

Weird Tales

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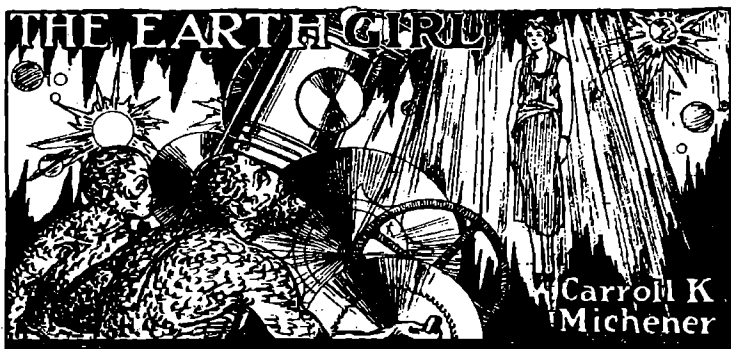


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Author of "Six Feet of Willow-Green"

HATTIE LA SALLE, in the opinion of her acquaintances, was always a little unaccountable. In many respects she was, of course, wholly rational, but she was a devotee of the crystal glass, in the rich-draped parlor of a mystic. There, she was often heard to declaim a strange, somewhat psychic story, and to end it, melodramatically, in these sententious words:

"I, a woman of the Earth, have destroyed a religion, and a city—who knows if I have not destroyed a whole people: the inhabitants of a globe? In the glass I can see it still—always: the flames, the smoke blinding the setting of a scarlet sun, the walls crumbling, the tower falling—falling—"

THE great ninth moon flashed its opaline disk above the horizon, and mounted with dizzying speed toward the zenith. The light of the little blue moon, sailing tranquilly toward its setting, paled in the engulfing brilliance of its huge sister. Presently the smaller satellite effaced itself, leaving the other in full sovereignty of the night sky. The tri-color irregularly splotching the face of this celestial queen began to blend and soften; its patches of green, sapphire

and gold were erased by a solid, dazzling hue; and as the orb flared across mid-sky the landscape asleep under it lay flooded suddenly in an almost explosive irradiation.

"The ninth—ah, it is the ninth ray!"

Within the lofty stadium of the observatory, Halvad, master astronomer of the planet Zonomas, was startled into alertness by his pupil's warning.

"Quickly, master! The light is pure—it is the magic ninth tint, and it will fade soon."

Master and pupil entered a domed alcove and busied themselves with a weird instrument. It was an intricate structure of crystal retorts, lenses, disks, and metal standards. A panel in the summit of the dome slid aside noiselessly, flooding the alcove with the vertical shafts of light shed by the satellite blazing directly overhead.

"There is no time to lose," warned the pupil, again. "The little gold moon is due—it approaches already; it will break the spell."

"Thou art impatient—the way of youth," murmured the older man. "There is time. . . . See."

His gesture indicated a row of effigies reclining under a glass canopy.

They were the figures of creatures in the image of his own kind, save that they were palpably of another sex. They were covered delicately with gauze draperies that nevertheless concealed nothing of form and of the waxed rosinness of their simulated flesh. In half light it would have seemed that they lived; in this fierce glare of the searching ninth ray it was apparent that they were but mechanical toys, as symmetrical and idealized as porcelain dolls.

"Look, now, upon the first," commanded the master, lifting his hand slowly to a lever in the strange mechanism by his side. "The great moment has come; we shall see if we have failed again—we shall see—"

A rending flash dizzied them; darkness flooded after it; a burning odor filled the atmosphere, a pungency like that of ozone set free by electric blasts. Then the light returned, dimmed and yellow.

"The little gold moon—we are too late."

"Nay, not so fast," cautioned the old man. . . . "Hear—"

A sound came to them from the shaded interior of the glass canopy. It was the voice of a woman overtaken by sudden, dazed fear.

They lifted the cover, and touched the waxlike limbs that so recently had been of the temperature of marble; they recoiled at the shock of warm flesh that now trembled under their hands.

"As Malamut is god, there is life here—this clay is animate!"

The agitation of the younger man was poignant, denoting the student rather than the adept.

"Thou wouldst not believe, Adathus; thou hadst no faith," the old man chided him.

"But this is beyond faith, beyond belief. Truly, Halvad the magician is mighty. He has proved himself as great as a god, for he has created human life."

"Nay, be not so extravagant," smiled the old man, "for there are loftier marvels than this, as thou shalt hear. Halvad has not created, but merely translated from another sphere."

They lifted the murmuring figure from its slab of marble, wound the slight draperies more securely, and together carried the yielding, pulsing body into an inner room.

Full light disclosed the complete beauty of their handiwork. She was fragiley, angelically fair, the feminine ideal of their race.

She breathed normally. Her eyes opened: vermilion, with gold overlights. Her sandaled feet pressed for support, until she stood free, surveying them.

Perplexity, touched with a shade of awe, a ghost of fear, clouded her features. Her lips opened, and she spoke, haltingly, uttering words that seemed the product of her will, and yet, peculiarly, alien to her thoracic mechanism.

Adathus, the pupil, clearly was stupefied with amazement.

"Can she be—is it true, then, what you have promised?"

"It is true; she is from another world. She is of the planet Madernus, known to its inhabitants as Earth. Knowest thou the number of the universe, as I have taught thee? And the name of the constellation?"

"It is of the constellation Helia, a satellite of the fifth star, Lumnus, which is its sun."

"Thou hast been well taught."

"And she—she is from Madernus, a girl of Earth? She has been plucked through space a distance such as is traversed by light only in a thousand years?"

"Nay, light is a sluggard; by the full spectrum that would have been the period; but the ninth ray knows no time. It has the speed of thought."

They fell silent, looking upon the timorous creature before them. The pupil spoke:

"We are unmerciful, cruel; see, she shrinks with astonishment. Can you not, master, by speech of the mind, soften her fears?"

Halvad looked into his handiwork's fluttering eyes, and the apprehension vanished from their vermilion deeps. A smile rippled her lips. . . .

MADERNA, the Earth Girl, she who had been known in Chicago as Hattie La Salle, arose from the couch on which she awoke, and in the green light of morning looked about her with the puzzled air of one still clouded in the circumstances of interrupted dreams.

Tinted masonry, carved into an unending bas-relief of fanciful, unfamiliar figures, enclosed her spaciouly. Tall windows, latticed with a delicate, gleaming metal, permitted the passage of a flood of vernal light. Perfumes impinged vagrantly upon her nostrils.

She advanced toward the windows, but was arrested by a womanly thought: she desired to scan herself in a mirror. Instantly, it was as if she stood outside herself, looking in.

She laughed. This must be a dream. Her features were those of a creature unimaginable. The face was not hers—it was not the thin, unhealthy, pasty face of the Hattie La Salle she knew. Her brow was the same—perhaps deeper; and so were the eyebrows, minus, however, the artful tailoring to which they were accustomed; but the eyes themselves bore an expression utterly new. Their color, of course, was preposterous; they were larger, brighter, filled with a nameless faculty.

The nose—where, indeed, was her nose? . . . It would require the service of the old wizard to explain the gill-like structure flowering, not unbeautifully, in the mid-space where

her own wind-freckled and none too classic protrusion should have been.

Lips were not wanting, at any rate; and there was nothing unusual about them, except that they wore an indefinable appearance of inutility. She formed them for the utterance of a word, and found them mute. Only when she put forth the stress of a concentrated effort of will was she able to make the word audible, and then it was by no action of lips or throat; these were peculiarly unresponsive. She amused herself by this new pastime of producing sounds by effort of the will.

Her hair caught her eye. It was of the texture of down, and had the sheen of feathers. It was hair and yet not hair; and, as for color, it was chameleon, reflecting and reinforcing the tint of the morning.

Her fingers ran wonderingly through the soft textures of the transparent garments clinging to her skin—the robe that had been her inheritance from the wizard's laboratory. Not from lack of warmth, but from a motive of instinct, she caught up a cloth from the sleeping-couch and draped herself in its opaque folds. Her bare soles transmitted no sensation of cold from the stone flags.

She looked suddenly at her feet, and was round-eyed for a moment at the fantasm of but two huge toes on each; a thick, warm callus slipped them.

A quick glance at her hands followed, and she was no less naively surprised, for there were not two fingers, or five, on each, but fingers seemingly innumerable, diminishing in size from the normal index to a web-like vanishing-point. She opened her lips on the impulse of laughter—and remembered; then her own conscious effort of mind filled the air with the familiar sound of mirth.

A door opened, and a creature not unlike herself stood forth. Conversation, she now made certain, was not a

matter of language and words, but of mental impulse.

"You called?" was the palpable inquiry of the newcomer.

"No." And yet: "Tell me: am I alive or dead? Have I gone—is this heaven?"

"You speak of things unfamiliar to me; but one may answer, and he is Halvad, the master. . . . You wish food."

The woman, evidently a servant, set a crystal bowl upon a pedestal fronting the windows, so that the rays of the sun fell upon it. She motioned toward it, vanishing as she had come.

Maderna glanced into the bowl, found it filled with a milky liquid, white even against the vernal illumination. She hesitated; then, actuated by an impulse originating not in her mind or memory, but seemingly from this alien flesh so warmly, pulsingly and becomingly clothing her, she looked full into the great, mounting sun of the morning, and, slipping to her knees, lifted the bowl to her lips.

To her earthly sense, the taste was cloyingly insipid. The draft was reminiscent neither of vegetable nor of flesh, but suggested rather the chemical virginity of synthetic laboratories.

The wizard, Halvad, came upon her there, and in his wake Adathus, his pupil. They were not unpleasant to look upon, although the gill-like nostrils, in them, were accentuated, and the feathery down was for them a grosser, more shaggy mane.

"Thou hast inquired if the calamity called death had overtaken thee."

Her ears caught no sound. The master was speaking with the mind, which seemed to possess a language beyond words.

"Come," continued Halvad, "thou shalt see—and know."

She hesitated at another thought—again an inheritance from her earth life. Her cheeks crimsoned, and the

mantling glow crept from neck to brow.

The wizard smiled with understanding, but his pupil, struck suddenly shy, and yet eagerly intent upon her lovely confusion, gazed at her soberly.

"We do not concern ourselves here with what upon your Earth is called clothing," explained Halvad. "We have a simpler garb. Attend me now. Observe me clad in what appears to be the skin of a wild beast. . . . But, now—observe me once more. Thou seest a garment such as that bed robe over thy shoulders. That is real, the one upon me is a texture of the mind.

"Ah, no need to look bewildered. This is not so much wizardry as it may seem. The mind, with us in this planet, is a mightier organ than on the more primitive sphere from which thou comest. I read thy thoughts before they are consciously expressed. Soon thou shalt develop that power, too, although at first it will be as if thou wert a little child in these things.

"Some clothing is real, indeed—no need for maidenly alarms! When the mind sleeps, or is impaired, the body must have other garments than those of its illusory creations. . . . Nay, clothe thyself with what thou wilt. Ah! Thou hast the power! Now, look from without. Thou art strange for even my eyes to behold."

Maderna, indeed, stood forth in the sartorial mode of the hour as interred in the city of Chicago. She was clothed, not in the garments to which she was habituated, but in the queenly attire embodying her earthly ideals of the dressmaker's art—a costume which hitherto had been for her an aspiration rather than a realization.

She emitted a sigh of delight. This must, indeed, be the feminine paradise!

Suddenly, in the midst of this wonder, she intercepted the gaze of Adathus. There was something ap-

proaching pained fascination in his eyes. It made her self-conscious, and she began to quiz herself, with the frankness of thought, as to whether she had for him a physical attraction. He was not an unhandsome lad. She rather liked him in that tawny skin, so entirely different from any fur she had ever before seen.

Almost in the instant of these reflections she felt panic. The master—perhaps Adathus—had read her thoughts! This was a horrible world; hideous that every fancy of the brain, even half-formed, tentative, intimately secret, should stand naked to all beholders.

"Nay, then," intercepted Halvad; "the mind clothes and conceals itself, just as it clothes the body. Thou wilt learn. But I recall, now, a matter of serious consequence. Thou shouldst know that on this planet there is no passion of the sexes—our ancient writings call it 'love', just as it is termed on your Earth. This element we have erased from our sociology—it vanished centuries ago. Whence thou comest the race is still torn by its fierce impulses. Ah, I have long known of this through my studies. Thy thoughts just now betrayed thee into a reminder of it."

He looked earnestly from Maderna to Adathus, then he spoke again, soberly:

"Thou shouldst be warned that the passion of the sexes has no place in our peaceful world. We have had no war since the ninth moon joined its sisters—and that is so long as to be beyond thy conception in terms of Earthly seasons. And what is the root of war? It is easy to trace; it runs back through all the material lusts—for food, for raiment, and for power to control the sources of food and raiment—to the very fountain of all desire, the impulse of sex. They deity love on thy planet, little realizing that the primal love—that of man for woman—sits enthroned with the

darker sovereign, hate, and that the two drag thee, their slaves, through the hell of strifes and wars.

"But I do not wish to lecture. We have a morning of entertainment before us, and—thou wilt pardon me—of study. For, my beautiful young woman, no matter how unwillingly, thou hast become a specimen in Halvad's laboratory of cosmic research."

He turned to go, but Adathus stood aside, waiting for her to follow. His eyes were illumined with a feverish curiosity as he continued to gaze upon her exotic charms.

Rousing himself, Adathus held open for her a door, and, as she passed, the odor of heliotrope, strange to his nostrils, flooded faintly toward him from her feathered tresses. He gasped, took a puzzled step toward her, touched her tremblingly.

She smiled, trying to read, if not his tumultuous thoughts, at least the expression of his eyes. Was it possible that this creature of another world, so like her new-molded self, had fallen in love with her, in spite of the Zonomanian tradition that love was extinct?

A moan of terror sounded to her external ear. Adathus recoiled from her. He fled, past the stately figure of his master, and out of sight through a long corridor. Again Halvad turned upon the girl a look of apprehensive and appraising notation.

They emerged upon a plaza open to the sky. Another sun flamed on the horizon now—a sapphire disk, smaller than the huge green one scaling the zenith. Its indigo rays, filtering across the level landscape, which was alike in all points of the compass, as far as the eye could see, tempered the dazzling green to a mild turquoise.

There was heat in the atmosphere, and Maderna put up a pink parasol, an instantaneous fabrication of the mind. She was puzzled to feel the temperature, under its protection, no less keenly than before. The old mas-

ter, observing her surprize, smiled knowingly, then gave her the explanation.

"The clothing of the mind's creation," he said, "is opaque to the eye of both mind and body, but the eyes of the suns know it not. Thy pink shade, therefore, does not protect from the light and heat; nor will thy fantastic Earth garments. The servant should have provided thee with the proper material fabric, the under-vestment upon which we build our fanciful garb. We must seek cover quickly, or thy body will suffer from these fierce suns."

A cavernous dome of masonry swallowed them, and Maderna was grateful for its darkened shelter.

What appeared to be a tremendous crystal globe rested airily beneath the dome. There was no other paraphernalia or furnishing.

Without pausing, Halvad walked up to, and seemingly through, the crystalline globe. Whether the globe vanished, as does a burst soap film, she could not tell, for, indeed, everything vanished; the dome was gone, gone was the huge pile of masonry upon which it stood, vanished were the two suns, the sapphire and the green. She stood alone with Halvad, upon nothing, in the midst of nothing.

Presently a white light—the familiar white light of her own Earth—surrounded them. A green landscape unfolded; the smudge of a huge city blurred it; these, too, disappeared, and they stood within a familiar room, decorated with the incumbrances common to the professional necromancer. She was conscious of the old man's explaining comment:

"In reality," he was telling her, "we have not left the planet Zonomas; but, as thou seest, we look in upon the familiar surroundings of thy Earthly existence. Further than this thou wouldst not understand; it is a question of the use of forces too vast

for thy comprehension. . . . Look about."

The scene within the room developed in detail. Maderna gave a sudden start, and moved impulsively forward.

"With caution," warned the old man. "The emotions are dangerous in these excursions into the infinitudes."

"But there—look! It is I, that figure kneeling before the crystal globe. This room—it was here that I came yesterday."

Fear numbed her syllables.

"I am dead, then," she moaned.

Haltingly she approached the abased, cataleptic image before the entrancing globe. She put out her hand to touch the body that had been hers. It was warm! There was a pulse; there was breath stirring from the nostrils. The eyes were open, fixed, yet unfocused. It was as if time were arrested, and she was witnessing, in the present, an incident of the past. She looked at the old man, inquiringly. He was shaking his head.

"Nay," he said. "It is as thou seest. Thou art not dead."

MADERNA slept through the heat of the triple suns. When she awoke the green orb had set, the one of sapphire swam through the cloudless west, and a tawny shower of light poured down from a golden disk overhead.

There was a vast sound of rushing, reed-like music through the open windows. It rose and fell like a tide, with a range of tone utterly beyond the compass of an Earthly ear.

Maderna clothed herself in a soft afternoon frock, exotic to this sphere, rejecting the garments of real substance that had been prepared against her reawakening. Adathus was in her mind as she stepped through a doorway and walked toward an aisle of ochreous vegetation in the great gar-

den without. All was chromed in shaded baths of color. Golden was the flat landscape; wheat-yellow were the vibrant filaments of sentient, mushroom-like growths about her, and the fanciful, animated flowers reminiscent of her elf-and-fairy days; an incredible, saffron-colored, cylindrical tower lifted its seemingly interminable bulk against the cuprous sky.

Adathus stood before her, under a rubberish tree that seemed leafed with alert and spying ears.

"I fear you," he sighed. "You must not let me touch you. I should go mad. Besides—although you may not understand this—the evil and the madness might not rest with me alone; they might taint the whole race, betray our whole civilization. I am a poor weakling, but if the disease can touch me it may touch others. No doubt I am a degenerate seedling of an ancient generation, of days when men and women on this sphere loved and fought and sacrificed and died to perpetuate themselves, just as now in yours."

Timidly, nevertheless, he braved her provocative smile. He strolled with her through the garden mazes, sheltered from the golden glow of the sun; and she, the eternal feminine, maliciously curtained and uncurtained to him her feminine mind. The result was not salutary to the destiny of the struggling Adathus.

"I like you," she murmured to him. "You are more human than the old man. But are you two and the servant the sole inhabitants of the planet? I want to see things. I've been here nearly a day—by the way, how long are the days here?—and I haven't been outside this old prison."

She glanced at the massive pile of masonry, with its aureate, crenelated walls, glinting dully through the foliage.

"At least," she amended, "I haven't been out of the garden. Take me—I want to see."

Adathus shrank from her.

"Not without asking the master."

She pouted, twitting him, with a tilt of the eye, for his timidity.

"That is not undue subserviency," he protested, "though you are teaching me the word's fullest meaning. You shall have your wish. You shall have anything you wish. . . . If only for a touch of your hand."

He trembled violently.

"I have gone mad. . . ."

They walked, hand in hand, toward a gate in a wall. They stood before it for a moment, and, as if at a thought suddenly clothed with force, it opened. They stepped through, and the gate closed behind them.

Maderna was conscious of a sudden cessation of the music that had filled the air in the garden.

"It was the trees—they are intelligent beings here," was his answer to her half-spoken question. "We have no animals such as those the master has represented to me from among those of your planet; and the trees are our musicians. They have ceased to play because you are gone."

"And where are we going?"

"You want people—you shall see them."

A city, strangely inhabited, strangely built, precipitously unrolled itself before her. She was conscious of motion, without having given volition to the desire for movement, and listened, with surprize, for Adathus' explanation.

"It is a power of which you know nothing, save this: You understand the lines of force about a magnetic field? This is the same, and yet not the same. We are propelled without a vehicle, without a material medium. But the details would scarcely interest you. Women, even among ourselves, have not mechanical minds."

Maderna gazed with the keenest of attention, however, upon the kinetoscopic picture before her. The clasp of Adathus' hand tightened, and the

mysterious force that propelled them relinquished its irresistible upward and forward compulsion. They had not appeared to leave the ground, yet now they seemed to step down from some invisible moving platform.

They were in an immense square, plashing with fountains, scintillant with huge domes of crystal, from which irradiated wavering, changing lights. Around them, on all sides, was an architectural symposium unreal to any Earthly eyes. Pillars, the diameters of which could have been measured only in hundreds of feet, supported colossal structures, winged and buttressed with masonry of unimaginable massiveness. It was impossible, from the network of trusses, cantilevers, and domed superstructures, to say whether there was in this vista one or a series of buildings. The very square, perhaps of a thousand acres, was roofed with a transparent, artificial vault, which nevertheless had some semblance of sky itself—it was blue, tinting the great square with a gentle cerulean.

"We are in the industrial center of Zonomas," Adathus was explaining. "There are only three commodities with which we are concerned: food, raiment, power: heat is a mere problem of translating solar radiation to whatever part of the planet requires it, principally the poles. All these things are matters of community enterprise. The labor, which is merely a process of giving direction to natural forces and to our manual agencies, which, with us, are lower orders of beings corresponding somewhat to your plant life, is compulsory and without compensation. The entire population shares in it. Food is a matter of synthetic composition; you have tasted: it is all alike, and necessary only at infrequent intervals; no living creature loses its life, as on your planet, in the preparation of it. Here, it offers no incentive to strife, ambition, crime. As for clothing, you have

heard something from the master concerning that. A species of plant produces a fiber from its own composition, and through its own agency converts it into the basic fabric used in Zonomanian raiment. It serves for protection to the skin from heat and cold. It is furnished by the community, and is not subject to buying and selling. The variety you see in the people about you is real only as a manifestation of their individual mind-forces. Underneath the colors and forms of raiment disclosed to you there is but a single, unvarying, primitive fabric."

There was more, an astounding lecture confusing to her mind. So at length he came to an embarrassed pause.

"I weary you with all this," he said. "And, in truth, I should prefer to speak only of ourselves, and of love. I am not so certain as Halvad of our civilization. Though we have banished love, hate remains; for there is superstition and ignorance. The people fear Halvad. He has done strange things, and has great powers, some of them known not even to the Yeomers, priests of Malamut, who are our rulers. You see, we are not so unlike you of the Earth—we must have our rulers and our priests."

A shadow touched them swiftly, and Maderna gave a cry of apprehension. Adathus was quick to assure her.

"Do not be afraid—you will not be injured."

A row of mighty shapes columned toward them across the square; they were like the detached legs of grotesquely magnified elephants, or like a close-ranked caravan of water-spouts, heads vaguely diffused aloft. They advanced relentlessly, casting a yellowish shadow before them, the shadow thrown by smoky, tenuous semi-opacity. The Earth Girl and her companion were engulfed in this procession; it passed through them,

around them, over them, and left them as they were.

"The sweepers of our artificial sky," explained Adathus, leading her again into the streams of straight-lined traffic surrounding the square.

The people were gorgeous in their fanciful raiment. They drifted like butterflies. The tremendous buildings yawned them forth, and engulfed them again.

"It's odd that you don't fly here," Maderna suggested.

"Fly? No need of it. Transportation is not a problem—we have no need of improving or diversifying it."

"Are you taking me—home?" she asked, presently.

Adathus gave a start, and trembled anew under the touch of her hand on his arm.

"Where else? The master may miss us."

She pouted, quite in the Earthly fashion.

"But you haven't shown me all. There is the great tower—the one visible from the garden. I want to see that."

"The Tower of Malamut!" exclaimed Adathus. "That is impossible. You do not understand. It might mean death to us both."

Her lips rippled to the accompaniment of her careless laughter.

"You only increase my curiosity," she-coaxed.

He shook his head, gravely; but the touch of her hand grew to an appealing clasp; her vermilion eyes were close to his; her breath was on his cheek. . . .

THEY stood in a swift current that bore them through architectural canyons, among sounds of titanic enterprise, past enchanted gardens filled with music, under changing hues that merged gradually into the unaltered light of the golden sun, now flaring reddishly toward its point of setting. . . .

They stood in open country, at the edge of a shallow and seemingly illimitable bowl, from the center of which rose the tower. At first the eye refused to credit the fact that the bowl was filled, overflowing, with people in a reclining, half-prone posture, looking aloft toward a point where tower and sky appeared to merge. There was no motion, only a sea of inactivity, heightened by blended color into a vista somewhat resembling a mirage. The people were as numerous as the sands.

"They are worshiping Malamut, who in turn instructs them," explained Adathus. "This is our only school, this is our fount of knowledge. We must do as the rest—change our garments into a semblance of theirs."

Musie, with a vaster melody than that of the garden, sounded from aloft. Through it came a voice, and the multitude was hushed, hypnotized.

"Fools," murmured Adathus, speaking close to Maderna's external ear, for greater secrecy. Then, as if in soliloquy: "The tower is not topless, as they think. The master knows. He has shown me the way. We have been there—at the top—in the Chamber of the Light."

"Oh, take me, take me!" urged the Earth Girl.

"We shall die, then," answered Adathus.

"Perhaps we are already dead; this is all surely a mere dream—it can scarcely matter," she persisted, half serious at his warning.

He looked into her eyes, doubtfully, sadly.

"If you would only tell me," he began.

"What do you wish me to say?"

But he was silent. Slowly a faint flush overspread her cheeks.

"Is it possible," she asked, boldly, "that you are a reaction from your loveless civilization? Do you want me to say that I—that I love you?"

He nodded, then turned shamefully away.

"You still wish to go into the tower?" he asked.

"I am not afraid; I love you, Adathus."

MADERNA, femininely, did not think of the wall's vastness in terms of yards and feet; for her it was simply unthinkable huge, rising sheer upward from its metallic foundation, to form one blind, curved face of the tower. Looking aloft, at an arm's length from its masonic surface, the tower wall before which she waited for Adathus seemed to lean far outward from the perpendicular, threatening her dizzily with its bulk.

She waited alone, beneath the edge of the metallic cup, set below the floor of the amphitheater, so that she was out of sight of the multitude, with nothing to see save the magnitude of the preposterous stone needle that filled half of the lambent, golden-sunned sky.

He came, nervously a-tingle, exhibiting a small instrument not unlike a miniature harp.

"Without this it would have been impossible," he breathed. "The master saw me as I left his apartment, but I think he is without suspicion. The second of his images—like you—is to be animated tonight, at the coming of the ninth ray. He has sworn to people his laboratory with samples of human life from every adjacent universe. But we must waste no time."

With a careful step, Adathus measured a distance along the wall, from a starting point that was to her undiscernible; he appeared to be engaged, simultaneously, in a puzzling mathematical computation; when he had finished, he looked about him anxiously, stood a short way from the masonry, and was satisfied that his proceedings had not been observed. . . . He held Maderna close to his side.

"It is necessary for you to follow me implicitly—to do whatever I say. Forget that the wall is there. Close your eyes—that will help you. Now, walk forward with me, boldly."

They took several steps, Maderna with her eyes obediently shut. To her surprise they moved onward, unimpeded, as if away from the wall. It was as if there had been no wall. She opened her eyes and beheld a low-ceilinged interior, filled with gross metallic implements, some as huge as a steamship—gigantic suggestions of the iron-and-steel handiwork of her own Earth.

"Part of the state's historical archives—the age of machinery and metals," explained Adathus hurriedly. "These are relics of centuries ago, when your Earth race had not yet emerged from the ooze of the seas."

They hurried past weird monsters, and brushed the cobwebbed reminders of what must have been a mighty period. A corridor swallowed them, and at the end of it was a blind wall. Again they paused, Maderna half expecting this one, too, to prove of the substance that is pervious to magic. Adathus drew forth the tiny instrument that resembled a harp, set it to his lips, and blew across its strings. A harmony wafted faintly from them, a concord of sound utterly etheric.

Slowly the wall dissolved before them. . . .

They were in a rectangular well, the upward dimension of which appeared limitless. It was suffused with a pale, violet light. Maderna touched the wall nearest her, curiously, and felt it slide downward, swiftly, against her pressure. An expression of tenseness in the face of Adathus warned her to remain immobile and silent. They continued to move rapidly upward, as if the floor of the well had been suddenly levitated by some master impulse. After what seemed an endless suspension upon nothing more substantial than rarefying atmosphere, a

narrow pannel in the encompassing masonry appeared to pause before them. Adathus nervously urged his companion forward through it, and followed.

A corridor led inward, widening; but Adathus turned her aside into what seemed merely a niche. It was, in fact, the blind opening of another and smaller alley, at the end of which blazed a piercing light. They stood, with dramatic suddenness, before the holy symbol of Malamut.

A balcony held them above it, screened them with a semi-lucent shield from the actinic ferocity of the flowing light. The source, the very godhead of Zonomas, was a limpid cone of fire, set in a massive frame; its substance seemed that of flame, and yet of precious metal; it appeared radiant with an overpowering heat, and yet cold as the light of jewels.

"Force," murmured Adathus. "It is the source—or, at least, the symbol—I do not know which—of the great energies that have stripped our existence of its primitive ways."

Maderna laughed.

"What is that," she asked, without replying, "before the great lamp of Malamut? It looks like an offering."

"It is another evidence of our superstition; a relic of forgotten generations. It is, indeed, an offering; formerly it was one of flesh and blood."

"Fruit—that's all it is," insisted Maderna. "I'm hungry. Adathus, for a taste of it, I would—well, what would you ask of me?"

"I have heard your legend of Evè—and laughed at it, until now. How odd that we should have no such legend here. . . . I ask your love, that is all; and that you will test me no more."

Like one who is fevered with something of dementia, and against her belated cry of regret, he darted down the steps toward the furnace of light, shielding his eyes with an uplifted

arm, and bore back with him a globule of tawny fruit.

She kissed his ashen lips, as one kisses a playful and obedient child, and buried her wilful teeth in the food of a god.

A hand snatched it from her; another seized her, and pinioned her arms. Adathus, paling with the despairing fear of death, was captive no less securely than herself.

"A woman," muttered the priestly figure at her side, half releasing her arms in order to gain a better view of her face. "A woman, Adathus—ah, thou art recognized—and as thou knowest, it is a crime against Malamut for one of her sex to enter the temple and to look upon the sacred flame."

"We have heard, Adathus," spoke the other captor, "that Halvad has created this woman—molded her flesh and animated the body with spirit. . . . That is the truth, then? . . . Halvad shall die—so shall ye all."

THEY were led into a spacious hall, windowed to the four dimensions of the horizon and open to the roof of the heavens. A mirror-like ledge, heveled against the windows, offered a magnificent view of the amphitheater circling the tower. It was like gazing into a poppy field; the white faces below were like the petals of a botanical mosaic.

A sacerdotal personage, joined by a larger group that now made the captives a center of attention, spoke sonorously into a simple instrument resembling a megaphone.

"A woman has profaned the shrine of Malamut."

The voice paused, as if awaiting a dramatic effect upon its reclining audience. A murmur arose from the bowl, then ceased.

"The woman is in the hands of Malamut, awaiting her judgment. What shall be done with her?"

A mightier, angrier murmur rose in response. It was unintelligible with suggestions; gradually the cry developed:

"Toss her—toss her from the tower!"

Again the sacerdotal voice was heard:

"A man has betrayed Malamut—he has played treason with the woman."

The verdict was swifter:

"Toss him—toss him to the bowl!"

"He is the dupe, the disciple of Halvad."

The name of the magician stirred their waiting silence to new thunders of decision. Halvad inspired fear, yet ferocity.

"He is in his observatory. What is your will of him?"

"Burn him—burn his castle!"

They were away, like the swarming of infuriated insects. The priests of the temple watched them go, and were gratified. Then they turned to the captives.

"Out with them—over the wall." they commanded, and certain among their number stepped forth for the task.

Halvad it was, who stood suddenly, miraculously, before the condemned pair, shielding their embrace from these doomsday men stretching forth envenomed hands.

The air was electric with exclamation.

"So goes all civilization," said Halvad, grimly. *"Centuries of progress leading to a moment of destruction. And usually, as now,"* (he smiled cynically as he glanced at the Earth Girl). *"usually the agent is a woman, and the agency that ancient impulse that destroys even as it perpetuates: the love of man for woman, woman for man."*

He turned, suddenly, fiercely, upon the Yeomen.

"Thou hast set them against my castle. They will use the flame in-

vented for the last war—the war that stopped all wars; the flame that crumbles walls of rock. Wait. . . . They cannot be stopped. Thou hast trained them too well with thy priestly superstitions. Presently, when the flames begin to mount—ah, they are rising. See. . . . Presently there shall emerge from the flame that which will destroy the city in a single blast. I had not intended it for this—Malamut is my witness—it was for the peaceful business of sounding the cosmic universe. . . . The tower—who can say whether the tower itself will not fall!"

They heard him mutely, and looked with a desperate awe upon the destruction of Halvad's laboratory.

A TREMOR, like the shock of colliding strata in geological upheavals, shook the tower. There was a lightning glimpse of the city, mangled, magically ruined, its marvels and majesties splintered into dissolute wreckage; then an appalling sound overwhelmed them—the sound of the catastrophe, arriving in belated confirmation of what their eyes had seen.

The tower stood.

Halvad, bearing the look of one utterly saddened, led them toward the room of the fiery shrine.

"Perhaps, after all, it was destiny, and no great fault of mine," he said. *"But what a trivial end for a mighty civilization."*

They watched him as he strode toward the bronze setting of the Malamutian jewel, flashing its cold, unbearable fire; they saw him mount the supporting circle of brass, and step into the flame. . . . They saw him vanish, saw the flame die, found themselves in a deathly darkness.

The walls of the tower trembled, disintegrating. The vast pile swayed, no longer tenanted by its supporting force. . . . The tower was falling. . . . falling . . .