

# Weird Tales

*The Unique Magazine*



## *The* **CITY of GLASS**

*By*  
JOEL MARTIN NICHOLS JR.

MARCH 1927

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# Weird Tales

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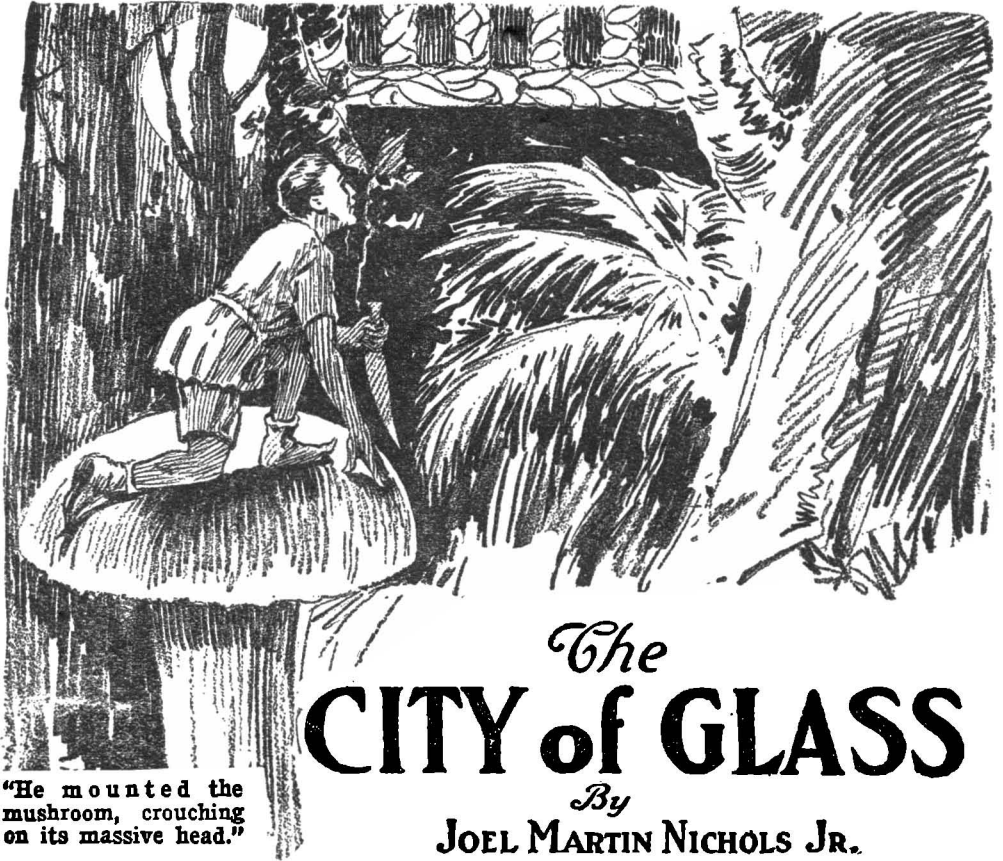
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"He mounted the mushroom, crouching on its massive head."

# *The* **CITY of GLASS**

*By*  
**JOEL MARTIN NICHOLS JR.**

**B**ECAUSE I have written some for publication, Professor Horace Lorne has asked me to set down in narrative form the story of our journey into the Atlantean country and how we stumbled on Klifha, the crystal city, and the strange things which befell us there. I have here at my side his voluminous notes covering the scientific aspects of our adventure, and on these as a framework I shall weave the tale.

In the plateau country which lies to the west and south of Ouargla on the Sahara route to In-Salah and Timbuktu there is a point high in the hills called Djerija by the Arabs, where, standing under the sun of noonday, one could see far to the south, riding high on the billowing sands, a great and shining city. Once

there was a splendid glistening castle there, its lofty keep and topless turrets lost in the blue; and a wonderful, shining pile, half mosque, half cathedral, of an architecture familiar to no man who ever trod the route from In-Salah to Ouargla. In certain seasons when the sun was right one might see broad gardens with splashing fountains, and palm-banked avenues with small, jewel-like houses, but these came and went, visible only to the telescopic eyes of the Arabs gaged to the endless Sahara distances.

By night, too, there was an odd, bluish glow over the spot where the mirage had been by day, and often the In-Salah caravans reported huge flaming meteors plunging earthward into the sapphire glow. And once a

lone camel-driver came flogging his beast into Ouargla shouting that the day of judgment was at hand and Allah had come for his faithful. He had seen over the mirage city a flash of lightning and heard the roar of thunder. Now there are some cities in the Sahara where it rains occasionally, say on an average of once in twelve years, but south of Ouargla it has not rained in the memory of living man, nor is there any account of rain handed down in the folk-lore of the people. And yet each August when the summer sirocco blew up out of that trackless eastern waste of sand wherein moves no living thing, there were those of keen nostrils in Ouargla who said they had caught in that searing breath sweetly sickish odors as of crushed lilies and rotting fruits.

All this had come to the ears of Professor Lorne. He was at that time pottering about Shott el Jerid, the salt swamps south of Tunis, working on the Borchardt theory that the lost Atlantis had once been located there. With him was his daughter, Constance, and her betrothed, Colin Penfield. I came into the story when I ran across them in a Tunis hotel and being hot for adventure begged the professor to take me with him on the expedition he was then planning. As I was something of a topographer, having served in that capacity with both the American and French armies during the war, he was glad to take me on.

I had heard of the Ouargla mirage. Is there anyone who ever set foot on the shores of North Africa who hasn't? But I confess that when he had revealed his project to me in full I was a little cold. It was too fantastic. It seems he was a believer in the theory that a mirage is the reflection of some far-distant object. Therefore, he reasoned, if there were such a mirage to be seen from Djerija, then there must be some-

where down in the desert a great mysterious city of which we knew nothing. With an instrument which he had recently invented he claimed he could, by sighting on the mirage, obtain the latitude and longitude of the lost city.

I came to realize then that he believed the mirage city not only existed but that it was the lost Atlantis of which he had already found traces in Shott el Jerid below Tunis.

"Plato's description has misled modern scientists concerning the location of Atlantis," said he. "We locate it beyond Gibraltar, which we believe to be the Pillar of Hercules, but as a matter of fact these are two distinct points separated by hundreds of miles. The real Pillar of Hercules, as known by the ancients, was located far east and south of Syrtis Major in the vicinity of Ahaggar Massif, to which Ptolemy refers in *Mons Talae*. Atlantis sank to an unknown depth in 1250 B. C. during a terrific terrestrial upheaval which, according to Diodorous, the Greek historian, swept the tectonic area lying between Teneriffe and Sicily. But the inhabitants, warned of the impending catastrophe, fled inland and disappeared in the desert. I have no doubt, now, that this great city which we see mirrored in the skies was built by them. Its remarkable state of preservation, as evidenced by the mirage, is probably due to the extreme dryness of the desert atmosphere."

"But the palm trees and the odors they tell about," put in Constance Lorne; "how could they come out of a desert waste?"

"The odors are imagination," he replied, "and none but the Arabs have seen the palms. They are probably mistaken. And anyway, what's to prevent our believing that there may not be some great oasis there?"

The upshot of it was that we all went down to Djerija. There in the

barren hills the professor set up his instrument and got his angles of refraction, and then we went back to Tunis, where it took the whole winter to figure out the problem. We then returned to Ouargla, which was to be the jumping-off place of the expedition. We were delayed for a time there because the rumor got around, I know not how, that we were going down into the desert seeking the ghostly city which was mirrored in the hills around Djerija. The Arabs believed no good could come of such a quest, and so it was only with absurdly large offers of reward that we finally prevailed upon some of them to go. Even then they demanded their pay in advance, the reason for which we were soon to learn, for on the sixteenth night out, they stole away and left us without a word of warning and without so much as a knife with which to defend ourselves. It was their plan that we should perish in the desert, leaving none to gainsay their report that we had been attacked and killed by a roving band of brigands.

"I think," said the professor, examining his pocket map after we had held our first council together on discovering our plight, "that we may be nearer our goal than we know. That is perhaps the reason why those blackguards left us so surreptitiously. Now those table-lands off to the south—my map shows nothing of that sort, which plainly indicates that those who made it did not know what they were talking about. I think if we pushed forward and climbed into those hills we might see something on the other side which would be of interest to us."

"Have you not noticed, Father," put in Constance, "that there is a distinct odor here—a sweet, sickish smell when the wind sweeps up out of the south?"

"I've noticed it," said I. "I've smelled it for two days now and it

seems to be getting stronger. Didn't say anything about it because I thought it might be imagination."

Professor Lorne sniffed. "By Jove, I believe you're right. It does seem as though there is a distinct odor on the wind. Not unlike moldy new-mown hay, or perhaps rotting fruits."

"That's what they said back in Ouargla—crushed lilies or rotting fruits," put in Penfield.

WE STARTED out together toward the hills, Penfield and I in the lead leaving the professor and Constance plodding on behind. Ordinarily Penfield and I more or less avoided each other. I may as well admit here that I had never liked him very well even from the first. We were, in fact, just about opposites in everything, both physically and mentally—and I daresay spiritually also, though I have no idea as to what stand he took on those matters. He was short and thickset and dark, whereas I am tall and broad and light; he was gloomy, sometimes surly and always serious, whereas I am inclined to be somewhat of a happy, devil-may-care and improvident nature. In age he was thirty-five; I was five years younger. Looking back, I think he must have been neurotic, which would perhaps explain why his reason crumpled so quickly under the assaults which the subsequent events were to make upon it. But I know there must have been good stuff in him, otherwise he would not have been loved by such a woman as Constance Lorne. In fact that was the one point upon which I envied him; though I now deny emphatically, in view of what followed between him and me, that I had ever wished him anything but well so far as she was concerned.

Two hours of steady plodding under that broiling sun brought us to the first of the hills, and a half-hour

of scrambling saw us on the flat summit.

"There is a distinct difference in the formation of the terrain from here south," said the professor when we had regained our breath and wiped our eyes clear of the flood of perspiration. "But so far as I can see, these hills go on and on into the south without hint of human habitation or sign of water."

"We have enough in our canteens to last about two days," said I. "And after that——"

Penfield suddenly motioned us to be silent. "Don't move," he cautioned. "There's something, somebody, crouching down there behind one of those rocks. It looks like a man—and yet—but keep on talking."

We continued our conversation then until Penfield suddenly reached down to his feet and picked up a stone, signing us to do likewise. Turning with my missile ready to hand I saw a strange figure climbing up the hillside, his arm, with hand open, held up in what was apparently intended as a sign of reassurance.

It was, so far as I could see now, a human being, apparently a man well advanced in years, to judge from the smallness of his bowed figure. But it was his clothing which at once awakened my amazement. The morning sun was by this time half-way toward the zenith; the heat was already almost beyond endurance, and yet this newcomer was swathed from head to foot in a heavy garment, apparently a kind of fur unfamiliar to me.

"*Bonjour, messieurs,*" he called out as he drew nearer. "*Vous n'avez rien à craindre; je viens comme ami.*"

"He thinks we're French," said I to Penfield, who, I knew, did not understand that tongue.

"Ah, but I am mistaken," called the little man, now in English, but

an English of a peculiar metallic intonation which I had never heard before. "You are not French but English—or possibly Americans."

"Americans," I volunteered. "And who may you be, pray?"

"Call me Azor," he replied, now drawing near and surveying all of us, particularly Constance, with eyes which were full of a curiosity scarcely less than our own. "Azor of the land to the south."

"Then," we all cried out together, "there is a habitable land not far from here?"

"Only the journey of a day," he returned. "You wish to go there?"

"We wish to be safely out of here," put in Penfield. "Our wretched Arabs ran away from us during the night."

He nodded his head sagely. "Ah, yes, the Arabs. They have a great fear of this country—and rightly so."

Meanwhile I had been examining his face. It seemed to me there was something vaguely unhealthy about it which belied the vigor of his movements. To begin with, it was bloodless, a sickly white with none of the yellow or brown tint which is inevitable to the men of the desert whatever their age or race. At a distance the flesh appeared to be smooth, yet it gave the impression of being flabbily unsound, and on his drawing nearer I saw that it was furrowed with a million tiny wrinkles. The eyes were dark blue, deeply set, almost cavernous and burning with a feverish fire which set at naught the calm, slow dignity of the gesticulations with which he embellished his remarks. What struck me as most strange of all, however, was the lack of moisture upon his brow. In that unseasonable clothing, after that tussle up the slope, he should have been literally wringing with sweat as we were, and yet, so far as

I could see, there was not a solitary drop on him!

And thus, as we talked, a strange thing happened. I began to have an unaccountable fit of drowsiness—a peculiar heavy feeling about the eyes and an almost overwhelming desire to sit down. Glancing over at Constance Lorne I saw her rub her eyes and yawn, and then an instant later she sank slowly toward the earth. Oddly enough, this strange behavior astounded me not at all, and perhaps I should have passed off in a like manner had I not glanced down to Azor's hand and saw there for the first time a small reddish bulb which he was squeezing between his fingers. From the mouth of it there issued a colorless vapor which disappeared immediately in the air. Then in a flash I realized what was happening.

"We're being drugged," I shouted. "It's something in that devil's hand!"

I made a lunge at him, but somehow my limbs seemed to have grown suddenly leaden and dragged me slowly to earth while the sun and the heavens and the hills above me swirled gradually around and then sank into deep darkness.

**I** AWOKE to find myself between warm sheets on a soft bed in a great chamber with a high, domelike ceiling. For a time my eyes wandered about, taking in with bewilderment the sumptuous furnishings—the thick rugs on the floor, the huge overstuffed chairs, the plump be-pillowed divan in the far corner. At the head of my bed was a small table, on the smoothly polished surface of which stood a huge bowl of fruit—oranges, pears, grapes, dates and bananas of a size and color I had never seen before. The air was sultry and heavy with odors sweet almost to the point of nausea. Pulling myself out of bed, I found my feet sinking into the thick carpets as in

dense woodland moss. The room, as I then noticed, had no windows, the soft glowing light that suffused it being let in from the ceiling, which I now recognized as translucent glass. From the ceiling my eyes wandered back to the walls and thence to the floor, and even these, as I could see now, were of an opaque glass. Indeed, there was scarcely an object in the room which was not of the same smooth material; even the frame of the bed, the table, and such parts of the furniture as were not covered with thick padding. Only the rugs, the hangings, and the bedding were of other material, and these were of a texture I did not recognize.

Made suddenly aware of a tremendous appetite, I bit into one of the huge peaches, finding it of a super-sweetness. Entranced at first by its flavor, I proceeded to devour it with great gusto, but before I was more than half-way through, the sickly sweetness of it suddenly palled on me and I was obliged to throw it aside. Then I tried one of the oranges, hoping for something tart; its taste, differing from the peach, pleased me at first, but pleasure soon passed to surfeit and surfeit quickly to nausea.

Suddenly through the steamy sultriness of the atmosphere there came to me an overwhelming desire to breathe the cool, clear air of the great out-of-doors. There was something depressing, almost loathsome here. A window to be opened—no, there were none. The door, then; I saw its outline at the farther end of the room. I tried the curiously fashioned glass knob, but it was evidently fastened from the outside and yielded not a tremor to my irritated pull.

I walked back to my bedside, noting for the first time, then, that on the small table near its head there was a button not unlike the electric push-buttons familiar in my own country. I pushed it and waited.



Presently the door opened and Azor appeared, followed by three others, obviously servants, and yet like himself in that they gave the impression of being at once young and yet very old. On their arms they carried several garments apparently intended for me. Azor had now cast aside his furlike apparel and had clothed himself in a loosely hung tunic of velvet or thickly woven silk.

"What's the game?" I demanded.

He did not answer, and I saw that he was puzzled by my slang expression.

"Why have we been kidnapped in this high-handed manner?" I asked, assuming an air of offended dignity which, although foreign to me, seemed more in keeping with the occasion.

"You are lucky to be alive," he returned. "Had you come at this time a year ago, before we Atlanteans had decided to make our great experiment, you would have perished before you ever reached the outlying hills."

"You talk in riddles," I exclaimed tartly. "Tell me, are Professor Lorne and his daughter and Penfield alive?"

"They are all alive and well," he replied. "All of them revived from the effects of the drug several days ago. You have been somewhat tardy. Miss Lorne and her father are confined in another part of the palace. Your companion, Penfield, is in an adjoining chamber, and you, my friend, are here."

"So I perceive," I returned, dryly. "Perhaps you are ready to give some explanation of this—this high-handed proceeding. I assure you that when my government hears of this—"

He shrugged his narrow shoulders. "You are quite beyond any help which may come from your government. Perhaps we gave you too much of the drug, but we had our orders to bring you in quite unblemished.

You are a lucky man, my friend. The queen of Atlantis has come in here during your slumbers. She has seen you and approved of you."

"Thanks to her," said I with as much irony as I could muster. "And now this talk of experiments. What of it?" I confess that up until this moment I was convinced that I was dealing with a madman.

"Since I have been instructed to apprise you of all that has happened, and what is to happen," he continued, "then I may as well begin here and now. You, my young friend, are privileged to see what no other man from your world has seen before you. More than that, you are to take an active, and, if I may say it, a pleasant part in the physical rejuvenation of the people of Atlantis."

"Then this is Atlantis, after all, and Professor Lorne was right?"

"More right than he could have dreamed of. He expected to find a deserted city in the desert. Instead he has found Klifha, the crystal city, inhabited by a race of beings who have brought their civilization to a point far surpassing any which your own has attained, or ever will attain.

"Thirty centuries ago Atlantis and all the people whom you shall see here were already alive. We were then the favored of earth's nations, living in luxury on the shores of the Mediterranean Sea near the Pillar of Hercules. Warned by our gods of an impending cataclysm which should shake this great continent from end to end, we fled with our goods and chattels inland, moving as far south as this, our present abode.

"Several hundreds of years before this time, our scientists, who were then, as now, advanced far beyond those of any other peoples, discovered an elixir, the drinker of which is rendered immune from any save violent death. Fortunately, or perhaps unfortunately, after we had already drunk of it, giving us a virtual

immortality, we discovered that although we were provided with what promised to be eternal life we had deprived ourselves of the power of procreating our race. In other words, the elixir acted with a double potency. It removed the necessity of our having children by making our race immortal, but at the same time, as a kind of recompense, it removed our power of producing children. There are no children in Atlantis. Those who drank the elixir while still young grew to adults and have so remained. All of us are centuries old. I was a patriarch when Greece was young. My hair was white when Plato was born. I have seen the seven cities of Troy, each in the heyday of its power. I heard Homer sing his way through the Anatolian cities. I knew Alexander and I saw the burning of Tyre.

"Naturally, we came, with the passing of time, to be old men so satiated with the ways of the world where nothing was new to us that we were glad to wander back to our homeland, to live out our years in peace beside the gently flowing stream of time. For centuries now, none of us has put foot beyond those northern hills. The spot where I and my band came upon you several days ago is as far north—in fact, as far away from Klifha—as any of us have been in more than nine hundred years.

"I said we are immortal to any except violent death. That is not exactly correct. Our scientists have noted during the past three centuries that the potency of the elixir which takes the place of blood in our veins is gradually weakening. Some of us are aging more under the hand of time than we should. Three of our number, the oldest in way of centuries, are on the verge of death. Years will yet pass before they perish, but we know, nevertheless, that the end for them is at hand.

"Now we have held communion with ourselves during the past fifty years as to what shall be done. The elixir is gone; we have lost the secret of its preparation but our scientists are of the opinion that they could readily produce it again should we so desire. But we are convinced that we do not care to go on longer as we have gone on. Life, when it is counted by the centuries, even with our luxury and diversion, grows heavy on our hands. We are sated esthetes, epicureans, sybarites, if you will. Our knowledge, matured by the centuries, has provided us with every pleasure. We have indulged our appetites, played to the whims of our senses until these senses are fast approaching the state where they can no longer be prodded into giving us pleasure. Our scientists say that the sense of taste and smell is gradually perishing. The odor of the common lily, the nectar of the ordinary fruit, pleases our palates no longer. In this sunny land of ours, by means of our great knowledge, we have kept pace with our dying senses by increasing the size and odors of our flowers and the sweetness of our fruits. These have been developed and increased to the last degree. We are reaching the point where our knowledge can serve us no longer. When these senses fail entirely, life will then be but an empty husk imprisoning a soul which would be happier in death."

"That is why," I broke in, "those fruits are too sweet for me. I can't eat them; they sicken me."

"Quite so," he replied. "And even at that, on the advice of our scientists, we gave you only the lesser of our fruits." He leaned over, seized a peach and bit into it. "Just as I thought. This peach, which is too sweet for you, is absolutely without taste to me. I could get as much satisfaction from a bit of grass."

"If you are so fed up with life here," said I, "why don't you go back into the world from which I come and find new adventure and interest there?"

He held up his hands in mock horror. "The gods spare us that!" he exclaimed. "Could we, who have gone so far beyond you, find anything there which could interest us? Bah, you are children where we are grown men, pigmies where we are giants. Your meanness awakens our contempt, and even your virtues are so puny that they call up in our breasts no admiration. Were it not so we would have been back among you centuries ago. Could we live on the tasteless husks which are food to you? Could we play your silly games? Could we appreciate your spineless philosophy? Could we whittle down our lives to your puny loves and pale hates? The gods forbid, I say again.

**B**UT there is another reason, perhaps the most important of all, why we do not return. Your land is too cold. Our blood is gone; we need an even more than equatorial heat for our comfort. Even outside this land of ours in the desert where I came upon you, you were sweltering but I was cold."

"But here," said I, "it can be no warmer than the equator."

"There you are wrong again. This particular room is cooler than any other because it is to our purpose to keep you healthy and comfortable. We have arranged special apparatus for that reason, and your clothing has been chemically treated in order to aid you to stand the excessive heat and moisture which you find here. But outside your room, this city, huge as it is, is completely surrounded and under a dome of glass. The rays of the sun and the lack of cooling breezes intensify the heat to a point which is desirable to us."

"Then you are really a hothouse people?" I exclaimed.

"We might be described as such. But to get back to the point toward which I was tending when you interrupted. As I said, we are surfeited with life; we are gradually dying. Now in this case there are but two things to do; we must either rediscover the immortalizing elixir or we must rejuvenate ourselves in some other way. Revitalizing ourselves with the elixir is unthinkable, aye, abhorrent. We should simply be doing what we have done before; there would be no adventure in that, and moreover, we should be calling down upon ourselves another eternity of years during which, with our pleasure senses dead, there would be no joy left on earth for us. Facing us then there would be only suicide \_\_\_\_"

"But you say you are immortal— or nearly so," I interjected.

"You forget that I said we could die only by violent death," he corrected. "But having no wish to revitalize ourselves with the immortality elixir we are going to do another thing; we are going to revitalize ourselves with the blood of our captives."

"You cold-blooded villains!" I shouted, springing to my feet and striding toward him.

"Have a care," he cautioned. "I have a means of handling you against which even your burly strength can not avail. Have a care and listen to what I say. This is not, as you seem to think, a scheme for killing you, sucking you dry of your blood. In fact, quite the opposite; it is our wholehearted desire that you shall live and be healthy. By all the gods, have you not guessed it yet? It is common enough in your own world."

I was puzzled for a moment and then his meaning came to me with a rush. "You mean," I cried, "that

you expect us to unite with your people and——”

“Yes,” he put in, “that’s just it—your women and our men; your men and our women. We are indeed fortunate in having such likely specimens tumble into our hands. You owe your lives to your comely appearance and good health. The old professor will, of course, not go for much, but he may be valuable as a study.”

And then for the first time the terrible thought crashed through—I say “crashed through,” for it seemed to come to my consciousness in no other way. Constance Lorne in the hands of these loathsome, bloodless brutes!

Azor must have read my thoughts, for he interjected, “You need have no scruples on that score. We Atlanteans wish you well and shall accommodate ourselves to any religious ceremony which may be considered indispensable by you. And they are not all so old and perhaps so unattractive in appearance as I. The queen will undoubtedly choose you, and she, to say the least, is more beautiful—aye, far more beautiful—than even this woman in your own party.”

“I wasn’t thinking of myself,” I replied, “but the professor’s daughter, Miss Lorne—surely, you——”

“She has already been spoken for and promised,” he snapped, a sudden strange irritation in his voice. “She is to marry one of the nobles; the highest in the land. She will either marry him—or perish in the moat. It is her choice.”

“Damn you,” I snarled, getting to my feet and standing over him; “I believe you had spoken for her yourself, you hoary-headed blackguard. But thank heaven there was somebody here with more power than you.”

“It is so,” he said, getting up and facing me, a queer flicker in his sunken eyes. “I had spoken for her and

she would have been fortunate had my request been granted. As it is, now, she goes to Kreggor, beside whom, in natural beauty, I am as one of the lilies of the field.”

I would have laughed at this remark had this been any laughing matter. I began to revolve the thing in my mind as I stood there. So the queen had chosen me, eh? I had found favor in her sight. Best now to play the game for a while. On my ability to fool her might depend our slim chance of escape. Very well, I would play Antony to her Cleopatra for whatever the gods should see fit to bring forth.

“Get into this clothing,” Azor directed.

Seeing nothing better to do, I pulled on the tunic, which was of a thickish material and yet cool and light to the skin. Sandals of what appeared to be pure gold and a great belt studded with jewels completed the costume. When I was prepared he bade me follow him to the door, the servants bringing up the rear, for it was plain Azor did not trust me.

As the door opened, a warm blast, heavily laden with perfume, smote my nostrils. For the instant I almost staggered under the nauseating sweetness of it, but I recovered in a moment and followed him out upon the terrace. Here a strange sight met my eyes.

We were high up on a kind of platform which surrounded the palae towers. Glancing down, my eye took in a scene which at first reminded me of the pictures I had seen in my old school geography. It was an ideal landscape of the carboniferous age except that here and there were buildings of divergent size and shape, all of them shining out like faceted diamonds under the hot, yellow rays of the sun. Below us I saw other and lesser towers, all of a partly transparent material which was surely glass. These in turn dropped

away to grassy terraces, broken here and there by glistening pathways and great staircases piled like pyramids of salt against the green beyond. Obviously, these were the palace grounds and gardens. In them, towering half the height of the lowest turrets were Gargantuan trees of a kind I had never seen before, their trunks and limbs festooned gracefully with hanging moss and creepers. Here and there silvery fountains shot egret plumes of water heavenward, and now and then one caught the elusive gleam of statuary among the trees.

"That," said Azor, pointing with a gnarled finger downward, "is the palace garden. Beyond to the left is the great horticultural experimenting station which is really a city of glass within itself. Far below on the next gentle rise you can see the walls of the city houses shining through the trees."

I LOOKED and saw them, each cut in the same glistening material, which either shot the reflected rays of the sun back into our eyes or shattered them into a thousand shimmering rainbows in the streets below.

"All glass," said Azor. "Some steel, of course. You see that hemispherical structure there in the distance? That great spherical piece elevated on stilts, as it were? That is the source of all our power. We have harnessed the rays of the sun. We have a gigantic sun-glass there, more than a hundred feet in thickness. The sun's rays, striking through it, are concentrated and reflected against great metal boilers filled with water. These in turn produce steam to run our dynamos. The sun-glass turns easily and in time of day may be used as a weapon. Any enemy caught in that beam would be immediately reduced to cinders."

"You are helpless then, during the night?" said I.

"Not at all. The electrical energy generated during the day is stored in great batteries. With these we are able to hurl thunderbolts of a potentiality only slightly less than you have seen in your own heavens."

"But you spoke of using metal. What metal can withstand such heat, and how do you get it?"

"We use steel, especially treated to withstand terrific temperatures. We make it from iron in much the same way that you do, but we get our iron from the skies. By means of powerful electro-magnets we can draw meteors out of the heavens. Most of these are of pure iron. Working it up into steel without the necessity of smelting it is a simple matter."

"How is it," said I, thinking of it for the first time, "that you know so much of our world, which you have not visited in so many centuries? Why, you even speak English and —"

"We speak all languages," he replied. "The acquisition of knowledge has been one of our diversions. We have also developed the radio and listen in on all of your petty conversations. And we have studied you and your habits through our great telescopes. Hence we were prepared to capture you as soon as we saw that you were most surely headed into our own country. But come, we have dallied here long enough."

He glanced at a strange timepiece which he pulled from his belt.

"Yes, it is now nearing the hour when you are to have your first audience with the queen. If you are wise"—he seemed to be putting a strange emphasis on his words now, peering up into my face with those feverish eyes of his—"if you are wise, you will see to it that you find favor with her. And finding it, you may be able to benefit by my friendship. It is just possible that you and I may find—may find a mutual benefit in aiding each other."

He turned then on his heel, while I followed, pondering his words: "We may find a mutual benefit in aiding each other." Had the little man some purpose in his obvious attempts at kindness to me? Constance Lorne, of course! There was disaffection here, and with disaffection I might profit. Very well, to it, then. I would play the game!

I followed him down a broad flight of stairs, turned and found myself at the end of a long, wide corridor stretching off into a magnificent vista of rich hangings, intricate mosaics and brilliant tapestries. A varicolored light was furnished by the sun striking through the high, vaulted roof, splitting into the spectrum and deluging everything in a shower of gold, red, violet and blue with half a hundred intermittent tints, so it seemed to me. There were bits of exquisite statuary here, some of it black as ebony but most of it of what I took to be white marble but Azor said was an especially treated glass. Presently we stepped out of the great corridor, down a flight of gracefully curving steps into a narrower passageway. There were tiny alcoves here, backed by colored glass. As I went along I saw someone seated in one of them, a strange figure, for it was that of a man bathed in a bloody glow from the ruby panes behind him. There was something familiar about him, and I looked a second time. And then I started forward, my hand outstretched in greeting.

It was Penfield!

"Well, what are you doing here and how are you feeling?" I cried.

He ignored my outstretched hand, gazing up at me out of black-rimmed eyes in which I saw points of strangely flickering fires. His appearance shocked me. I recoiled, appalled at the change in him, and we stood there for a moment with no word, he staring up into my face and I gazing down into his.

"Are you ill?" I demanded.

"Ill at heart," he answered. "But she is beautiful."

"You have seen Constance?" I whispered, bending nearer.

"Constance? I said nothing of Constance. I spoke of the queen—the queen of Atlantis."

"Did I not tell you?" whispered Azor in my ear. "He has seen her. Behold the result. It is her beauty."

I took Penfield by the arm but he shook me off, glaring malevolently up into my eyes. "You have not seen her yet or you, too, would speak of her as I do." Then he stretched out his hand and I felt his steel-springed fingers sinking into my arm. "Listen," said he, his breath now hot on my cheek, "Listen, Garth: if she chooses you, then by God I shall kill you."

"You are mad!" I cried, pulling away from him.

"Mad for love of her," he croaked.

"But Constance Lorne?" I protested.

"Damn Constance and damn you," he screamed. Then brushing me suddenly aside he turned and ran swiftly down the corridor. I stood there gazing after him in amazement until Azor plucked me by the arm. The little man touched his wrinkled forehead significantly.

"Reason has fled," he said, quietly. "We took him to the queen yesterday. Today he is insane."

"This is horrible."

"It is better for him. He will suffer less."

And so we went on down the corridor.

WYMONA, queen of Atlantis. Imagine a woman with a figure slightly larger than medium; hips and bust tending toward the voluptuous and a neck like the stalk of a lily on which blossomed a flower as fair as the immortal Helen. Eyes a deep blue, yet burning with that same

feverish fire I had remarked in the eyes of her subjects; nose straight and Grecian; drooping mouth surely voluptuous and certainly cruel. But if the fire in her eyes was like that of her subjects, here the resemblance ended, at least for such of them as I had seen. Her skin was white as alabaster, but lacked that sickly, puttyish hue which was in them a sure characteristic. And hers was the first face free of that fine network of wrinkles I had seen in Atlantis. Aye, she was beautiful.

We sat together in a tiny alcove in her glass-enclosed garden while birds of brilliant plumage sang about us and the water plashed softly in the fountains near by. From afar off, scarcely within earshot, came strains of soft music, weird yet strangely sweet. And yet, somehow the thing nauseated me from the beginning. Once she bent near me, and the heavy perfume from her dark hair deluged my senses so that for a moment my purpose reeled and I half reached out my hand to seize her naked arm.

But she was a woman, even in Atlantis with the mists of thirty centuries behind her. And so, being a woman, she pretended to play the game as other women have played it, and are playing and will play it until the stars grow cold. She pulled away from me coyly. In that quick moment my reeling senses snapped together and reason bolstered purpose once again. God! How humid the air! How heavy this eternal perfume! And these fountains splashing their never-ending music! And the birds! What would I not have given at that moment for the homely chatter of the humble hedge-sparrow! And a sight of Constance Lorne, pink-cheeked and yellow-haired and firm-fleshed.

The queen must have noticed a sudden wave of disgust in my face, for she turned to me and said, "You are not happy here?"

And I, fool that I was, I forgot I was there to play the game. I burst out, "No, let me go to my friends. Let me go to Constance Lorne. Take Penfield, my companion. He is mad for you already. My thoughts are elsewhere."

Too late I realized my mistake. She had just given me proof that she was very much a woman as I knew women, and yet I had been fool enough to speak my preference for another in her face. And that on the very heels of something which had been entirely different when I reached out my hand for her. Hell, as I was shortly to learn, has no fury like a woman scorned. She sprang to her feet and stood gazing down at me, her eyes blazing like twin stars in the gathering dusk.

"So that is it!" she cried, bending down until I felt her hot, perfumed breath on my forehead. "Know then, that she is not for you. By all the gods, this very night she shall go to Kreggor! He has asked and I have delayed, but I shall delay no longer. And so after that, perhaps she will live less in your dreams."

"She will never go to him!" I shouted in desperation.

"Then she shall be fed to the crocodiles in the moat," she answered, her eyes taking on new fury. "Let her choose and know that you have forced the choice."

With that she wheeled suddenly; came the swift rush of sandaled feet, and she had disappeared in an opening of the shrubbery.

I sat there sick at heart with what I had done. Dusk deepened to darkness. The far-distant music ceased. The birds fluttered through the foliage to their nocturnal perches. Only the never-ending splash of the fountains remained, and these, seeming now to have lost their music, rang against my ears like the clash of discordant cymbals. Presently I felt a hand on my shoulder, and looking up

in the gloom, saw Azor standing above me.

"You have been eavesdropping, you devil!" I snarled, though I did not know why I should have cared if he had.

"I heard it all," he replied frankly. "Now listen, I have something to say to you. You still have within your reach a chance to save this Lorne woman of yours. I had counted, at first, on your companion Penfield, but his reason will not stand the test. We shall be overheard here. The very walls have ears in Atlantis. Follow me quietly."

**T**HERE being nothing else to do I followed Azor through the shrubbery. Here there was a narrow flight of stairs leading down to a small door, which he opened carefully to only a crack before going in. The place was apparently empty, for he pushed it wide then, and signed me to follow him. Once beyond the door I found myself in a huge room so large and broad that I could not see its farther walls through the dusk and the thick, green shrubbery. Near by were large glass cases filled with earth, in which were curious plants, most of them strangely stunted.

"This is the royal horticultural experimental chamber," began Azor. "The workers have left for the day, so we shall be unmolested. And now to begin."

He drew me by the arm across the floor to a glass case raised on a platform between two huge potted ferns. Glancing down upon it I saw through the glass several rows of tiny mushrooms or toadstools, together with bits of decayed wood on which tiny lichens were growing.

"You have bungled it badly," continued Azor as we leaned over the glass together. "And yet all is not lost. But we must act quickly because the Lorne woman is in imminent danger. The queen has held off

on Kreggor's request for several days, though she has promised her to him, but I think, without doubt, she will give the order this night. In fact, I doubt not that it is already given. Kreggor, however, will try nothing until midnight or thereabouts. So we have some time for our plans to work."

Drawing closer to me, he reached within his tunic and pulled out a long, glistening dagger, the handle of which he pressed into my hand. "It is of glass," he whispered, "but quite unbreakable. You must be doubly careful, for the tip, the point, is dipped in deadly poison. Sink that but once into Kreggor's body, yes, only so much as scratch him with it, and Constance Lorne is saved."

I took the weapon from him, half fancying for the moment to plunge it into his own shriveled breast. But I remembered immediately that I should have further need of him, and so he lived.

"Listen carefully," he admonished as I hid the blade under my tunic, "Constance Lorne is in the great eastern tower; the tallest of them all and the last to the east except one. Kreggor's apartments are next west, and there is, of course, a connecting corridor between. Now there is no way for you to go to her aid from the inside of the palace, because Kreggor will have the corridor well guarded by his henchmen and by electrical paraphernalia which would mean certain death to you should you encounter it. A suspicious man is Kreggor. And so, therefore, you must scale the outer walls and enter her chamber through a door which opens into Kreggor's corridor."

"But the walls are smooth; they are glass," I objected. "A fly could not cling there."

"Do not interrupt me," he replied testily. "I have means. I have means."



He tapped the glass surface at his elbow with a nervous finger. "You see here," he continued, pointing to the fungus below, "one of the swiftest-growing and most virulent plants in Atlantis. It is a development of your own common toadstool, but owing to the peculiar atmosphere and great age of everything in which it finds root here, its growing powers have gone far beyond anything you have ever dreamed of in your own world. The specimens in this case are purposely stunted by bacteria which we have placed in there to feed upon their roots; otherwise we should soon be overrun and driven from our own abode. But now, should you, for instance, drop a spore from one of these plants in the moist earth at the foot of the eastern tower wherein your friends are confined, there would be in a very few moments a huge growth towering as high and perhaps higher than the loftiest of the towers."

He bent nearer now, the peculiar feverish fire in his eyes blazing out with renewed fervor.

"Your task is this," he continued. "It is necessary for you to scale the eastern tower wall from the grounds outside. Now I shall give you one of these seeds and you are to drop it in the soil close to the wall. You must then act quickly, for this spore will sprout almost immediately and the growth will be shoulder-high before you realize what has happened. Therefore, when you see the club-head of the plant rising out of the turf before you, hesitate not so much as a second but climb upon it. You can hold yourself in place without fear of falling by cutting holes in the thick pulp to which you can cling. Clinging there you will be carried immediately aloft as the plant pushes upward. As you pass the rotunda on the last turret, jump from the plant. Following the rotunda around to the west, you will find a

door leading into the great corridor which separates the apartments of Kreggor and Constance Lorne. Conceal yourself behind the hangings. Sometime during the night Kreggor will come by alone. Then you are to strike, swiftly and surely, that there may be no outcry, for upon your silence depends your life. After that you may make your way back here as best you can, and I will conceal you until we know better what we can do."

He opened a drawer beneath the case and took out a small glass jar. Pushing his fingers through the wide mouth he seized something there and then passed it to me. It was already so dark that, so far as I could see, there was nothing in his hand. But on his admonition to look closer I saw lying on the tip of his finger a white speck of powder, a mushroom spore. Reaching up, he tore a leaf from a near-by twig, and wrapping the spore within, passed it to me.

"You'd best give me several," said I. "This one may be sterile. I shan't have time to come back for more."

"I shall give you no more," he said firmly, turning away. "As a matter of fact I am risking much in giving you even the one. The growth will develop spores immediately upon its maturity—say in half an hour; the spores will be scattered and in an hour or so the palace lawn will be thick with them. I am hoping that someone will notice the growths and give the alarm before they have gone beyond our control. Otherwise we shall be hard put to it to win back the garden from being completely overrun. I can tell you truly that there is more danger to us packed in a single one of those glass bottles than would be in a ton of your dynamite. Each bottle contains spores from all manner of virulent fungi; once these were loosed in Atlantis and hell itself could not prevail against them."

"When do we start?" I asked, coming up behind him. He had forgotten to close the drawer, and now I had a bottle of the powdery spores concealed beneath my tunic.

"In two hours from now. Return to your chamber. I shall come for you when it is time."

As I followed him back through the winding corridors I saw a figure lurking in one of the alcoves. Glancing a second time and going partly out of my way to make sure, I saw that it was Penfield. I called out to him then but he made no sign of recognition.

IT WAS perhaps an hour before midnight when my chamber door opened in almost ghostly fashion and Azor came in, his somber robes and hood under the subdued glow of the lights giving him the appearance of some huge bird of ill omen. Over his arm was a garment similar to the one which enveloped his own shriveled figure, and into this he bade me draw myself as soon as possible, pointing out that I ran less risk of being seen when clothed in black.

"You must hurry," he admonished. "I have it on good authority that Kreggor will act by midnight. He has other business to occupy him until then."

Again we hurried down the innumerable flights of stairs. Most of the lights had been extinguished in the palace at this hour, but here and there a dim globe made weird shadows among the palms and statuary which lined the corridors. Finally Azor opened a small door, and stepping to one side, pointed out into the darkness.

"Follow this pathway," said he. "It leads directly to the eastern towers. Plant your spore at the foot of the second and largest. You can't mistake it. I can not go farther, for my presence is required elsewhere and my absence would be noticed.

Good luck to you, as they say in your country."

He held out a shriveled claw but I did not take it. Somehow, even then, I did not feel that I could trust him out of my sight. He was aiding me to save Constance Lorne, but only to serve his own desires. For the moment we were bound together by a common purpose. But that afforded me no delusions. Once that purpose had been served and he would use every means in his power to destroy me.

I sped out into the night along the glass pathway under the towering shrubbery and lofty palms. Here and there festoons of moss hanging down wiped me gently across the face like ghostly fingers seeking my identity. The air was sultry as usual, happily not quite so warm as during the day, but now it reeked more than ever with dampness and heavy odor. Once I slipped on the smooth glass underfoot, and my legs, shooting out from under me, plunged my body to the hips in the dripping growths which lined the pathway. Came a dull cracking as of rotten wood and then a renewed flood of odor, more sickly sweet than I have ever smelled before. Peering ahead in the gloom I saw that I had crashed into a bower of roses; the blooms, tremendous growths like cabbage, bobbed above me in silent mockery. For the first time, now, even the thrill of approaching danger left me and I felt the full thrust of a loathing which until now had stirred but faintly in my breast.

God, what a country! Nauseating sweetness; warm, clinging moisture and a night full of lusts and hatreds!

I took the path again. Something glided across my path and into the trees. It was a huge reptile, and I started back in horror but remembered then that Azor had said these were palace pets and quite harmless. Now a monster toad hopped to the

middle of the pathway and stood there glaring up at me with its basilisk eyes. Knowing the thing was harmless, and yet full of loathing, I quickened my speed and leaped high in the air, clearing its slimy, up-turned head by many inches.

The breathless miasma of the great honeysuckles clinging to the wall on my left now deluged me; my senses fairly reeled under the blanketing heaviness of it. God, for a breath of clean, dry, desert air!

And then my sixth sense pricked me—the swift, unerring consciousness of impending danger. What was that? A footfall behind me? I paused. Again it came. Now the crack of a rotting bough under human foot. Now a swift patter. No toad or reptile that!

I paused; my pursuer paused also. I walked forward slowly. He did likewise. I turned and ran back. His receding footsteps sounded in my ears. And then it came to me. I was being stalked—stalked here in the dripping sultriness of the night; stalked by someone who followed close, betraying his presence with careless feet and yet delaying the attack! If it were an Atlantean, why did he not cry out and give the alarm? Surely there were enough of his compatriots close at hand within these very walls.

And yet I had no time to stalk him as he was stalking me. The precious moments flew. Azor had said there should be no delay, for danger gathered with every tick of the clock about the head of the woman in the great eastern tower. Kreggor! What sort of monster was he, Kreggor? Constance in Kreggor's arms! Push on! Push on!

I found myself muttering these words aloud in the night. I broke into a half-run, and my pursuer ran also. And then I came to a small canal over which there was an ornate glass bridge. Looking to the left I

saw that the canal wound away and disappeared among the palace towers, probably to connect eventually with the city moat. By now the one behind me was nearer still; I fancied I could hear his labored breathing, and yet the night was so thick under those overhanging, moss-grown limbs that I could see nothing behind me. The opposite end of the bridge, free from the leafy roof overhead, was bathed in the wan, eery light of a waning moon. I crossed over, and on the other side found a small shrub near a statue, in the shadow of which I resolved to await the man who followed. The best I could imagine was that it must be Azor who would be trailing me, ready to cut me down as soon as I had slain his enemy, Kreggor. And so, thinking this, I made up my mind that I should kill Azor first.

As he came out of the shadows which hid the farther end of the narrow causeway I rushed out and met him beneath the moon, midway the bridge, my dagger lifted upward ready to strike him down. Muffled though he was in his midnight cloak, he was quick and lithe and in a moment we were locked together, each holding the weapon hand of the other. Then he writhed suddenly in my grasp, tore away his arm and raised it to strike. Looking upward I saw it glistening in the moonlight—a glass dagger, the very twin of my own. The movement tore the hood from his face and the moon laid its wan light across his features.

It was Colin Penfield!

I dropped my own weapon then and seized his upraised arm in both my hands. "You fool," I whispered in suppressed fury. "It is I, Garth. Hold up until I explain."

"I will kill you, Garth," he muttered, trying to wrench his hand away. "You shall never leave this place alive. I will kill you. You

were the chosen one, but when they find you here in the morning——”

His voice trailed off into a maniacal shriek of laughter that split the murky stillness about us. And then I knew he must be surely mad—mad for Wynona, queen of Atlantis!

Still, for Constance Lorne's sake I tried to reason with him as we swayed together on the brink of the canal, the murky waters below waiting only to swallow one or the other of us—or both.

Somehow then he tried to wrench himself free and we slipped on the glassy incline, he going down with me on top. His skull struck the pathway with a resounding thump, and the glass knife clattered to the ground beside us. I kicked it backward far from his reach, and breathed easier now that its deadly point no longer threatened.

I believe that blow restored his reason for the moment—but only for the moment. He sat up, looking from me to the glass parapet and then around us to the strange shadows etched by the moonlight on the walls of the palace.

“It—it was that villain, Azor,” he mumbled. “He set me to tracking you. Told me to kill you when you had made away with—with that Atlantean up there—Kreggor, he called him. I was to wait until you had done the job—and then—with that poisoned dagger——”

So that was it! Azor was playing both ends against the middle. How simple it all was! Afraid to kill Kreggor himself and still more afraid to kill me, the chosen one of the queen, he had planned that I should make away with Kreggor and be in my turn slain, obviously as the result of a jealous quarrel with Penfield. A solution of his problem which would entail no awkward explanations!

“Come,” I said to Penfield. “Get up. We have work to do tonight.”

I helped him to his feet and he

stood gazing up at the moon. Then he pointed upward.

“I see her there—it is her face—Wynona—Wynona. Wait, I'm coming! I'm coming!”

I would have acted quicker had I realized his reason had fled once more. As it was, he shook me off with that madman's strength of his and sprang up on the parapet of the causeway. Stretching his arms toward the moon, he stepped, or rather threw himself over. It all came in the flash of an eye—his quick leap to the wall; my own cry of consternation; his outstretched arms—and then a splash.

There came a second splash and then a single scream. That was all. Running to the parapet, I gazed over the side; then leaped to its edge and prepared to dive. There were ghostly ripples on the oily surface, but nothing more. I waited a second to see his head reappear, but nothing broke that still, slimy surface!

And then, just as I poised for the dive, something shot out of the shadows beyond, moving swiftly toward me. For a moment I thought it was a log propelled by a push from some unseen hand beneath the bridge, or perhaps released from the ooze of the bottom by the crash of Penfield's body.

And then my limbs froze with horror. No log, that! It was a crocodile!

Now I spied another and still another, floating toward me, their lidless eyes gazing up at me with hungry expectation. The moon silvered them now until they stood out in ghastly outline against the murk about them. On the jaws of one I thought I saw a blotch. It was greenish black under the moon, but I knew that with the light of day upon it its color would be red. And so I stumbled from the parapet and staggered along the pathway, sick with the miasmatic horror of this hideous

night. And then I think that I, too, went a little mad.

I CAME now to the tower which I knew from Azor's description must be the one imprisoning Constance Lorne. The thick overgrowth from the trees again shut out the light of the moon, so I had to grope my way along the dripping walls, drawing back with horror as my hands encountered some huge, nocturnal beetle or the fat, gelatinous body of some oozing snail. Here was the second tower and the point at its base which Azor had recommended for the planting of the spore. Glancing upward, I thought I caught a gleam of light coming through the trees. It might be from the tower—it seemed too concentrated to come from the moon.

And then there drifted down from those dizzy heights above a scream—a woman's scream! Faint but unmistakable—it was the voice of Constance Lorne!

Reaching into my tunic I pulled out the folded leaf, unrolled it and brushed it into the moss and ferns at my feet, the speck of powder that was the mushroom spore. It must have taken root almost simultaneously with its touching earth, for in that very moment a great blunt head, ghostly gray in the darkness, arose beside me. Startled, even though I had been prepared by Azor, I fell back. In a moment more the thing was waist-high and I knew that I must act. Seizing the club-head of the plant, I drove my knife into its pulpy sides, hollowing out handholds and footholds with swift strikes. Another instant and I had mounted it, crouching on its massive head. For a time it wobbled drunkenly, and I was afraid my weight would snap the stem; but presently it steadied and pushed itself onward. Up—up! The limb of a tree interfered now, but I hacked a way through it, the sticky,

soft bark crumbling easily under the feverish strokes of my knife. Two limbs now to hack through, and we should be free. The festoons of moss on the last, twining their slimy tendrils about my body, nearly dragged me from my perch, and I cut and slashed at them with the frenzy of a madman. We pushed upward through the last and into the moonlight.

Close at hand, quite within touch, was the ghostly wall of the palace, smooth and free of the growths that encumbered it below. From above nothing but silence now. No, by heaven, another scream and the running of feet! Almost insane with impatience I got to my knees, and, in peril of slipping from my precarious perch, gazed upward. Yes, there was a light there. Now came another scream and a man's heavy voice, crying something in the Atlantean tongue. Then a harsh snarl, the sound of a blow and coarse laughter.

Up and up I went. Now the horrifying thought struck me: suppose the plant, stunted by my weight, should not thrust high enough and I should be marooned there, helpless, in full view of the palace? Now up another ten feet. The growth was surely slackening in speed. Was it approaching its limit? The parapet was almost within reach of my hands.

Heedless of the danger of falling, I scrambled to my feet and reached upward. Yes, my hands curled over the parapet edge. Kicking my feet free of their holds I pulled myself upward and swung a leg over. My feet struck the hard glass rotunda just as another scream split the stillness. The huge growth, relieved of my weight, pushed upward like a ghost of the night.

Now another scream. There was a window on the farther bulge of the turret wall, a large oval of transparent glass. Racing to it, I peered within. What I saw there sent the blood swirling into my temples anew,

and the white wall before me turned to red.

Constance Lorne was crouching behind an overturned table at the far end of the room. In front of her with his back to me was a huge, gnomelike creature; a monstrous head on a spindling neck; great, fatty body on short spindling legs and tremendous hairy arms reaching out over the table like the suckers of a devil-fish. Azor had spoken truly. Beside this creature confronting Constance Lorne, Azor was as a lily of the field!

Even as I watched in petrified horror, he reached one of those hairy arms out to her, and his coarse laughter rang out on the air. She screamed again, and pushing the table against him, ran out from her corner. But she slipped on the edge of a thick rug and fell, and in that instant he had her. Over her his great, twining arms went, reaching and pulling here, patting there, while his head, now turned toward me, showed a face sickly white like his people but bloated beyond all resemblance to a human being. In it was the tide of lust unleashed from the bonds of thirty centuries.

I tarried no longer. Remembering Azor's directions now as through a bloody film, I ran to the left, finding there a door going into the great corridor which in turn led to Kreggor's apartments. It was dimly lighted now and—thank God!—quite deserted. To the right was another door, through which I raced headlong; then another flight of steps and now another door. This must be the one leading to her chamber. Would it be locked? From the inside, yes, but not from the outside if it were like that which led to my own.

I seized the glass knob and gave a mighty pull. It swung open, showing me the room in its entirety. Luckily Kreggor was at that moment so engrossed with his prey that he had no

eye to danger. In three leaps I was across the room. Constance saw me coming and stifled a scream. He must have seen it in her eyes, however, for he dropped her suddenly and whirled about. His quickness was astonishing for one of his bulk. I saw his arm go to his tunic. If it reached there and came forth with his weapon I should be lost, for he could kill me easily, as Azor had warned. But already the force of my last bound had hurled me against him. Seeing that he was too late, his hand abandoned its quest with his tunic and, shooting upward, wrapped its long, springlike fingers about my throat. He saw my dagger then as it glistened at his breast, and with a hoarse cry of consternation tried to ward off the blow. But I had sunk it home in his shoulder, too high to be mortal as a knife-thrust, yet sure to kill him because of the venom-embedded point.

He grasped me then about the waist and with a second hoarse cry which was almost a scream hurled my body upward with his giant's strength. Doubtless he had intended dashing out my brains against the wall. Helpless in that iron grasp, I held up my forearm in a hopeless attempt to ward off the blow. But he was too late. The poison had done its work. Groaning and frothing white at the mouth he sank to the floor while I snatched away from his weakening grasp. For a moment he writhed there, emitting scream after scream until the chamber rang and rang again. And then with a last convulsion which made the great muscles in his arms stand out like whipcords he lay still.

Constance stood there, her lovely hair disheveled, her uncomprehending eyes riveted in stupefaction on the monster at her feet.

"Quick," I exclaimed. "Where is your father? We have not a moment to lose."

"In the next chamber," she cried, drawing herself together. "I know the way and the door opens from the outside."

TOGETHER we stumbled out of the room. The hall was still dim, but from somewhere deep in the distant corridors we heard shouts of alarm and the running of feet. Suddenly the great lamps above our heads burst into light, leaving not a shadow in which to hide. Part-way down the corridor there was another door which I seized and threw open. Just beyond the threshold, fully as pale as those bloodless Atlanteans, was Professor Lorne.

"Follow us," I shouted. "They are coming already."

In the dim distance of the corridor I saw figures moving toward us. Then another set of lights above our heads leaped into life and we stood revealed to the entire hall. There was surely no escape in that direction. We were trapped in the tower!

And then I remembered that great, ghostly plant which stood out beside the rotunda. Here was the road I had come—would it not bear us away as well? Could I not hack footholds in the stem of the thing, thus providing us with a crude ladder to the earth?

Motioning them to follow me, I rushed out upon the rotunda. The great white stalk stood there as I had left it a few minutes before, its club-head only a few feet above the parapet where growth had ceased. The stem was more than I could reach around with both arms, but I threw myself about it and with my dagger began cutting a series of footholds and handholds in the woody pulp.

"Follow me down," I directed.

It was a test of courage for any man, let alone a woman. We were high in the air; a fall at that height would mean almost certain death, for the foliage which spread between us

and the ground, soft as it was, could hardly be expected to break the fall of a hurtling body. And yet without a moment's hesitation Constance Lorne reached out her hands, fitted her feet into the holes and began to descend. The professor came just behind her.

By this time lights were gleaming here and there about the palace. There was an increasing chorus of shouts, the ringing of a great bell and then running of feet. In a moment Kreggor's henchmen would be in the tower. There, with the body of their master to tell the tale, it would not be long before they scattered to find us. It could be but a few minutes at most before some one of them would spy us, and we were helpless to defend ourselves. Any object tossed from the parapet above would brush us like so many flies from the stalk of our friendly plant.

But still they did not come, doubtless believing we had hidden ourselves behind some of the corridor hangings above. Minutes passed while the din behind the palace walls increased and more windows leaped into life, sending long pencils of light into the gloom of the gardens below.

I was beginning to breathe easier. I had cut my way down to the higher of the tree limbs through which I had bored my way on the upward journey. Then a strange thing happened. Presumably the weight and motion of our bodies on the stalk of the toadstool had shaken the ripening spores loose from their place under the head, and now they were falling like fine rain to the ground below. Five minutes later, just as I was helping Constance to climb to a point where she could share my perch on the tree limb, two great, grayish heads thrust their way through the foliage. In a moment they were popping up all about us; some of them seemed almost alive in the uncanny way they nosed about, pushing us

hither and yon until I feared we should be shaken to the ground. These of course would develop spores in their turn, and in a very short time the whole palace grounds would be a forest of these great stalks. With that, new hope arose in my breast. Perhaps in the ensuing confusion we could conceal ourselves until some other means of escape offered itself.

Presently, however, as we crouched there I heard a shout above our heads, and glancing up I saw a row of grotesque faces peering over the parapet. They had seen us! Another shout and the faces disappeared. I seized Constance by the hand and bade her follow me along the tree limb. Our hiding place had been discovered, but perhaps we had yet time to reach the ground and be off.

After an eternity, as it seemed to me, of wild scrambling we reached the trunk of the tree and I swung Constance down, followed by the professor. Here the moss and creepers aided us and I began to have hopes we should yet reach the ground unseen. Trembling with expectation I reached the last limb; below us lay the ground, too far to jump and yet within reach if we aided ourselves by these twining creepers. I seized one, had thrown my leg about it and was about to swing off, when there came a shout from the palace windows.

Too late! Several of the terrace doors opened and in the wink of an eye they were pouring into the grounds. A moment later and they had gathered beneath us, cutting off all hope of escape. We were captured!

Why I thought of it at that moment is more than I shall ever know. Perhaps the sight of those huge growths leaping into life all about us, and the obvious consternation of the Atlanteans at the spread of the toadstools, brought back the words of Azor: "The spores in a single bottle

are more dangerous to us than a ton of dynamite."

And I had a bottle there in my tunic. Mixed fungi, he had called them. Not all toadstools, apparently. Snatching the bottle out, I pulled off the cap and hurled the contents out upon the moist air.

FOR a moment the men below did not seem to grasp the significance of my action. Some of them even started to pull themselves into the tree, bent on our capture, while others turned their attention to the toadstools. But they were quick to realize what had happened, for presently there came a cry of surprize, followed by a shriek of alarm.

In a second all was bedlam and struggle below us. I had seen the swiftly pushing and apparently harmless toadstools, but here there was something different—horribly different. Like Jason I had sown the dragon's teeth, and a thousand, yes, a million warriors were springing full-panoplied from the earth. Great whitish monsters seemed literally to leap into the air about us. In the flash of an eye those hideous growths had fastened themselves upon the bodies of the Atlanteans, wrapping their million tendrils about them, bearing them by sheer weight to earth, where the horrible struggle continued, shielded mercifully from our eyes by the intervening darkness.

All was confusion about us now. The great fungi puffed up here and there until the whole grounds seemed to rise and swell in a yeasty mass toward our tree limb. In this mass dark figures struggled and fought for life, only to disappear one by one as though dragged from the surface by unseen hands to smother in the pulpy mass below. There were shrieks, cries, and groans. Several of the Atlanteans at the very edge of the spreading gray carpet pulled themselves loose and started to run away,



only to have some great fungus, leaping seemingly from nowhere, land upon their shoulders and drag them down. Presently the whole grounds as far as I could see were a seething, swaying mass of gray. The spores must have begun to ripen and fly by that time, for I saw some of the pulpy mass leap to the rotundas and windows of the palace, where it soon passed within, to judge from the pandemonium from those trapped behind the walls.

I began to realize, then, that these things were actually ripening in the air! Soon nothing would be safe—even we should be attacked! I wondered, then, why we had not been attacked already. The solution of this I was shortly to learn, for at that moment some poor wretch at the very foot of our tree managed to pull himself free and had dragged himself almost to our feet before I realized what had happened. I had not the heart to kill him or thrust him back and was debating with myself what course to take when the problem was solved without my interference.

One of those spores had apparently sprouted in his clothing, for all at once a pulpy, writhing grayish matter sprang into being about his neck. Never shall I forget the look of horror in the man's eyes as the slimy stuff, increasing and multiplying with each second, gradually broke his hold on the creepers about him and dragged him down to his death. He landed with a heavy thump, and vanished from view with a last despairing scream.

There were fungi all about us on the tree limb now, yet though it trailed over my feet and gattered about my knees I still felt that I had freedom of movement. Why did not it attack us as it attacked the Atlanteans?

“Are we to die the same way?” I asked, turning to Professor Lorne.

“I do not think so,” he replied calmly. “We should have been attacked long before this if we were not immune.”

“Immune?” I exclaimed.

“Yes, immune. The Atlanteans fall easy prey to these fungi because of the decadent nature of their bodies. Back in our own country it is comparatively rare to see fungi form upon any organic matter which is young and vigorous. You see toadstools and lichens and other forms of fungi preying upon old, damp or rotting material, but rarely on the young and growing. We—even I—as contrasted with the Atlanteans are young and vigorous. Our flesh and organs are sound and healthy. This health and soundness is due to blood and youth. These people have neither. Life is preserved in them by some fluid other than blood. Their bodies are like damp, sodden tree-trunks, and as such they fall easy prey to these flying spores.”

“Then they might be described as a decaying people,” I ventured.

“It is not a bad adjective. But come, I think we had best be moving on out of here. We are safe for the moment, but if these fungi keep on spreading we shall soon be engulfed. We could be quickly smothered in the stuff even though it could not seize and suck at our bodies, as it appears to be doing with those dying wretches below.”

It was indeed true that this new danger threatened us. Obviously, we must be out of here as soon as possible. Glancing about me I noticed that a huge limb growing from the opposite side of the tree led out over the parapet of a near-by canal. As yet only small bits of fungus had formed on the parapet's mossy surface, though puffs of the stuff were spreading over the ground on either side. To gain the canal parapet by means of the tree limb would be the work of a few minutes.

I ran out on the limb, bidding them follow. Luckily our combined weight as we approached the end bent it downward so that the task of getting from the tree to the parapet was a simple one. Once there, the road between the canal on one side and the puffing, yeasty mass of fungi on the other lay free and open.

"The fungus has not yet come thus far," observed the professor as we reached the end of the boulevards leading up into the city, "but I fear, at its present rate of advance, it will soon overrun the entire area. Atlantis is surely, surely doomed. The Atlanteans are evidently panic-stricken. No concerted effort can be made, in such confusion, to check these growths."

WE STARTED down the nearest of the palm-banked avenues, one which, to all appearances, seemed to lead toward the outskirts of the city. Once across the moat and into the desert, we should be safe. Back of us the hideous bedlam from the palace grew fainter and fainter, but now and then from the houses about us we heard cries of alarm. Then, for the first time since we had left the castle grounds, we saw a group of Atlanteans turn out of a side street and run down the avenue ahead of us. They, too, were bent for the bridges and the desert.

And then, while we looked on, a horrible thing happened. The air about us must have been filled with these invisible flying spores, for suddenly on the shoulders and about the legs of the flying group ahead there sprang into being great puffs of grayish-white fungi. In less than ten seconds each of the helpless wretches was rolling about the roadway, screaming and tearing with frantic fingers at this terrible enemy. Even before we had reached them they were entirely enveloped and their struggles had all but ceased.

"Just as I feared," gasped the professor, "the air of Atlantis is now alive with spores, and these hapless wretches will carry the fungi to every part of the city. The very bridges are likely to be packed high with the stuff before we can reach them, cutting off all escape by that means."

By this time the eery light of coming dawn had suffused the street. Here and there we saw some struggling gray mass beside the roadway, but we knew now too well what it was to give it more than a passing glance. These grew thicker and thicker as we went on, but here most of them lay still, which meant they had been attacked on their rush for the city bridges long before. That explained, perhaps, why we had seen so few of the Atlanteans running in the streets. Doubtless most of them, at the start of the outbreak, had made a dash for the bridges only to be dragged down long before they reached them.

Presently the professor bade us stop. "It is no use to go farther in this direction," said he. "See, that is undoubtedly a bridge in the distance, but these people have been caught there, and now there is no way for us to get through that seething mass. We should only be smothered."

It was true! Gazing ahead in the gray light of dawn I saw a huge trembling wall ahead of us, higher than the surrounding houses. It was the fungus, feeding on the Atlanteans who had sought escape at the bridges. To try to push our way through that seething, writhing mass would mean a terrible death by suffocation!

"No doubt every bridge leading from the city is in the same condition," said Professor Lorne. "Perhaps we might be able to swim the moat at some spot between."

"Impossible," said I. "The moat is alive with crocodiles. These At-

lantearns have surely signed their own death warrant."

And then I told them further what had happened to Penfield. I had whispered to Constance before how Penfield had perished, and from time to time I had seen tears in her eyes; but now, with a moment's breathing space, she began to cry.

The professor touched his head significantly when I had told him more in detail. "Penfield had insanity in his family," he whispered to me as we were hurrying back along the way we had come.

And so in this manner Colin Penfield passed out of our lives forever.

By this time the streets were clearly outlined in the first golden flush of dawn. There were no longer any living Atlanteans to be seen, and the fungus, as if still unsatiated, had begun to spread into the trees and shrubbery which lined the avenues. These, already covered from trunk to leaf, were like giant puff-balls raised against the sky. Tendrils of the stuff began to make their way across the streets, and these, coiling about our feet, made walking extremely difficult. Surely something must be done ere long or we should be trapped in some corner and overcome.

But what could we do? Every avenue was now a seething mass of gray. Every bridge leading out of Atlantis would surely be blocked. The moat was out of the question. A matter of a few hours and we, too, would be face to face with death. Indeed we were that already.

**T**HE morning sun rose blood-red over the housetops, revealing new horrors with every blazing shaft. The city of glass had now become one vast, silent sepulcher wherein the only thing that lived, aside from us, was death itself.

Despair had seized upon my own heart when suddenly there loomed over the housetops before us a Gar-

gantuan three-legged structure supporting a huge hemisphere of glass. It was the Atlantean sun-glass which Azor had pointed out to me from the terraces of the palace.

Professor Lorne grasped the possibility quicker than I.

"By Jove," he cried suddenly, "the sun-glass! We have the means here of burning our way out of this accursed city!"

He began to run once more, and we after him. Shortly we found ourselves in a large open square with the great glistening crystal over our heads. There was a small steel cupola just below and to the right of the glass. This, obviously, was the structure which housed the apparatus for directing the ray. Another few seconds and we had swarmed up a narrow steel ladder, finding ourselves in a small steel box with a maze of wheels and levers on the wall. The professor seized upon these and began twisting them this way and that, his eyes glued to a large mirror before him, which, as I could now see, reflected the movements of the great lens above. If the source of electrical power, stored for night use, was still intact, we should have no difficulty in shifting the brilliant beam of light which now rested on the base of the steel boilers across the square.

The lens was moving. Power was still intact. Manipulating the levers for several minutes, the professor worked out their meaning, pointing out in excited tones, meanwhile, that the apparatus did not differ so greatly from that of the great telescope with which he was familiar at the university. Now he shot the great beam for the first time into the massed fungi in the streets below us. For a moment there was dead silence, and I thought the cursed growths must be immune from heat. Presently, however, there came a slight hiss-

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## The City of Glass

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ing, followed by a tremendous crackling.

Looking down the avenue I saw a huge smudge rising between the houses. Almost at once there came an indescribable stench which filled our little chamber and sent us choking and gasping to the doors.

"We can burn it out," said the professor, "but this gaseous matter produced by the burning fungi will soon smother us. If we could create a draft of some sort or provide a means for the smudge to escape—ah, I have it; we'll cut a few holes in the great glass dome which surrounds Atlantis."

I had forgotten for the time being that Atlantis was enclosed in glass. Between us and the heavens above was a thick dome of solid glass barely visible in the thick, steamy Atlantean atmosphere. For a moment I wondered what new idea he had hit upon; the glass was quite out of reach so far as we were concerned. But his trained scientific mind had seen the possibility immediately. Without another word he began pulling the levers anew, and I saw the great lens slowly swing about. But the concentrated beam, instead of shooting upward, had turned down. Then I noticed for the first time a series of huge glass prisms which were built into a steel framework just beneath the lens. These, as I was shortly to see, would bend the ray until it could be played against the skies.

The ray was now turned toward the heavens. For a moment it rested there and then the professor swung it around in a great circle. Presently there came an ear-splitting crash not unlike that which comes on the heels of a bright flash of lightning. Something hurtled down out of the air before us, smashing against the roof-

tops with the sound of a thousand cymbals. The ray had cut a circular piece from the dome above us. On the heels of the crash there came a light pattering on the pavement outside.

"Why, it's raining," I shouted, running to the door.

"Don't go out," admonished the professor. "That isn't rain; it's molten glass falling from the dome. Luckily we're protected."

Six more disks the professor cut from the dome before turning the force of the beam back upon the spreading fungi. By this time the stuff was gathering like great drifts of soiled snow in the square below us. We had found our weapon none too soon! The beam from the lens now turned back into the street leading to the bridge; there came another hissing and crackling, followed by the same stench. This time, however, the smudge rolled upward and dispersed in the heavens.

Professor Lorné held the beam in the same spot for three hours before we could see our way clear to the bridge, moving it only occasionally to burn back the stuff which threatened to creep and engulf us from below.

"I think we had better be starting now," he announced, finally. "These Atlanteans were great chemists. I have no doubt there are vast stores of chemicals situated in different parts of the city. The fungus to the west is now dried up to the point where it is slowly burning. Should it reach some of these stored chemicals we might be all blown into the heavens. And the road to the bridge is now open."

With that we climbed quickly down the ladder and made our way through a veritable canyon of burnt fungi toward the bridge of the city. On either side there was a hissing and roaring as the dried fungi smoldered away without the aid of the sun-glass.

The heat was well-nigh unbearable. Undoubtedly all of us would have perished were it not for the chemically treated garments in which the Atlanteans had clothed us from the beginning. As it was, we reached the bridge that spanned the moat, the professor and I carrying Constance between us.

“Hurry,” he urged. “We can not pause, even here. Should the fire reach the chemicals we would surely be destroyed.”

And he was right! Scarcely had we reached the rim of encircling hills when a huge ball of white vapor, clearly discernible in the thick smudge, arose over the doomed city. For an instant it hovered there and then shot upward like a gigantic rubber ball pushed by some unseen hand from the inferno below.

Quickly on the heels of it there came a terrific explosion which rocked the earth about us until we reeled drunkenly against the rocks. Then came a blast of livid air that hurled us over backward on the sands. In the short second between the shock and the blast I had my last picture of Atlantis—a picture well in keeping with the horrors of that thrice-accursed land. The monster pall of smoke had mushroomed out in the heavens until it took on the form of a gigantic cobra, upraised on its scaly belly, the hood outspread and menacing. The crash came, the hooded head struck at the heavens.

When I arose and looked again, only a thin veil of black vapor on the horizon marked the spot where once had flourished this, the strangest of cities. And as I gazed, even this faded against the blue and was lost forever.

**I** MIGHT continue my account in a description of the hardships that were yet to be our lot before we were finally picked up, almost dead from thirst, by a caravan in the desert. But these events were of so prosaic and commonplace a nature compared with what we had just been through that I have seen fit to end my story here.

So far as I know, no one but us escaped from Atlantis. Oddly enough we could find not a single trace of the debris when we returned on a second expedition, though in one of the gullies which must have been under the palace walls we came upon a skeleton, the bones of which were curiously torn and mangled. Luckily, Constance, who had now become Mrs. Garth, was not a member of our party, and so Professor Lorne and I buried the bones in the gully where we found them, raising a cairn of stones above the spot, on which we marked the name of Colin Penfield.