll be careful with her, Phillips," he answered. "It isn't that I doubt your ability. But wouldn't it be better to take her back to Terra? You can't—"

"Be quiet," Phillips ordered harshly.

He turned back to Galton. The gleam of tenderness had left his face. "I know what you're trying to do. You want to cheat me out of waking her. That's your game. You've always been jealous of me."

"Well, you're not going to do it. When you joined our little archaeological expedition, you accepted semi-military discipline. You're going to help me waken Dejaireira. Those are orders. Orders, my boy."

Galton's face grew wooden. "Yes, sir," he replied.

WHEN night—or that portion of time recurrently allotted to sleeping—came, Galton tossed wakefully in his bunk. At last he turned on the dim blue light over his head and looked across to where Phillips lay. The older man, as if conscious of his gaze, moved jerkily. He put one hand to his mouth and mumbled disjointed syllables.

Galton swung his legs over the edge of his bunk and sat there for a moment. Then he rose and softly left the cabin. In the first airlock he put on his suit. He passed through the second lock and out to the surface of Ganymede.

It was quite dark. This was the side of Ganymede which the satellite keeps eternally turned away from Jupiter, so the lowering big red disk was not in the sky, and the sun was invisible at this point in Ganymede's orbit. Even if it had been shining, its light at this distance was feeble and dilute. Galton switched on his helmet light and went hopping and clambering over the rock-strewn terrain toward the chamber where the queen was. He went in.

He walked through the big airless chamber till he came to where Dejaireira lay. For a long time he stood looking down at her. In the light from his helmet her golden limbs seemed to

sparkle faintly and her hair was darker than the sky outside. "Poor little queen," he said at last, "poor lost little queen." He turned and went back to the ship.

Inside, he took off his suit. He went to the cabin door and listened. Phillips still seemed to be sleeping. Galton nodded to himself. He went aft through the narrow passage until he came to the lifecraft.

Galton hesitated only briefly. Then he took a heavy wrench and went to work on the power units. Before he finished he was sweating hard; the power units had been designed to take a lot of punishment before giving up. But when he stopped he knew, with solid satisfaction, that not another erg would flow through them. It would take the resources of a machine shop to get the power units in the lifecraft functioning again.

Galton looked down at the wreckage with a faint grin. It might be awkward if anything happened to the main power drive in the Heinrich Schliemann, but he couldn't help that. The main point was that now there could be no question of Phillips' trying to revive Dejaleira. Galton grinned once more. He went back to the cabin and lay down in his bunk. Almost instantly he was asleep.

PHILLIPS discovered the destruction in what was, conventionally speaking, late afternoon. He came up to Galton waving his arms and sputtering furiously about vandalism and insubordination, and Galton listened stolidly. When Phillips' rage had worn itself out—much more quickly than Galton had expected—Phillips cleared his throat.

"I'll report this when we get back to Terra, Galton," he said formally. "It will go into your record to stay. Mean-

while—" he smiled bleakly—"we'll continue with our excavation as planned. We can't let your childishness ruin the expedition, can we? We've got to make a success of it to show Central we were right in coming here to dig. You know how negative their attitude was. There's still a great deal of work for us to do.

"I propose, Galton, that we bury the hatchet, at least for the time. As long as we're on Ganymede, we'll cooperate. Do you agree?"

"Yes," Galton answered. He felt a little surprised.

"Good! We'll have a drink together, to show no harm's been done. Eh, my boy?"

"All right."

Phillips opened the little bar cabinet and fussed around with the bar things. "What'll you have, my boy?" he asked.

"Phlomis, I guess. No, wait. I think I'd rather have rum."

"Better make it phlomis," Phillips advised. He seemed to have recovered completely from his anger at Galton. "That's what I've poured." He handed the glass to Galton.

Phillips raised his own drink. "To —Dejaleira," he said lightly.

Galton nodded. Politely he drank. Ordinarily he liked phlomis, but at the moment the liquor's dry, cardboardy taste was unpalatable. He wished Phillips had given him rum.

"One more," the gray-haired archaeologist said, "and then we'll get back to work. We've got a lot of cataloguing to do. That phlomis goes down well, doesn't it?"

This time they drank more leisurely. "Galton," Phillips said abruptly, "why are you jealous of me?"

"Jealous? I'm not." Galton was having difficulty in replying. His tongue was thick and he felt an unaccountable dizziness.

"Oh, yes you are. I'd noticed it before. But now . . . You must be in love with our little queen yourself."

Galton tried to answer, to deny the accusation. He could not speak. The cabin was moving about him giddily, advancing in swollen waves that alternated with blackness. He tried to put his glass down, and it dropped into blackness. He leaned forward toward Phillips, and blackness swallowed him up.

AFTER that there was a long time when Galton fought tormentedly for consciousness. He struggled toward it desperately through choking layers of dreams, but they were always too thick for him. Now and again he would rise almost to the surface. He would be given water and would drink greedily. Then there would be a sting in his shoulder and he would go down, still fighting, under the heavy, hateful weight of oblivion.

He came to himself at last. It took him time to get his eyes to focus. When he could see reasonably well he found that he had been tied to one of the stone pillars at the extreme outer end of the hall where Dejaleira lay. He felt a great exhaustion; it was hard for him to move his head.

This was reasonable enough. Phillips had been keeping him drugged for nearly a week, and during that time

he had had no food, only water. To the depletion of his tissues was added the backlash of the drug debauch Phillips had inflicted on him. If it had not been for his bonds and the support given him by his spacesuit, he would not have been able to stand.

The hall was brightly lighted. Phillips had put fluors in the ceiling. Down at the far end Phillips and another man were moving about, arranging machinery. Even in his weakness Galton felt a shock of surprise. Who could the stranger be?

Phillips came walking up to the pillar where Galton was. He looked at him critically. "Conscious again, I see," he said. "I thought it was about time." The older man's face looked strained and tired, but his eyes had a restless brightness. He had impressed Galton as unstable before. Now he seemed a little mad.

"Phillips, who's that man? What's he doing here?"

"You mean McGirk?" Phillips gave a thin smile. "Why, he landed near our ship sixty hours or so ago. A most fortunate landing for me. I'd been reluctantly forced to the conclusion that the Schliemann's power units were quite inadequate for reviving Queen Dejaleira. It was really very naughty of you to smash up the units in the lifecraft.

"But McGirk has proved most co-

operative. We've rigged up power lines from both ships now and I feel we're at the end of our difficulties. McGirk's not much to look at but for a man of his type he has a surprising interest in pure science. He's almost as interested as I am in reviving the queen. As to what he's doing on Ganymede—well, I rather think he landed here because the space patrol is after him."

"You mean he's a criminal?"

"Hush, my boy! His radio may be on. Well, he may be something of the sort. He wanted to kill you, but I felt it was only fair to let you witness the reawakening of the queen."

"Our biggest trouble, at present, is oxygen. When DeJaleira wakens she'll need air, and we can't put her in a suit because it would interfere with the field. And making the hall airtight is quite impractical. It leaks like a sieve. Too bad the field's dangerous, or we could have revived her inside the ship. But we'll think of something, we'll think of something."

"Notice the repulsors? They're to keep the ceiling up."

He nodded and went back to where McGirk was working. Galton stared after him. He felt sick. If they failed, DeJaleira would die. And if she lived, McGirk . . .

He threw himself as hard as he could against the ropes. It was no use. Even if he had had his normal strength he could have done nothing with them. McGirk had tied him up scientifically. There were no lax strands or conveniently handy ends.

There was a buzz in his helmet as McGirk turned his communicator on. "All set, Phillips?" he asked in a rumbling voice.

"Just about. Wait, though. I've been thinking about the oxygen problem, and it seems to me that the best

solution would be a mesh screen. It's neutral. What do you think?"

"Sure, I guess so. Whatever you say. All I want is to have her—" he gestured with his thumb toward the slab on which DeJaleira was lying—"wake up."

"Very well, then. Go back to the ship and bring me . . ." Phillips began a long list of items. McGirk listened, nodding his head. As he shambled past Galton on his way to the Schliemann, he gave the bound man a hard, bright grin. Galton received an indelible impression of a rat's hungry, snarling face. He felt a revulsion and hatred so strong that it almost nauseated him.

"You might as well stop throwing yourself about, Galton," Phillips said without turning. He was still busy near DeJaleira, making connections and setting screws.

McGirk came back, staggering under an enormous load. Phillips helped him release himself, and they went to work at once. Galton listened wretchedly, trying not to hear their brief exchanges. DeJaleira . . . DeJaleira . . . it would be better if she died.

"That's about it," Phillips said to McGirk at last. "Oh, yes, we'd better put another repulsor down near our friend. I don't like the look of the rock there. Point it up at an angle of about forty degrees. No, nearer him. That's fine."

"Are you going to start it now?" McGirk asked expectantly.

"Yes." His face changed. "What's that?" he demanded sharply. "McGirk! Look out! There's someone coming through the door!"

McGirk whirled about, his hand on his blaster. And as he turned Phillips raised his own blaster and shot him neatly through the back. He fell soundlessly.

"I'm afraid that was necessary," Phillips said, smiling at Galton benignly.

nantly. "It did occur to me that McGirk's interest in pure science might not be quite so great as it seemed. I felt, as regards DeJaleira, that he was not altogether disinterested. So . . .

"I'll leave him here. He won't be in the way. And now . . ."

He wheeled a banked switchboard toward Galton. "The field's dangerous," he explained, "to organisms not in the imago-state. One has to keep at a distance. As of course you know." He looked intently at a chronometer. His hand hovered above a switch. "Now," he said.

THERE was no sound in the airless chamber, but Galton felt a deep grinding throb through the rock under his feet. It subsided gradually, as though it yielded to some muting, repressing force. The scattering of repulsors in the chamber was arcing steadily, the odd lambent field flowing upward from them. Down at the end of the rock-hewn chamber the light had turned to a deep emerald green.

"Eight point two three five seconds," Phillips said. He depressed another switch. The light around DeJaleira shifted to a pale, icy blue. "We've nearly a minute of this," Phillips said. "The field's building up."

Galton sagged against his bonds. There was nothing he could do.

Phillips turned another switch. Again there came that deep vibration in the rock. The field around DeJaleira turned to creeping, corpuscular gold. "Odd, isn't it," Phillips said reflectively, "how changes in the visible spectrum accompany the frequencies to which we aren't sensitive? I wish I knew a little more about the theory behind those sequences. Not that it matters a great deal. Now to go back to the tonic."

He moved a pointer and the light

around DeJaleira shifted through a rainbow spectral sequence back to white. Phillips gave a deep-drawn sigh. "DeJaleira," he said in a light whisper, as if in intimate self-communion, "DeJaleira, my beautiful darling, you haven't long to wait."

In his helplessness, Galton had begun once more to fight his bonds. Now a discovery turned him momentarily rigid. He had found out that he could move his right foot.

He could move his right foot nearly five inches away from the pillar to which he was tied. Nearly five inches. What use could he make of this fractional bit of freedom?

He began to move about, straining against the ropes, for fear his sudden inactivity should have made Phillips suspicious. He need not have bothered; Phillips had no eyes for him. All his faculties were fixed on the rock slab where DeJaleira lay.

Once more the older man made an adjustment. The light around the queen turned to pale gold. And this time there was a response. DeJaleira stirred.

Nothing that had happened yet had seemed to Galton so horrible. In a burning flash of insight he saw how much better it would have been if she had died. She was waking to a world so remote from her own that the very concept of the change would be meaningless. She was waking on the far side of an abyss of time so vast that it could only terrify.

But she would live now and Phillips would take her back to Terra with him. Her sweet antique beauty would be the spoil of billions of pairs of greedy eyes. The inhabitants of three planets would go mad over her. She would be stared at, questioned, prodded, pulled, examined, idolized. And in the middle of the furor she would be utterly alone.

Poor lost DeJaleira, poor time-strayed queen. She would be more lonely than any human being had ever been.

The field around DeJaleira deepened into amber gold. "Darling, darling," Phillips was breathing over and over again. "You'll have to stay in the field a little while longer, my darling. Else you might go back into the Sleep. Queen DeJaleira, my queen. When you're out of the Sleep I'm going to kneel down at your feet and worship you."

Once more DeJaleira stirred. Her eyes opened. Slowly she sat up, leaning on one slender arm. Her bright breast moved in a long sigh. For a moment her face wore a look that Galton was to treasure in bitter-sweet memory as long as he lived—a look of radiant, unearthly joy. Its poignancy caught at his heart.

The seconds passed. The joy faded from the queen's face. There was uncertainty there now, and the beginning of fear. Once more she looked about the ruined chamber. Her soft lips moved, trembled as if she were about to speak.

Galton gathered himself. He could not bear it. He drew his right foot back as far as the ropes would let him and then lunged out with all his force at the repulsor McGirk had placed near his feet.

The repulsor tottered for a moment and then fell over on the rock. For a moment its arc flared up in a dazzle of light and sputtered angrily. Abruptly its field died away. A second later Galton felt the rock floor grate portentously under him. The rock ceiling shook.

Phillips spun round. Within his helmet his face had gone dirty white. He mouthed something, inarticulate with fury. Then he raised his blaster and fired at Galton point-blank.

The shot went wild, crashed into the ceiling. For a full second everything seemed to hang suspended. And then the mountain began to fall on the two men.

The amber field around DeJaleira flickered out. An instant later the light from the fluors followed it. But before the lights went out finally, Galton had time to see what he was to remember all his life, and always with a sense of comfort—DeJaleira, released from the field, sinking down on her stone bed again, sinking with relaxed limbs back into the Sleep. Then the rocks came raining down between. The stone curtain obliterated everything.

Galton recovered consciousness many hours later. There was an excruciating pain in his leg. He was still tied to the stone pillar, but it had, he found out by wriggling, broken off a little above his waist.

The stone-choked hall was quite dark.

Galton, biting his lip often, managed to work his ropes up over the column's fractured end. Every motion increased the agonizing pain in his leg. When his hands were free he felt along his leg and discovered that it was broken, as he had thought. From the character of the pain, the fracture must be compound.

He tried his helmet light. It still worked, though the lens was cracked. With the help of the wavering spot of light he went to work on the ropes on his legs. Once he nearly fainted. It was a long time before his feet were free.

He sank down on the rock-strewn floor to rest. Behind him a hand-span of sky was visible, with a star or two. It should be possible for him to get back to the ship. Was Phillips still alive?

"Phillips!" he called into his helmet radio. "Phillips! Phillips!" There was no answer.

Galton sent the beam of his light bobbing about the rock-cumbered space. At last, crushed against the floor, he found what looked like an arm and hand. He dragged himself over to it.

It was Phillips.

Painfully Galton cleared some of the rocks away. Then he found that Phillips' oxygen tank was ruptured and all the air was gone. Phillips must have died, while still unconscious, of asphxia. He would have died from the weight of rock piled on him in any case.

Dejaleira, Galton knew, was still safe. The part of the chamber where she lay had been dug deep into the heart of the rock. If the meteor impact had not broken the roof there, the far slighter earthquake Galton had produced could not have done so.

Galton dragged himself toward the patch of sky. Hours later he emerged on the surface of Ganymede. He had to pause several times to rest, but at last he was back inside the ship.

The fracture of his leg was compound, as he had thought. He treated it as well as he could. Then he fed data into the automatic astrogator for a terrestrial course.

As the Schleimann jetted up from Ganymede, bound for home, Galton looked back. Already the little moon was showing a curvature. "Good-by, Dejaleira," Galton said.

For nobody was coming here again. When Galton got back to Terra he would tell Central that he and Phillips had found nothing. Phillips, he would tell them, had grown more and more morose at their lack of success. At last he had insisted, despite Galton's protests, in resorting to deep electric blasting. In the resultant earthslide he had been killed and Galton badly hurt.

Central Archaeology would believe the story. They had been less than lukewarm toward the expedition, anyway; only Phillips' reputation had made them license it. And Phillips' known instability would make the electric blasting plausible. Ganymede would be crossed, with a sigh of relief, from Center's books. Nobody would dig there again. There would be no reason to.

This was the best way for it to end. Dejaleira and her two awakeners would lie behind the rock-heaps. Time would pass and the bodies of the two men would crumble into dust at last, but Dejaleira would go on waiting. She would lie on the rock slab waiting, just quietly waiting, while eternity went by.