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WEIRD TALES ISSUED 1st OF EACH MONTH

Once in a Thousand Years

By FRANCES BRAGG MIDDLETON

One of the strangest stories ever written—a fascinating present-day tale of Atlantis and a weird adventure in the Sargasso Sea

IT WAS a mad thing to do, of course. But the three of us were together, perhaps for the last time. And we were all just out of school, and none of us was twenty-two, and each of us had had one drink too many. Also, the night was one of those mad, intoxicating nights that rarely come more than once in any man's lifetime.

Glamor. The night was thick with it. A blue, blue, star-shot sky. The Gulf spread out to meet it, white under the breath-taking beauty of the great white moon. All the rippling, gurgling voices of a summer sea, all the Circe-scents of jasmine flowers, magnolias, and orange trees in bloom. We couldn't sleep. We couldn't stay inside.

I don't remember who suggested swimming out to the float. We were none of us accountable, exactly. But I remember we all agreed to it, though we all knew that the tide was out and running strong. Indeed, I never knew such another ebb as we felt that night. It swept us out with all the force of the current of a great river in flood-time. And it served to sober us. We were glad to reach the float and lie on it and rest. We knew we could never go back against a tide like that. We'd have to wait till morning.

So Nelson Todd and I made the best of it and slept. But when the hot sun waked us, Shane O'Farrell was gone.

It did not occur to us then to be uneasy. We swam in, dressed, and went down to breakfast. It was only then,

when we couldn't find him, and when Todd's family and Todd's servants—it was Todd's father's house where we were staying—declared they hadn't seen or heard him, that we began to be alarmed. And by that time it was too late to do any good.

Of course, we searched everywhere, notified his uncle and the authorities. There was a terrible rush and scramble of coast guards, police, and newspaper men for a while. It actually looked at one time as if Todd and I might be accused of making away with him. But O'Farrell's old uncle wouldn't hear of that. Neither would he admit that O'Farrell was dead. Todd and I had no doubts on that score. We knew what that tremendous ebb was like. If it had got O'Farrell . . . but it was more than three years before we knew.

For Shane O'Farrell came back, as suddenly, as unexpectedly, as he had gone. He simply walked in on me, in the office where I was strenuously trying to learn my father's business. And when I had begun to get over the shock of his return, and to get a good look at him, I began to realize that he had changed immeasurably. He had always been tall, I remembered. Now, by some trick in the carriage of his head, in the pitch of his shoulders, he seemed inches taller. His blue eyes were clouded with something I couldn't fathom. His big, generous, Irish mouth, that had used to laugh so much, was etched in sensitive, wistful lines. And his movements were more



"Who are you?" he demanded.

He gave me a startled look.

"That's queer," he said.

But when I asked him what was queer about that, he only shook his head absently. And it dawned on me suddenly that it was his own voice that was queer, as if it hadn't been used much lately, in talking English, that is.

I began to get a little warm under the collar. After all, we'd been brought up next door to each other, gone to school together, eaten each other's bread, fought each other's battles, spent each other's money, almost all our lives. He had dropped into the sea that night from

deliberate. His old impulsiveness was gone.

SHANE told me, in answer to my questions, that he had been globe-trotting a bit, that he had already seen his uncle, but hadn't been able to locate Nelson Todd.

"Todd's on an engineering job in Yucatan," I told him.

within a yard of me. And I wasn't going to be put off by that cool, detached, new manner of his, if I could help it.

"So you mean to tell me," I accused, "that you got tired of the float, so you just dropped off into the water, were swept out to sea and were picked up, and that you've just been wandering over the face of the earth ever since, without money, without letting your friends know——"

"Oh, I was with friends," he told me casually. "That is," with the manner of one conscientiously trying to tell the exact truth, "that is, they were friends after I met up with them."

And for a while he just sat there, staring out the window of that eighteenth-story office, but seeing nothing, hearing nothing, I could have sworn, of the dingy, humming streets below. And my patience broke all of a sudden, like a blown-up balloon.

"But where have you been?" I almost yelled at him. "Great Scott, man, do you think you can go out like the flame of a candle and then bob up again without a word of warning, and expect nobody to take any notice of it? Haven't the reporters got hold of you yet?"

"No," he answered mildly, still staring out toward the smoky horizon. "Uncle John and you are the only ones who know yet that I'm back. I don't want—publicity."

"Well, you'll get it," I exploded. "Dead men can't come alive without getting into the papers. Where have you been?"

"In the Sargasso Sea," he answered quietly, and smiled a little, secret smile.

I think I was never quite so angry in my life before.

"So that's what you mean to tell the papers!" I snorted witheringly. "I suppose that wouldn't get you publicity in

large, handsome gobs? The Sargasso Sea that's so famous and so reeking with mystery! And you mean to tell me you got there—by swimming, was it?—with nothing but a pair of bathing-trunks to help you along?"

He burst out laughing, quite like his old self for the moment. It was the first sign of *reality* I'd seen in him since he came.

"Oh, I had a striped silk dressing-gown before I got there," he explained. But then his laugh broke off in the middle and his eyes grew vague again. "Saint Brandan's Isle, you know. You've read about it——"

"Sure," I snorted. "I've read about it. About the Seven Cities of Cibola, too, and the voyages of Madoc and Mael-dune, and a thousand other marvels. But I never expect to see any of them, and you don't either."

"No, I never expect to see any of them," he repeated, and his eyes grew more clouded than ever.

I banged the drawers of my desk shut and dragged him out to lunch. That night I took him to a show. But he never really waked up. He still liked me, I think—as much, that is, as it was left in him to like anyone. He dropped in every day. But he wouldn't talk. And that queer, detached manner of his bothered me.

When he did break silence, it was always to say something strange and unexpected.

"Do you believe in the impossible?" he asked one night, when we were smoking in the living-room of the two-by-four apartment which was all I could afford in town.

"It depends on what you call the impossible," I answered, puzzled. "Columbus did it in his day. Peary did it in ours.

So did the Wright brothers. Everything was impossible till somebody did it."

"In other words," he said slowly, "nothing is really impossible?"

"Not after it's been done," I told him, with all the wisdom of twenty-five.

"Then if I told you——"

But he broke off there, and that absent look came into his eyes again. I admit I was worried about his sanity. His uncle was, too. I know, because he told me. But we didn't either of us know what we ought to do.

HE GREW more and more restless through the winter. He went to the public library almost every day and dug into a lot of what would have been called ungodly volumes not so very many years ago. Folklore. Old legends about Atlantis, Antillia, Lemuria. All he could lay his hands on about archeological research in Crete, Egypt, Mexico, Yucatan, a dozen other moldy civilizations. There was nobody to interfere with him. He had money enough, which his old uncle had carefully nursed along for him while he was gone. He didn't have to work. But it did seem a pity for him to throw his life away—as he seemed bent on doing.

And that word "impossible." It seemed to haunt him. He wanted to believe something, or to make me believe something. I got wise to that fact at last. I'd known for a long time that he must have stumbled on some discovery or other, probably remarkable, even epoch-making. He was eating his heart out about it too. He needed, desperately, to let it to the air. But it was a long time before I could get him to talk. And when he did start, it was just by bits and snatches. I had to piece them together myself. But when I did begin to get his drift I was eager enough for him to go on.

"Do you know anything about heredity?" he demanded once.

"Only that most people look more or less like their parents and inherit their debts or their property," I said.

"No, I mean——" He stopped, and it looked as if he was going off into one of those far-away silences again. But he didn't. "No, I mean the principles of heredity that make us what we are. A man doesn't always resemble his close kin. There are throwbacks sometimes. You take a case where two dissimilar breeds have been crossed, white man and Indian, say. No matter how carefully the alien blood is bred out, sooner or later a child will be born into that family who has all the marks of a full-blood Indian. Now such things do happen, not frequently, but often enough to establish a rule. How do *you* explain that?"

"I don't know that I ever tried," I told him. "But I suppose it was because the kid in question wasn't very choosy. Instead of taking his hair from granddaddy Jones and his eyes from grandmother Smith and his short temper from great-great-grandfather Whosit, the cattle rustler, he just grabbed off all the characteristics of old Chief Rain-in-the-Face and let it go at that. I dare say such things happen oftener than we think. Where there is no mixture of races it isn't noticeable, but lots of times you hear people say, 'I declare I don't know who that child takes after, nobody in the family that I ever saw.' But what's the point, O'Farrell?"

"Just this," and his face was very intent and sober. "Suppose someone could inherit *all* his characteristics from just *one* ancestor, with nothing at all from any of the others—what then?"

"Why, then, probably, he'd be a monkey," I grinned. "At that, they're born

with tails sometimes, you know. You see it in the papers. And it probably happens sometimes, too, when it doesn't get into the papers."

"Yes, but"—O'Farrell was dead in earnest now—"but if he inherited everything from just one ancestor, all his characteristics of mind as well as body, then wouldn't he remember *all that that ancestor ever knew?*"

I was dumfounded, and uneasy. But I tried to hide my fears. I wanted to draw him out, if possible, get at the thing that was festering in his mind.

"You mean," I said slowly, feeling my way, "that you would explain in that way the queer feeling we have sometimes that we have lived before, that we can almost remember things which we know we never saw——"

"Exactly!" eagerly. "But if you had inherited *all* your brain from just one ancestor, then you'd remember clearly, wouldn't you? Don't you see that that *could* happen?"

"Oh, yes," I granted carelessly. "It might—once in a thousand years."

"Once in——" He stared at me, his face as white as paper. He looked so sick I ran and got him a drink. But he got over his agitation shortly. His color came back. "But that was only a guess you made," he finished, as if taking comfort in the thought.

"Of course, it was a guess," impatiently. "A guess just like yours."

"No, I'm in earnest," surprizingly.

But he wouldn't say anything more then. It was weeks before I got the rest of it. And even yet I doubt if I ever did get it all.

IT SEEMS that he couldn't sleep that night, out there on the float. That luminous, glamorous moonlight, the swiftly running ebb, all the scents and

sounds and witchery about him wrought him up to a tremendous pitch. He said he just lay there repeating lines about the sea that had stuck in his mind from English Lit., especially from Swinburne and Tennyson—he'd dug in pretty deep, I remembered, that last year at the U. He quoted a lot of it. He said that night, for the first time so far as he was concerned, "The sea moaned round with many voices"—and he understood them all. That for the first time he could actually feel all "the light and sound and darkness of the sea." And at last he found himself repeating that thing of Masfield's:

"Once in a hundred years the lemmings come
Westward, in search of food, over the snow,
Westward, until the salt sea drowns them dumb,
Westward, till all are drowned, those lemmings
go."

And then, he said, altogether without his own volition, he had slipped into the water, and the tide was racing with him out to sea. He wasn't drunk on liquor, I could swear to that myself. A glass too much, maybe, but not drunk. But the night had got him, the night and the ebbing tide and the moon that controlled the tide.

He said he wasn't worried at all. He exerted himself very little. The tide was carrying him. Even when he began to tire he wasn't actually alarmed. When he came in contact with some wooden thing that floated by him he pulled himself aboard without any particular feeling of eagerness or relief. The moon had paled by that time and the sun was not yet up; so he couldn't see much. He could hear a sort of drowsy chittering and squeaking, though, at the other end of the raft he was on, a noise that reminded him of mice. But he didn't investigate. He was tired. And, unbelievable as it sounds, he stretched out on the wet boards and slept.

The sun roused him to what, he assured me solemnly, was to be the most stupendous day of his life, up to that time. He found himself on a raft, all right, though he was sure it hadn't been built for that purpose. It looked more like the side of a heavily timbered house, a house that perhaps had been washed away and broken up in flood-time. It rode low in the sea, and shipped water constantly, enough to keep everything wet. O'Farrell didn't mind that especially, but his companions did.

For he wasn't alone. At the end of the raft farthest from him were clustered somewhat less than fifty little brown-furred animals with small ears and short tails and tiny, white, sharp teeth. They wrinkled their noses at him and made complaining noises and seemed very damp and unhappy. He supposed they were some sort of field mice, though they were a little large for that. They reminded him of prairie-dogs, he said.

He began now to be actively concerned about his own safety. There he was, well out of sight of land, aboard a makeshift raft which the most sanguine couldn't have called seaworthy, with no food unless you counted the field mice which he wasn't hungry enough to do yet, and no clothing but his bathing-trunks. Fortunately the sea was calm. Clumsy as it was, the raft rode levelly, driving as straight ahead as if by rule and compass. And when he looked overside he understood the reason. A current as strong as that strange ebb tide of the night before was sweeping it onward—a current where by rights no current ought to be—a current of purple-blue, transparent water that was less than fifty feet wide.

O'Farrell came cautiously upright in the center of the raft. As far as he could see ahead of him, that dark-colored current cut the gray Atlantic in two. And

on its flood drifted boats of many sizes, of many designs, led, or so it seemed to him, by a stately yacht, white and misty in the distance, her sails all furled.

He simply couldn't believe what he saw. He looked and looked, but the scene remained unchanged—a plain sweep of sunlighted ocean, empty but for that weird, incredible procession.

He was hungry by noon. So were the field mice. They scampered about uneasily, chattering at him, beseeching him with their little bright eyes. He was thoroughly alarmed by this time, finally decided to signal the nearest craft. It was too far away for his voice to carry, but, caught in a splinter of the raft, there was a weather-stained strip of sodden canvas; so he used that to signal with.

The boat just ahead of him put about and drew slowly toward him, fighting that powerful current every foot of the way. O'Farrell said it was the trimmest gasoline launch he ever saw, fitted up with a high-powered engine, but still almost powerless against that inexorable current. Its only occupant was a girl. She threw him a line as she came alongside, and he made it fast to a splintered timber. And then he got the biggest shock of the day.

For the girl suddenly cried out in a voice that was high with ecstasy and amazement and incredulity all at once. She leaped to the raft, ran over to those shy, furry little creatures and went to her knees and held her hands out to them.

"Oh, the dear, dear, funny, timid little things," she cried, a sob in her throat. "And you brought them! You lucky, lucky man! We didn't know we had any of them along."

O'FARRELL said he just stood there, gaping at her, while the little field mice sniffed at her fingers and crept into

her hands. He had felt like a man in a dream ever since he waked, and now he felt more like one than ever. Even the girl was unlike anyone he had ever seen before. She was as tall as he was, very fair, yellow-haired, blue-eyed. But that doesn't mean much. It was her features, he said, the pure Greek lines like those of the old statues, the grace and swing of her perfect body, which he found impossible to describe. Even her white middy blouse and skirt, her white shoes and hose, couldn't keep her from making him think of the Winged Victory. But her voice, her accent, were, incredibly, as truly American as his own.

"Oh, it's wonderful, after all our years of dreams, to see them coming true!" she was murmuring. "I never thought I'd actually *travel* with them. Oh!" her voice rose on a note of purest music. "All our old dreams, changing into reality!"

O'Farrell was stupefied, she was so amazing, so utterly different from anyone he had ever known. And she was plainly so rapt with ecstasy, so absorbed in her happiness, so sure of being in the presence of an understanding and sympathetic listener, that she had thrown all reserve to the winds.

"You know how it begins," her soft voice was almost crooning. "Back in your childhood, when you first begin to remember that other world—when bit by bit you understand the destiny you were born to—when you first realize why it is that you love and long for the sea, though you never saw it in this life—why you yearn for a burning moon in place of the cold, pale moon you know, for the low, yellow stars instead of the far-off points of light you live under, for a sky of gorgeous blue instead of the dull sky up above you——"

She drew a deep, long sigh. The little

furry things had taken complete possession of her now. They were as friendly with her, O'Farrell said, as kittens. It was pretty to watch her with them, or would have been if he hadn't been so completely bewildered by it.

"And you come upon pictures that make you ache with homesickness—you don't know why. Pictures of the sea—and long, smooth beaches of shining sand—and ships of long ago. Pictures of Greece, Crete, Spain, Philistia. And your half-dreams taunt and mock you, till at last, just all in a sudden flash of light, you *know*."

Her voice trailed off into contented silence. O'Farrell made no effort to break it. He couldn't think of a thing to say. And when she spoke again her tone had changed.

"Why, they're hungry!" she cried. "There is no food! Why did you bring no food along? Whatever in the world——"

"I didn't know I was coming," he told her bluntly. "This whole business"—he waved his hand toward the sea, the current, the parade of boats—"is no more than a nightmare to me. Maybe you can explain it?"

She sat back on her heels, staring at him in an amazement that matched his own. Her eyes were enormous in her suddenly pale face. She caught her breath sharply in a sudden rush of emotion, the nature of which he could not have told.

"But this is beyond a miracle," she cried. "If you aren't one of us—if you didn't hear the call—how could you come?"

He told her. She listened intently, nodding her head from time to time, slowly and thoughtfully. She looked squarely at him out of eyes that were the steadiest, the most candid that he had ever seen.

"But this is terrible," she told him

when he had finished. "I don't know what they'd do to you," with a sudden, apprehensive glance at the line of boats ahead. "You can't possibly escape, and if you don't even know where we are going——"

"I don't. It's the most impossible adventure any man ever dreamed about. Can you tell me? Do you know?"

"Oh, yes, I know." She smiled. "I am one of those who were born to know—by inheritance, rather than by learning. All of us," again that gesture toward the boats ahead, "are bound for the same place—to the kingdom of Atlas—the Garden of the Hesperides—the Isles of the Blest——"

She broke off, watching his face, which must, O'Farrell confessed, have seemed a mask of stupidity.

"Can't you even guess?" she cried.

But he could only shake his head.

"Do you mean," she asked him incredulously, "that you know nothing at all of that first great civilization from which all others spread—that land of tall, fair men—for there were giants in those days—which sent its adventurers into so many lands? Did you never hear of Cro-Magnon man, who left his drawings and his bones in the caves of France and Spain? Or the legends of the giants who lived once in the British Isles? Of the Pelasgians, the Cyclops, the Titans of Greece and Asia Minor? Of Hiawatha, who came to teach the savage Iroquois? Of Quetzalcoatl, the Fair God, who came to the Aztecs? Does the tale of the sunken land of Tristram's Lyonesse mean nothing at all to you?"

"Mighty little," O'Farrell admitted.

"Either you're crazy or I am. I've read myths and folklore, of course, and as much of the *Morte d'Arthur* and its kindred 'literature' as they made me swallow. But it never occurred to me that I'd ever

meet up with anybody who *believed* that stuff."

"But it isn't written—what *we* know," the girl said solemnly. "As for those legendary remnants of an ancient history that you mention—why, don't you realize that there never was a myth or a legend yet that did not have some foundation in fact?"

O'Farrell said he couldn't answer her. What with the hot sun on his head, the glare on the water, and no food for almost twenty-four hours, his head was going round and round. Perhaps the girl saw that. Anyhow she came deliberately upright, and the little animals she had been petting clustered around her, running over her feet.

"Did you ever see anyone just like me?" she demanded.

"No," O'Farrell muttered. "No."

"Yet all my people are like me. I don't mean the family I was born into. No. I mean my people"—she waved her hand—"there—in front of us." She looked at him, long and hard. "And you are not one of us. You know none of the things we know. That will be very bad for you, because you can not escape. And yet you might pass for one of us, being fair—and tall—though not quite tall enough. And you brought these"—she pointed to the little creatures at her feet.

"I don't want to see you made a sacrifice," she went on earnestly. "Maybe if I tell you—but first we must get aboard the launch. It isn't wet and sloppy like this thing, and I've plenty of food aboard."

SO THEY made the transfer, field mice and all. The launch was fairly comfortable, well stocked with eatables, cushions, summer blankets. The girl gave O'Farrell a lounging-robe of hers

and a complete man's yachting-outfit which she had worn in a college play. She had always played men's parts in the girls' plays, she said.

He went into the tiny cabin and tried them on. They fitted him—and O'Farrell was six feet tall! But she advised him to save the suit for the day of their "arrival", so he wore the lounging-robe instead.

It must have taken about a week, he reckons, to make that incredible journey. He lay on the deck most of the time, under the awning, trying to figure things out and not succeeding. He had no theory, no answer to the puzzle presented by that girl. She spent the nights in the little cabin, but all day she was outside, always in fresh, plain, white clothes, always as perfectly appointed as if she were actually chiseled of the marble she so resembled. And she was always coolly, impersonally friendly toward O'Farrell. But she showed actual tenderness toward those pets of hers.

She had told him her name the first day. Diana. That was all. It fitted her superbly, he thought.

They were evidently quite off the steamer lanes. They met no craft, sighted no land; till, early one morning, the hazy outlines of lofty hills stood blue against the sky.

"The Isle of Saint Brandan," the girl whispered softly. "Sailors used to sight it, but when they tried to reach it, it was never there."

"Is that where we are going?" O'Farrell wanted to know.

"That is where we are going. For *we* shall reach it—we and the lemmings. We were summoned, as others are summoned—once in a thousand years."

Lemmings! He understood now. Those lines of Masefield's went swimming

through his head again, and he repeated them under his breath:

"Once, it is thought, there was a westward land,
(Now drowned) where there was food for those
starved things,
And memory of the place has burnt its brand
In the little brains of all the lemming kings."

"Yes, it was there—the Greek Isles of the Blest—Odysseus sailed west to find them—and they still are there, only the land between is lost and drowned—lost and drowned as the poor little lemmings are, those who try to go when it is not the appointed time."

"Do you remember the last lines?" O'Farrell asked. "Listen!

"But now the land is drowned, yet still we press
Westward, in search, to death, to nothingness.

"Is that for us?"

"No, not for us. That is——"

And she sat there for a long time, her chin on her hand, watching the cloud-like hills on the far horizon. Yet it must have been by faith alone that she was so sure that the land was there. To O'Farrell it seemed much more like a mirage, a fantasmagoria, a *fata morgana*. The hills changed so, now like a low continuous range, now rearing in tall spire-like peaks, now resembling glaciers, icebergs, or ruined, battlemented castles. And as they drew nearer, the land seemed actually to divide, to break up precisely as a fleet might do, even to advance and recede in strange and complicated evolutions, while over it hung always a wavering mass of rainbow-colored mist.

"Do you wonder now," the girl asked him in a hushed, enraptured voice, "that the sailors used to tell such strange tales of Saint Brandan's Isle—how they sighted its green hillsides and its clear streams, and how it vanished like a mirage whenever they came near it?"

"I can remember one legend about a Portuguese who landed there," O'Farrell answered dryly. "The natives feast-

ed and wined him to the king's own taste. But when he awoke he was adrift alone on the ocean. And when he reached home he found his sweetheart had been dead a hundred years or so. They showed him her tomb, I remember, by her husband's, along with the tombs of her seven daughters and her seven sons. I wouldn't like that."

"That was only a myth," she objected.

"Haven't you said a hundred times that all myths have a foundation in fact?"

"Yes," reluctantly. "And it might have happened with him as it has happened with you. It is a miracle, of course. But miracles can happen—once in a thousand years."

"You mean, I suppose, that the summons—as you call it—comes just once in a thousand years?"

"Yes, that is what I mean."

"And what is to happen to us?"

For the first time, O'Farrell said, he saw trouble in her face. Her eyes, when they met his, were clouded, her fine mouth quivered.

"For myself there can be nothing but good," she answered. "But for you, who come by accident, I don't know. They will not like it. And it lingers in my mind, like some far-off recollection only half remembered, that they can be very cruel, at times."

"In the matter of human sacrifice, perhaps?"

She winced. Her breath came sharply.

"It used to be so," she admitted, unwillingly. "And I suppose they still offer sacrifices to their god of the sea—Poseidon. You know"—gently—"the Mayas of Central America did that too; only, being an inland people, they had to throw their sacrifice into an artificial pool. They had had their messenger, too, just as the Aztecs and the Iroquois had, from Atlantis."

"Atlantis!" But he realized that he wasn't really surprized.

"Atlantis, which was never completely destroyed, which still exists in the Sargasso Sea, a country so completely governed by science that its people can always avoid their enemies, so never have to fight them."

"So that tale Plato told of the Atlanteans attacking Athens is substantially true?"

"Of course. And if you want to live, you must believe as I believe, and seem to remember as I remember. For if you show doubt or ignorance, I am afraid you'll die."

And then, O'Farrell said, she talked to him a long time, carefully going over and elaborating all she had told him—all that he must, for safety's sake, be able to "remember". He had been through so much already, he said, that nothing had the power to astonish him any more. And in spite of the threat of danger in it, this unheard-of adventure began to appeal to his Irish soul. If he could ever get away and tell the world about it—

The girl's voice broke in upon his thoughts.

"You'd better dress now. I imagine our reception will be something gorgeous. Atlantis welcomes visitors from the outside world just once in a thousand years, you know."

HE OBEYED her, as he had got in the habit of doing. When he came out of the cabin again, he noticed for the first time long streamers of drifting seaweed. It grew thicker and thicker as they went along, swirling down the current ahead of them, behind them, beside them. But it did not interfere with them. The current took care of that.

And always the land ahead continued its changes before their eyes, resolved itself

at last into a wide-horned crescent of flat white beaches and tall palaces and towers and fair, green, colorful gardens, against a background of softly folded, mist-en-shrouded hills. The pure beauty of it made them gasp.

The boats were crowded closely together now. O'Farrell could see the occupants of several of them. And they were all very much alike—all tall, all fair, all yellow-haired and blue-eyed, like the girl Diana. And they, like her, were all tremendously excited. Well, O'Farrell was excited too, but not so enthusiastic as the rest.

And then, before O'Farrell's dazed, incredulous eyes, dozens of islets broke away from the tips of the crescent's horns, came swinging through the quiet sea toward the boats. Each of these tiny isles was perfect in itself, seemed to be the very embodiment of some artist's dream of an enchanted land. Many were flower gardens, ablaze with unbelievable color, alive with circling song-birds. One held a lonely palm tree, leaning a little in the southern wind, rooted in a long narrow beach where bits of white coral rolled in the swirling water. Another bore a shrine with a white altar, vine-wreathed and smoking with incense, before which a group of children decked in the goatskins and hoofs and horns of fauns were playing on flute-like pipes made of reeds.

"'Pipes o' Pan'", O'Farrell thought. "'Horns of elfland'—and all the rest of it. The thing's impossible. Thirst and the sun got me on that cursed raft and I'm delirious. Well, it's a pleasant enough way to die."

But even as he told himself that, he says he knew he lied. And,

"Remember the floating gardens of Mexico," the girl murmured, very low. "No doubt they were copied from these."

The boats were drawn into a line now, a line that curved in the middle, a crescent to match that other crescent of the shore. And the islets swept together in a circle about them, formed an atoll, leaving the boats in a still lagoon. The current which had brought them had spent itself, dissolved. Another force had swept the islets into place, was moving the boats toward the land. And, as a climax to all the rest, the mists which had hung above the hills swept downward and outward into a vast, circular curtain, completely blotting out all the world outside.

"Now, in the name of all the pagan gods at once!" muttered O'Farrell to the girl beside him. "Do these people know how to control the elements too?"

The girl Diana smiled serenely.

"Atlantis is very old and very wise," she told him quietly. "And its people have known neither war nor invasion nor famine nor pestilence for eleven thousand years. So, why shouldn't they have learned all that man can know in this world?"

The boats swept nearer and nearer toward the shore, with constantly diminishing speed. The sheer beauty and perfection of the scene, O'Farrell said, struck him dumb. The broad white beach, the steps and balconies of the tall white buildings, the terraces of the green hills—Plato's mounds, O'Farrell recognized—swarmed with tall, fair people. The men were garbed in tunics and kirtles, white in color, sandals and greaves of yellow leather, and great tall head-dresses ornamented with yellow feathers set in a fanwise spread from left to right. The women were bareheaded except for jeweled fillets, and wore soft flowing robes of every imaginable tint. And in the foreground, extending all along the beach, was a chorus of young men and maidens, singing. The sound of their

voices surpassed anything O'Farrell had ever heard.

But the girl Diana put out a hand and touched him on the arm. She was trembling violently, and when he turned to look at her, he saw that her face was as white as chalk.

"That song," she whispered in a shak- ing voice. "I can understand every word of it—and you, of course, nothing at all!"

"Not one word," he said.

"Then—then——" Her tormented eyes were pleading. "Oh, I never thought once about the language! I never dreamed that I'd understand it! I had never heard it in the world outside, so how could I know? But—don't you see?—you must be careful. You must say that the ancestor from whom you inherit left Atlantis in the earliest times. They were invaded from the mainland once—the language must have altered——"

O'Farrell shook his head slowly. He felt, he said, as the "hero" of an old Greek tragedy must have felt—like one caught in a net and dragged, compellingly, inexorably, toward some unknown and unwelcome end. His had been a passive part from the beginning. He was utterly helpless, and knew it. He had no idea what might be coming, but whatever it was he must take it with as much fortitude as he was able.

"What is the use of lying?" he whispered back. "I'll never be able to get by with it. They'd better know in the beginning——"

"No, no, no!" She was tugging at his arm with both hands now. "Promise me you'll do as I tell you. Promise me!"

"All right," he assented, "but I'm afraid it won't help much. I know so little—Plato's writings—what I can remember of them—and what you've told

me. They'll soon know I'm a fraud——"

"No!" she cried in a vehement whisper. "No! They shan't!"

THE boats touched land. O'Farrell and the girl got ashore somehow. The lemmings scampered after them, were snatched up and petted by a hundred hands. And then the chorus of voices and of strings rose to an exultant, triumphant pæan of joy and praise. The crowd pressed close. The whole scene became utterly unreal and dream-like. A perfect babble of incomprehensible words assailed O'Farrell's ears. He could not have made himself heard if he had wanted to. A group of old men, dressed in long yellow robes embroidered with curious, mystical designs, and miter-like head-dresses of gold, appeared suddenly in front of him. They were, he surmised, priests of the Atlantean religion. The foremost, doubtless the high priest, waved a veritable caduceus over O'Farrell's and the girl's heads in a gesture of consecration. Then they passed on, were hidden by the crowd.

With a little cry the girl Diana broke away and ran toward one of the newcomers, who was looking at her with a wild, delighted incredulity. It was a man who wore the uniform of a colonel of English infantry, with a string of ribbons across his breast. He looked to be nearing fifty, lean and tall and weary. He walked with a limp. His left arm was stiff. And a long scar, as if from a bayonet cut, ran down his left cheek. The girl had gone straight into his arms.

The throng divided. Great swaying elephants, caparisoned in yellow silk, and bearing howdahs of white ivory, made a lane for the newcomers. An elderly man wearing priestly garments emerged from the crowd and pressed a sort of diadem set with flashing stones down upon

O'Farrell's head. Metal pads fitted firmly behind O'Farrell's ears, and on the instant, though the words of the singers, the babble around him still sounded outlandish and strange, it all became intelligible to him.

"I am Otar," the old man said, smiling at O'Farrell's look of incredulity, "of the healing branch of the priesthood. And this instrument is a mechanical interpreter of tongues. We find it useful in helping newcomers to adjust themselves for the first few days. So today we are all wearing them in one shape or another." For a moment he studied O'Farrell through his shrewd, keen eyes. "And who was your honored Atlantean ancestor, my son? Do not hesitate to use your native tongue. Whatever you say, I shall be able to understand." And he touched his head-dress significantly.

O'Farrell braced himself. It was, he realized, now or never.

"My ancestor left Atlantis very young," he improvised with the facility of desperation. "Atlantis had been invaded, and he remembered little of it but the misery and oppression his people suffered at the hands of their conquerors. He had dreams of human sacrifice and games that ran with blood. He went as armor-bearer with an expedition to the mainland to make war upon a city afterward known as Athens. He was captured by these early Athenians and so never returned to Atlantis."

"Ah, that is extremely interesting!" exclaimed Otar, his blue eyes bright with interest. "And what was that armor-bearer's name?"

"His name was Gadir." O'Farrell pronounced firmly the only Atlantean name which Plato knew. After all, it was something to claim descent from the man for whom the Pillars of Herakles—the Rock of Gibraltar—had been named!

"Then you shall be called Gadir among us—Gadir, the bringer of the sacred lemmings. Your old name," with a slight gesture of his hand as if flicking from him a grain of dust, "your old name will be forgotten. Let me have your left wrist, if you please."

O'Farrell obeyed. How could he do otherwise? But he watched with some trepidation while the priest-physician drew what looked like a capsule of glass from a pocket and held it against O'Farrell's wrist. He felt but the slightest prickle. Then the old priest pocketed the glass again.

"A matter of precaution," he explained. "The outside world is, we know, a place of hideous suffering and disease. But now—you will not believe me, since your ancestor left us before our great discoveries were made—but now you will never know a moment's illness again."

And before O'Farrell had time to thank him he had bowed ceremoniously and vanished in the crowd.

Others, many others, came up and spoke to O'Farrell now, briefly or at length, making him welcome, praising him for the bringers of good fortune—the lemmings—which he had brought, asking him eager questions of the outside world, of which they had had no news for a thousand years. But now a procession was forming. O'Farrell was led to a kneeling elephant, helped into the gorgeous howdah. The girl Diana and the English colonel followed. The elephant lurched to its feet and they were off.

Before them paced at least two score of elephants. As many more were behind them. Only the newcomers and the body of priests rode. The rest of the people danced. Danced, literally, to an almost delirious music, in what seemed to be a

complete abandon of joy. Escorted by the whirling figures, they turned into a wide, white-paved avenue. Towering buildings stood on either side, flush with the pavement. But there were no people at the windows or on the balconies. Everyone, plainly, was in the street.

THE girl Diana leaned forward from her seat between O'Farrell and the Englishman. Her eyes were rapt, ecstatic.

"It's like the rarest sorcery," she sighed. "If one hadn't been prepared for it so long, it would be unbelievable."

"A land so self-contained," the Englishman mused, "that it has no need of the rest of the world; so versed in the arts of concealment that it need not fear the world; so wise, so happy that it does not envy the world—yes, it is, as you say, unbelievable."

The girl looked shyly at O'Farrell.

"Colonel Carter's ancestor who bequeathed him his memories was the father of the ancestor who gave me mine," she said simply. "We knew each other instantly."

"And," interposed the Englishman, before O'Farrell could speak, "since she can not remember her father, and since my daughter—an only child—was killed in an air raid over London nineteen years ago, we have agreed to be as father and daughter. It is very good of her," he added, gently.

"It's more than I can quite take in," O'Farrell ventured dazedly. His eyes were on that beautiful, gracious street, on the lumbering elephants ahead, on the beautiful, rejoicing people who whirled and danced. His ears were hypnotized by a music of voices, of pipes, of strings, of horns, such as surely the world outside had never known. "There's something in the air that—lifts you up," he added.

The Englishman laughed gently.

"Not in the air, my lad, but in that ichor in your blood-stream," he amended. "Crock that I am, it has made me feel different too. No more pain—no more disease. No death till the heart simply wears out and stops its work—or is stopped by violence. Ah, but one must wish he could tell the world about it."

"The world wouldn't believe," the girl Diana said. "Or if it did, it would want to rob us of our secrets and then, most likely, destroy us."

The Englishman sighed.

"You are probably right, my dear." He turned to O'Farrell again. "You and my new daughter are the only Americans here. I am the only Englishman. There are two Irishmen, a Welshman, and a Scandinavian. The rest, as one might expect, are from the rim of the Mediterranean—from Egypt, Spain, France, Crete, Greece, Italy, Asia Minor—where Atlanteans settled long ago. There were eleven Greeks who came together on that yacht. But then, the old Greeks were certainly direct descendants."

Again his keen blue eyes rested in what seemed a trace of puzzlement on O'Farrell's face.

"And you brought the lemmings. That was a fine thing, certainly."

"More an accident than anything else," O'Farrell told him. "I stumbled on them, on the way. It was Diana who fed and cared for them. Thank her, not me."

A faint pucker grew between the Englishman's fine brows. The girl gave O'Farrell a warning look.

"He was washed off his own—craft," she hastened to explain. "I was lucky enough to be able to pick them up. We came on together, you know."

"Yes, I know. Poor little beasts," returning to the lemmings. "To think of

remembering for more than eleven thousand years! Tiny, tiny brains to nourish faith so long. Because their ancestors made annual migrations, like the wild geese and the ducks and the ill-fated passenger pigeons, they still try it 'once in a hundred years.' If only they knew that it is only once in a thousand!"

"It puts our own faith to shame," the girl said.

"And yet inherited memories are probably more common than we think. Ours are entire. But consider the broken ones. And there are so many! One man may be lucky enough to be born with the genius of a great poet of centuries ago, and 'gain much fame thereby'. Another gets enough to put him in a madhouse—dreaming that he is King Solomon or Napoleon Bonaparte. Oh, I speak feelingly on the subject! I raved of my Atlantean memories so much in that French hospital back in 1918 that they thought I was mad. If I had not been lucky in my connections, and known to be greatly interested in ancient civilizations, I should be in a straitjacket now, I dare say. As for those other poor chaps——" He made a quick gesture with his uninjured hand. "Well, we are lucky. Let us be thankful."

He fell into a brooding silence. O'Farrell had no wish to break it. Nor did he dare to ask where they were going. Doubtless he was expected to know.

They paced slowly down the street. A great arch presently confronted them. The elephants passed through into a narrow, shadowy enclosure, began the descent of an ever winding, ever darkening road. It must lead to a temple, O'Farrell surmised. All the old races had worshipped in caves, he knew, as witness the Cretan labyrinth. He hoped, with an inward shudder, that there would be no sacrifices.

THEY went a long way. Where the light came from he could not tell, but though they must have penetrated deeply into the earth, the darkness never became complete. Always they could see the elephant ahead of them, the howdah swaying, ghost-like, on its back, till suddenly it knelt, then lurched to its feet again, then disappeared.

Their own elephant knelt. Shadowy forms helped them to alight, lowered voices bade them follow. So they climbed a high stairway of broad, shallow steps, fairly well lighted though they could not tell from what source, to a narrow doorway. Still following their conductors, they went through.

They came out into an enormous balcony, set with tables and benches. Other balconies were above this, still others beneath, sweeping in immense circles above the huge arena below.

The central feature of this arena was a high altar smoking with incense. Its white marble sides were painted with beautifully executed designs—the swastika; the Cretan double ax; Atlas with the sky on his shoulders; a winged horse, soaring; Medusa's head; the lemmings; Poseidon riding a storm at sea; the bucranium—the head of the sacrificial bull—with fillets; the minotaur.

Above it all arched a dome of the color of a summer sky at midnight. The sweeping zodiac with its twelve signs, the twelve planets which the Atlanteans, and—later—the Aztecs had known, blazed in this artificial heaven, giving light.

The girl Diana touched his arm, drew his attention from the unparalleled grandeur of that gorgeous ceiling to his more immediate surroundings. He followed her and the Englishman to one of the tables and sat down. He saw that the balcony was filled, though not overcrowded. Filled too were such portions

of the other balconies as he could see. All about him was a hushed murmur of conversation.

Boys and girls came in presently, bearing trays of food and wine which they placed upon the tables. These young people, O'Farrell decided, were neither slaves nor servants. They had all the air of hosts looking after the comfort of honored guests. Indeed, he realized suddenly that he had not yet seen anyone who seemed to be a servitor, nor any officials other than the priests. And he found the food, the drinks, though utterly unfamiliar to him, to be extraordinarily good.

Into the arena below filed the chorus which had welcomed them on the beach. Their musicians were with them—with harps of various shapes, though none too large to carry, pipes, small horns, odd-shaped lutes, a drum. A vast wave of melody rolled up to the silent people.

Dancers swept in, a medley, unearthly, beautiful yet somehow terrible, an awful unmasking of the ancient pageantry of the new-made earth. Goat-shepherd Pan with his fauns and satyrs, who hunted animals and dressed like them. A god-like, golden Prometheus, who brought down a flaming torch from the sky. The first horse-tamers, the centaurs. Nymphs and dryads decked with leaves, and with flowers in their hair. Warriors in helmets and armor. At last, the thinkers, priests of Atlantis in their yellow robes.

In turn they wove an intricate pattern of a myriad figures, fantastic yet weirdly beautiful. And suddenly O'Farrell began to understand. The music, the chanting, the dance, were all parts of a single symbolism. The age-old history of Atlantis was being enacted before him.

There was shown the slow, measured development of a primitive people, the

constant outflow of the more restless to neighboring lands of the north, south, east and west; recurring earthquakes and human as well as animal sacrifices to placate the gods; invasion by an alien people and exile of many of the original race; finally the great ocean wave which broke up and almost destroyed the kingdom.

O'Farrell had sat spellbound. He had forgotten himself, his predicament, his danger. It was as if the panorama of thirty thousand years had been unrolled before him.

But now the scene changed. Dancers, chorus and music-makers drew aside, became a background for the procession which now entered the arena. These were the older priests in their lavishly embroidered, yellow robes and mitered head-gear, bearing scepter-like wands of gold; the high priest, who had exchanged his caduceus for a golden double-ax; half-naked youths, each of whom led in a filleted, snow-white bull; young girls in long, white robes and chaplets of white flowers.

"The sacrifice!" O'Farrell exclaimed under his breath, and felt the blood curdle around his heart.

"Oh, no," the Englishman whispered. "Watch!"

And the girl Diana gave him another look of warning and entreaty.

And then O'Farrell saw enacted, down there in that huge arena, a thing quite new and modern and yet as old as the oldest ritual of the ancient cult of the bull. One by one the beautiful long-horned bulls were released. One by one the young men leaped at them, seized their polished horns, and, in spite of the bulls' frantic struggles, pinned them to the earth. Each bull received a mock blow from the golden double-ax in the high priest's hand, was led away.

Then the young priestesses marched in a demure procession around the altar, and threw incense by handfuls upon the smoking fire, chanting their vows meanwhile to serve Atlantis' altar-fires for a year-long term of chastity and prayer.

O'FARRELL drew a deep breath of relief. No bloodshed there! But the original ceremony from which this one was directly descended—ah, that, certainly, had literally run with blood!

The high priest raised his hand.

"Children of the sun and of Atlantis," he cried. "You know why we are gathered here. You know that when the gods were wroth with us, when the earth split and the waters rose and the heavens poured fire upon us, even then the more merciful of our gods raised up leaders among us to save the remnants of our people and our land. They—these merciful ones—taught us how to set our broken isles adrift, how to bring them together, how to separate them again. They taught us how to control the mists of the air and the currents of the sea, how to remain for ever invisible to our enemies. And last, because they knew that every race must have new blood in order to survive, they taught us how to summon our own from the outside world—once in a thousand years!"

A very old man, that high priest. He took a step forward now, and lifted his arms high.

"We welcome you as our own, those of you who have come today from the far-flung parts of the earth. Ours is a happy land where every man works, and every man plays, and every man rests, eats, sleeps according to his need, and every woman the same. Forget, then, violence, injustice, ugliness, the cold of frost, the burning heat of the sun. There are none of those things here.

"And you know, too, you who are descended from Atlas and Poseidon, that the little ones, the lemmings, they who once gnawed loose the bonds of Poseidon's sea horses and set them free, made pilgrimages to our old land each year in the long ago. But when Poseidon in his anger at our disobedience and iniquities had overwhelmed the land which stood between, they could no longer reach us. Yet they tried, at certain times, and were swallowed up and lost."

His voice, which had sunk to a mournful cadence, suddenly ceased. He spread his hands. And, as if by magic, out from behind the smoking altar scampered the lemmings, chattering, running this way and that.

Applause burst from the people, wild, deafening, and lasting long. But at last the high priest raised his hand, and silence fell. His voice came again, triumphant now.

"These did not die! The mighty Poseidon sent them to us, a sign of his favor, of his forgiveness, of his promise to preserve us—for another thousand years! And he chose as his instruments a youth and a maiden who came together. Let them, therefore, descend and stand before me, that all Atlantis may behold and honor those whom our father Poseidon has pointed out as his most favored children."

Dazed and thunderstruck, O'Farrell felt the girl Diana's hand take his. It was as cold as ice. But she did not speak. Together they threaded their way among the tables, down the stair, along a shadowy passage, through a door. At last they were in the center of the arena, a hand of the high priest rested on each head.

"All Atlantis thanks you," the old man finished simply.

"Ah, it was nothing to be thanked

for," Diana said, a catch in her voice. "It was a duty, an obligation, and a pleasure beyond all telling. *We loved to do it.*"

"And," O'Farrell added, feeling it incumbent upon him to say something and not knowing what to say, "we hope, now that they are here, that they will grow in numbers year by year, so you will never be without them again."

And then it seemed to him that the atmosphere was charged with something dreadful, as if the sky had cracked, or the earth opened, or the sea forsook its bed. Silence. Like the dead weight of a nightmare, like the awful certainty of death.

At last the high priest's voice came in a strangled whisper—a whisper that yet seemed to reverberate to the remotest corner under that blazing dome.

"*Who are you?*" he demanded. "How did you come here if you do not know—is it indeed possible you do not remember?—that the lemmings, like the wild geese and the salmon and so many other creatures, must go north in the spring to breed?"

And then O'Farrell knew that he was done.

"Deceit, imposture, falsehood," came the inexorable voice of the high priest. "These things have always borne the brand of treason, and treason is punishable by death." His voice rose to a lamentable cry. "I am accursed, that the duty has devolved upon me to condemn a man to death!"

"No!" the girl cried in a desperate voice. "No! He had no intention to deceive. It was I who made him do that. I did not know—my memories were too old to tell me—that now you worship only the more merciful of the Atlantean gods. My ancestor went with Quetzalcoatl to America. And at that time At-

lantean worship was a cruel and bloody thing!"

"How did he come?"

"By accident only. The current caught him—him and the lemmings. He could not help but come. And he shall not die! I appeal to the people!" Her voice rose to a scream. "He shall not die!"

"He shall not die!" It was the Englishman. He was standing, his right arm thrown upward, palm out, in the universal gesture of friendship, peace.

And "He shall not die!" came in shouts from this section and that as the newcomers leaped to their feet. O'Farrell could distinguish them by their dress, but not for long. For in a moment they were hidden by the up-surg-ing multitude.

"He shall not die!" shouted Atlantis with one voice. "He brought us the lemmings! He shall not die!"

"The lemmings, and good fortune with them for a thousand years," the girl Diana cried. "The people have spoken. He shall go in peace."

"The people have spoken," assented the high priest. "There shall be no blood on my hands tonight. Shall he remain or shall he depart? It is for him to choose."

But O'Farrell stood still, too overwhelmed with bewilderment and uncertainty to speak. The shocks had been too many and too close together. He was at that moment incapable of choice.

The girl looked at him, long and hard. A queer little smile rested on her lips for a moment. She made a slight, despairing movement with her hands. At last she spoke.

"He would never be happy with us. Let him go."

They put him in her boat, O'Farrell said. It was night then, but the sky was clear and the moon and the stars hung low. They brought him food and presents of all sorts, and said many kind

things to him. They didn't want him to go. That was plain. But he was still too numbed to combat the girl's decision—she had guided him so long. He let her guide him now. So—he went.

For a little while he could see the land behind him. But presently it seemed to break up, to be floating in fragments of beauty on the bosom of the sea, at last to be no more than a mist, a mirage, a dream of faery. . . .

BUT," I demanded then, incredulously, "why didn't you come home? You were gone three years or more. And this adventure, you say, took up hardly more than a week!"

"And at that I was luckier than the Portuguese who spent one night there and took a hundred years to get back home," O'Farrell answered, with a strange smile. "But my further adventures were commonplace enough. The Atlanteans had done all they could for me, but they couldn't give me gasoline. So when the stock in the boat gave out, which was soon, I drifted. A tramp picked me up, a privately owned trading-vessel with no wireless. She was bound for the South Pacific, and I had to go, willy-nilly—around the Horn—stopping to trade first one place and another—till we came to the very jumping-off place of the world, it seemed to me. And that was a plague-stricken place—typhus, the mate said it was. He and two sailors and I were left there. We were on shore when the captain found out about the epidemic, and he simply lifted anchor and left us—in a blue funk, I suppose.

"But it's plain he spread the news of the sickness, for there wasn't a boat that

came near us for—well, something like two years, I imagine. You lose track of time out there—and," wearily, "you have lots of time to think."

"Well?" I said, for I knew there must be something more.

"Oh, I came home. But I had proof while I was there that I hadn't dreamed about—Atlantis. It was true. For that shot in the arm the priest gave me did what he said it would. At least two-thirds of the natives died of that plague. The mate and the two sailors died—horribly. But I stayed right with them and did all I could for them and wasn't sick a day. That's proof, I think. And it's quite likely that I'll live to be a hundred or more—just as that Portuguese did—whether I want to or not."

"And now you wish you had stayed when you had the chance, or that you could go back?"

I don't know why, but I was quite certain of his answer before he spoke.

"Oh, yes." He sat still a long time, twisting his pipe between his fingers. "I want to go back. But I can't. That current won't flow again for another thousand years. I was a fool, a poor, blind fool. It's hell, you know, just plain hell—" His head drooped forward a little, hopelessly. "It's hell to love a woman—and not have sense enough to find it out—till after you have lost her—for ever."

And after a while he repeated in a voice of indescribable weariness and bitterness:

"Perhaps, long since, there was a land beyond,
Westward from death, some city, some calm place,
Where one could taste God's quiet and be fond
With the little beauty of a human face;

"But now the land is drowned, yet still we press
Westward, in search, to death, to nothingness."

