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The Stone from the Moon

By
Otto Willi Gail



(Illustration by Paul)
He held a large condensing glass toward the sun and directed the brilliant focus of light on the water. . . . In a few seconds it steamed and in a flash the whole pool was boiling.

THE STONE FROM THE MOON
A Sequel to "The Shot Into Infinity"

CHAPTER I

As though impelled by some mysterious power, the slender form glides through the dense primeval forest of the lowlands of Yucatan.

With sure step the bare foot, protected only by soft sandals of untanned leather, moves from root to root. The slender brown hand bends aside the flowery garlands of lianas and the luxuriant parasitic growths. The pliant body of the dark-skinned woman slips easily through the labyrinth of creepers, ferns as high as trees, and perfumed orchids of many hues.

The rays of the sun, descending vertically at the Tropic of Cancor, find it hard to penetrate the dense leafy roof of the giant trees, countless ages old. A dull, greenish twilight lies beneath the mighty arboreal vault of nature, untouched by human hand. Moist air as in a hot-house rises from the never entirely dry ground of the lush forest, which sends forth the miasmas of fever. The motionless air is filled with an oppressive fragrance by the multitude of tropical flowers reaching from the luxuriant moss to the dome formed by the interlaced tree-tops.

The woman has no eyes for the splendor about her. Without looking around she glides and climbs on. She seems to know the way perfectly, for she does not pause even an instant to consider her course.

Then bright daylight appears through the less crowded tree-tops. Before her is still a hedge of thorny blackberries to surmount, after which the primeval forest recedes on both sides. A wide clearing flooded with dawning sunlight comes in view, strewn with fragments of white stone, which shimmer in the intense heat.

Here are the ruins of Uxmal, the sunken city of folklore, in the primeval forest of Mexico. . . .

There is a peculiar charm in these silent memorials of bygone civilizations—the high temple pyramids with the broad stone steps, the immense altars, and the richly sculptured columns. It is a sunken world, grown

over with waving grass and gay flowers.

In this rich city artists once wielded the chisel and the brush, beauty and ambition celebrated their triumphs, and warriors and statesmen directed destinies. Children were born, youth went a-wooing, and pleasure and pain wove the eternal fabric of life—but now the glory is vanished, and the men with all their hopes and desires are dust.

Only their mighty works outlive the makers and tell us of that dim prehistoric time. These still defy the winds of the ages. But the hour will come for them also, when they will again crumble into the dust of which they are made.

The altars are split asunder. Gigantic roots penetrate the walls and force out the blocks. Mighty trees of the primeval forest encircle the columns and lift the heavy masses from their pedestals with an irresistible force. Creepers embrace the architraves, send them crashing down from the cornices, and hold them fast to the ground with strong arms that clutch like an octopus.

Cyclops seem to have piled up the rough blocks of stone. Evaporating water, hurrying in a rind, and creeping plants are destroying the massive structures which seemed built for all eternity. . . .

With heaving breast the slender woman pauses a moment at the edge of the wood to listen. Nothing stirs. There is deep silence in the ruins. Only the croaking and whistling of monkeys and parrots playing in the tree-tops breaks the deathly stillness of the city of ruins.

The brown figure starts. Was not that the sound of a distant call, echoing in the woods?

Glancing obliquely downward, she bends forward, holding her breath to listen. . . .

It must have been some mistake, perhaps the unusually loud blow of a woodpecker. No strange sound comes through the breath of the forest, blended of a hundred murmurs.

Quickly she springs up, speeds over the stones, slips silently between the walls, a dark shadow at midday, like a ghost that cannot find repose in a thousand-year old grave.



OTTO WILLI GAIL

WE of the modern scientific age have a tendency to look with scorn upon the legends and folk-lore that are part of the literature of the various nations; we look upon them merely as part of local fairy tales without much basis of fact. But those investigators of the folk-lore of nations, especially archaeologists who have penetrated the ruins of the Mayas of Mexico, the ancient Egyptians, and others, have become convinced that many of these apparently fantastic tales have their bases in solid fact.

One of the most perplexing problems presented to archaeologists has been the marked similarity in the inscriptions, the literature, and the civilization of the Mayas of Mexico and the Egyptians. Separated by 3,000 miles of water, these people seem to have a common origin. And to make the mystery more complete, the water in between them—the great Atlantic—is believed by many to have been the location of that mysterious Atlantis which many stories tell us was the seat, thousands of years ago, of a great civilization. Archaeologists also are unable to explain the evidence of a past splendor of civilization among the now down-trodden and decadent Mayan Indians. But there is a story that many thousands of years ago Quetzalcoatl, a white god, descended from the skies to teach the Mayan Indians many of the wonderful things of science, and then, mysteriously, he disappeared. Certainly it is not an impossible assumption that some time in the dim remote past a visitor from another planet may have descended to teach these Indians many strange things. The possibilities in this theme are infinite and in this remarkable interplanetary story, Mr. Gail uses the available material in a most convincing manner and constructs a powerful and yet very charming story.

At a hedge encircling the foot of a high step-pyramid, she stops. Cautiously she parts the branches, mindful not to break a twig, which might betray the well-guarded spot to intrusive eyes. And suddenly the woman has vanished, as though swallowed up by the earth—as though the ghost had returned to the grave. She is gone!

With a gentle rustle the bushes close. Nothing disturbs the peace of the enchanted city in this primeval forest.

CHAPTER II

Stones and Dreams

"WILL you take hold, you damned scoundrels?" A hearty curse followed these rough words, and then the round face of the speaker shone in friendly benevolence.

Five powerful men were leaning so hard on the crowbar that the iron bent. But the immense stone did not budge.

"Never mind, Patson!" A clear, fresh voice sounded above the panting of the men. "We can't get it that way!"

Patson looked up with a snort. Sweat was dripping from his massive forehead, now glistening with moisture. "It's a shame, Mr. Burns! With a couple of sturdy Irish lads we could heave that block up to the moon, if necessary. But these lazy Indians haven't any muscles in their arms. What they can't carry on their heads stays put. These chaps are limp and lazy, so that—"

"Be careful, Pat!" whispered Burns to his angry comrade. "Even if it's a blessing that your chubby angled face doesn't match your mood, you can never tell how much these people know of our language."

Patson grunted and again turned to the stubborn block. The four laborers stood around in dull indifference and stared stolidly at the crowbar with their deep-set black eyes. They were ragged, dark brown figures, with brutish faces almost unrecognizable from dirt, with very prominent cheek bones and wide low foreheads.

"The thing to do," said Sir William Burns, "is to have the earth dug away all around the block. It seems to have sunk pretty deep into the soft ground."

Pat scratched his head. "I guess that'll be the best way, sir, but it'll be the longest."

"Well! Just take care when you turn it over that the inscriptions don't get scratched. Of course the block had to fall with the inscription side down, worse luck!"

The archaeologist walked slowly around the immense stone and carefully measured it. "The dimensions agree exactly. This block must be the missing central piece of the cornice of King Koh's altar."

Pat leaned carelessly on his crowbar. "I guess good Queen Moh never demanded chaps like these gallowbirds would some day be fingering the altar of her murdered brother and royal consort!"

"How long will it take you to get the stone free?"

"At least an hour, I should say, sir."

Burns looked at his watch. "Then I'll take a look at the temple at the southeast corner in the meantime, it seems to be an exact copy of the step-pyramid of Chohola." He turned to go. "One more thing, Pat. If I'm delayed, just take an impression of the inscription while you're waiting. Good-bye."

The slender, youthful figure of the scientist vanished at once among the confused heaps of ancient ruins.

Slowly, pacing the distances, Sir William Burns strolled around the steep pyramid.

"Thirty meters on a side at the base," he murmured at the second corner. He wrote down the number and went on. At the next corner he stopped in surprise. The road was blocked by a high wall overgrown with moss, which apparently enclosed a temple court adjoining the main structure. Thick and impenetrable cactus growth made it impossible to follow the wall.

He drew back a short distance and gazed at the vast structure, the five stories of which were in terrace formation, each successive one being smaller than the one below. In the lowest story he could see no opening by which he could reach the interior. The numerous windows of the upper stories could be reached only by way of the rotten ladders leading from the first platform.

At the north side the shrubbery surrounding the foot of the pyramid was thicker and formed a sort of network which would probably support a man. It was so high that if he stood on it he might perhaps be able to grasp the edge of the terrace and climb up to it. With quick decision Burns began climbing the slender, swaying branches.

Swinging in the insecure network of wild aycareos and creepers, he extended his arm. He was within a few inches of the projecting cornice, when the twigs gave way. He could get no adequate hold on the rough stones. For a moment he kept his balance high up in the air, then came crashing down, tearing his hands on thorns and jagged edges of stones and striking the ground violently.

For a while he lay as though stunned. Then consciousness returned. He looked about in confusion. He was wedged in between the base of the wall and the thick hedge which adjoined it, and every movement entangled him still more in the mass of thorns and tore his clothing to shreds.

He bent down and cautiously crawled a little way in the narrow space between the wall and the hedge, seeking eagerly for a more open space, where he might cut his way out with his pocket-knife. In passing his hand along the wall at his right, he suddenly found a hole! There was a low opening in the wall, large enough to admit a man!

Without hesitation he crept into the dark hole. He found himself in a damp passage-way, just high enough to allow him to walk in a stooping position. He carefully groped his way forward by feeling of the side walls. The slippery ground made a sudden descent, then ran level for about twenty meters, and again descended steeply to the opening. On looking up Burns saw a gleam of light before him, revealing the exit.

"Good Heavens!" he exclaimed, as he emerged into the light of day. He stood rooted to the spot, his eyes wide with wonder as he gazed fixedly at the magic picture before him.

The Tree of Life

IN the centre of the almost empty court stood an immense evergreen oak—in itself a rarity in these hot lowlands. The strange silhouette of the age-old gnarled tree contrasted sharply with the bright stone buildings standing about it. Just below the thick, rounded top two great stumps of branches stood out at the same height, like mighty arms which sought to support the leafy roof. It was a natural cross! No fresh growth had budged on the dried-up cross-bar which was shaded by the thick tree-top.

"The tree of life!" whispered Burns in sudden uneasiness. "The cross of the Toltecs!"

At the foot of the oak lay a woman. Half kneeling, she was clasping with both arms the weather-beaten trunk. Her eyes were turned aside, as though she listened to spirit voices from the depths. She lay motionless, with parted lips, a figure as gracefully slender as a gazelle. The sunbeams cast a bright bluish gleam on her long black hair, making her bare shoulders shine like bronze, and caressing the slender hands and tiny feet which peeped from beneath the folds of her garment.

Burns stood breathless, his eyes devouring the beautiful brown woman at the foot of the tree of life. She seemed to him a mere phanton, the product of his fevered imagination, a fairy dream, which would vanish if he moved.

"Moh, the fabulous brown Queen Moh, has arisen and returned to her native land!"

Had he merely thought it or had he spoken aloud? The woman started and raised her splendid head to listen. Almost at the same moment a short, sharp cry rang out over the ruins and died away after echoing across the brilliant sunlit court. The brown woman had perceived the intruder. She sprang up and waited like a cat, ready to leap. There was fire in her great black eyes.

Burns walked slowly forward, while the Indian woman drew back.

"Has beautiful Queen Moh returned from the distant land of the Nile?" he said slowly, as though under a charm. He spoke the language of the Maya Indians of Yucatan.

"Queen Moh lies at the bottom of the great ocean!"

What a resonance there was in this splendid voice from the past! There was a scale of tones in every word, cooling like the love-notes of the wild doves.

An irresistible desire to hear more of this voice impelled the Englishman to speak further. "Then the stones must lie!" he said.

"What do the stones tell you of the Queen of the Mayas?"

The ringing words, the proud and yet pliant and feline attitude of the speaker confused and excited Burns. This Indian woman produced an unaccountable effect on him. He replied as though in a dream:

"The stones in the land of the red children of Zeos tell the same story as the stones in the realm of Ammon-Ra; the hapless Queen Moh, grieving over the murder of her brother and husband, King Koh, fled from the peninsula of Yucatan across the wide sea and after a long journey reached the fertile land of the Nile. There she erected to the memory of her lamented consort a splendid monument exactly like the tomb of Chichen-Itza. Both are surmounted by stone leopards with human faces."

"Do the dead stones tell you all this?"

"They tell even more! Queen Moh brought to the nations far over the sea the art of Chichen-Itza and Uxmal. Therefore she was highly honored in Egypt, and was later even adored as the goddess Isis."

The girl shook her head. "You are mistaken. Queen Moh sailed out over the sea to seek the land of Mu, which lay far to the east, and from which formerly the white savior had come to us. She did not find it, for the beautiful land of Mu had already been engulfed by the waves. Good Queen Moh sank with her ships into the depths of the ocean. She never reached the land of the whites."

The assurance with which the Indian girl spoke embarrassed the scientist. Strange to say, he was unable to regard her story as merely a legend. He felt that

the conviction of this beautiful creature must be well founded. But how?

"How does the lovely flower of Uxmal know all this?"

"Stones lie—dreams alone are true!" replied the girl, reflectively.

"Then you have dreamed of Queen Moh?" asked Burns in amazement.

"I—I don't know. My mother tells me much, day by day."

"Where does your mother live?"

"In the fields of Zeos. Her body has long been resting in the earth."

"And still she speaks to you?" The scientist drew back a step in astonishment.

"She often speaks to me. I don't hear her words, but I understand what she says to me. I have forgotten much of it. Many times it awakes again in my soul and then vanishes anew. My mother's words come and go—I do not know."

"Didn't she also tell you of the beautiful and fertile land of Mu, which the poor queen sought and did not find?"

"The land of Mu?" The Indian woman hesitated, as though searching in her mind. "From the land of Mu came Quetzalcoatl, the white savior, to the Mayas and Toltecs, when there was still eternal springtime, and no rainy season and dry season divided the year. His face was white, and from his cheeks flowed a long yellow beard. On his brow shone the sacred sign of life. He was as noble as the sun, and he taught the red children of Zeos to build stone temples and houses. But the frightful war-god Huitzilopochtli hated him and aroused the mountain tribes against him. The white savior had no love for battle, and left the land of the Mayas. But before he returned to his own land of Mu, he performed a miracle. With a throw of his hand he cast a great dart into an ancient oak, in such way that its end stood out on both sides of the trunk. The two ends of the dart at once swelled out and became as thick as the trunk itself. Thus originated the sacred sign of the cross, which came from the land of Mu."

"And the land of Mu itself?"

"Of the land of Mu I know nothing. One day, when the dart in the tree of life begins to sprout, the white savior will return again, and will bring peace to all nations. Then, too, the land of Mu shall rise again from the bottom of the sea."

Sir William is Perplexed

THE scientist looked thoughtfully at the thousand-year old tree, which bore in its trunk the dart of Quetzalcoatl, in the form of the sacred sign of the cross. This oak might of course have owed its unusual shape to accident and the imagination of the simple people might have woven the touching story about it. A tree from dim primitive times, from the time of Quetzalcoatl, could not possibly exist anywhere on earth. And yet—the Indian girl's story agreed in many respects with his basic investigation of inscriptions.

Could it really be mere chance that almost all civilized nations on earth know and honor the cross? The tree of life of the Mayas, the cross of Christ, the Nile-key of the Pharaohs, the hieroglyph of life, the holy sign of the Brahmins—could all these have resulted from merely playful fancy? And if these multifarious signs, all of which have in common the basic figure of the cross, pointed to one and the same source, what was this source?

Was it Quetzalcoatl, the emissary of the fabulous land of Mu, swallowed up by the ocean?

Burns kept hitting again and again upon the same thought, however little it could be proved on the basis of concrete discovery. But what of those words: "Stones lie, dreams alone are true?"

"Who are you, strange maid of the primeval forest?" he asked, with unconcealed astonishment in his eyes.

"My mother called me Tuxtla."*

There was a soft sound to the word "Tuxtla," as it came from the woman's lips.

"And who is your father?"

"He was a white man, like yourself, sir! I am a Ladina."

She was a mestiza then, the daughter of a white Mexican and a native woman. Burns had suspected it. The well-developed figure and the keen mind of Tuxtla suggested a blending of races.

"Where do you live, Tuxtla, and what are you doing here in the ruins of Uxmal?"

"I cannot tell you that. Ask no more questions, sir, and withdraw from the place of the sacred tree!"

This command, expressed in a tone of entreaty, allowed no contradiction. But, Burns could not refrain from asking one more question.

"Just tell me, Tuxtla, is there in the neighborhood a hacienda in which I and my five men can find shelter for a few days?"

"Are you one of those Englishmen who are stirring up the graves of Uxmal?" A harsh vertical furrow appeared on Tuxtla's beautiful brow.

"I am Sir William Burns—from the Archaeological Institute in London!" he added. Then he suddenly felt the ridiculousness of a formal introduction to this mestiza.

"Go back the way you came! At the edge of the forest you will find a game-run, which will take you through the woods to an open grove of cypresses. Go half a league to the south from there, and you will see shining in the distance the white horse of Don Pedro de la Cosa."

"Thank you, Tuxtla, thank you! But—when and where shall I see you again?"

"Do not seek me, sir, and then you will find me! Now go!"

There was a strange and almost mockingly cruel smile on the intoxicatingly beautiful face. An imperative gesture bade the Englishman depart. And he obeyed.

At the opening of the passage he turned again. The mighty tree of life stood silent. The thick shadow of a high wall fell across the trunk, which stretched out the stumps of its branches menacingly, as though the cross were waiting the patient Redeemer.

A sudden uneasiness came over the scientist. "Tuxtla!" he cried in a low, anxious voice.

Nothing stirred. The mestiza had vanished without leaving a trace.

CHAPTER III

The House of *de la Cosa*

THE long shadows of evening lay on the terrace of the solitary white house. The glowing heat of the day had given place to mild winds which were bringing soft, perfumed air from the forest.

The three men were comfortably stretched out in easy chairs, pleasantly blowing rings of smoke from

their black Havana cigars. The dinner table had been cleared. An elderly shrunken woman who appeared to be German was passing around cold lemonade, sugarcane liquor, and the inevitable *palmas*. Afterward she uttered a timid "Goodnight, gentlemen," curtseied, and withdrew.

"See, gentlemen," said the tall sinewy Mexican, whose raw silk riding suit shone in the twilight, "as far as you can look over the plantations there is almost nothing but agave. The last harvest was meager. The price of raw sisal went up very high and spurred people on to grow agave. Now everyone is relying on them."

He held his cigar as high as his eyes—with his well-trained little finger standing far out to the side—and examined the burning end thoughtfully.

"I don't grow much myself," he went on evenly. "I buy the crops of the small *rancheros* and the Mayas. Naturally these people cannot establish markets for themselves. They don't need to. For centuries the export has been taken care of by the house of *de la Cosa*. My agents are in every seaport in the world; and in every place where sisal and dyewood are handled the name of *de la Cosa* stands first."

Sir William Burns was silent. He did not know what to say, and the conversation would have come to a halt, if the ever-ready Patson had not taken a hand.

The conversation of the egotistical merchant was intolerable to Burns. Politeness demanded that he should take part in it. But for hours Don Pedro had been talking of agaves, tobacco, sape, coffee, sugar-cane, and cotton. It bored the archaeologist to have to listen to his bragging and pretend an interest in it.

The magically sweet summer evening invited dreams—dreams of old stories and tales which are connected with ruins, and which on moonlight nights reveal themselves to sensitive hearts. On such night the stones speak. The rulers and priests arise from their graves and tell of war and victory, of guilt and atonement. The cares and desires of the present shrink to nothing before the mighty voice of eternity.

Why had he given up his old stepping-place in the abandoned Maya hut? It had offered him of comfort than this hacienda of Don Pedro, which was actually luxurious according to local standards. But there he could have worked undisturbed and devoted himself to his thoughts. And here? Since the day before, Burns and Patson had been guests at the house of *de la Cosa*, and they had not had a single free hour. The perfect Spanish-Mexican politeness bade the host devote himself to his guests, surround them with attentions—and rob them completely of their freedom.

Burns kept deciding to break away and flee to the solitude of the ruined city. But deciding was as far as he got. There was a power which held him here—the words of Tuxtla, who had directed him hither: "Do not seek me, sir, and then you will find me!"

Who was this beautiful woman at the tree of life? Was she only a dream at bright midday? An inscription which had taken bodily form? A phantom?

His whole being was affected by this experience. The image of Tuxtla was indelibly impressed on his mind.

He had not ventured to question Don Pedro about Tuxtla. What could the answer be? An astonished smile—a sideways glance from lowered lids at the English peer who was interested in a mestiza—a polite shrug of the shoulders—silence—and then more talk of agaves, sugar-cane, Campeche wood, . . .

Burns waited for a pause in Don Pedro's long-

* Pronounced *Tuxtla*.

winded remarks and then arose. The Mexican seemed to guess the purpose of his guest. "May I propose a short walk in the garden?" he said with an engaging smile.

Without waiting for an answer, he clapped his hands. Black Mingo came running up.

"Cloaks and lanterns!" The order sounded like a gust of wind and sent the servant speeding back again immediately.

Burns was incensed. "Thank you very much for your attention!" he said with suppressed wrath. "I should like very much to enjoy a bit of the evening in the open. But I will under no circumstances bother you, Don Pedro. I can find my way all right alone."

Of the Señorita

The hacendero bowed. "But, gentlemen, it is a pleasure for me to be able to show you the most beautiful spots of the hacienda by moonlight. I am entirely at your disposal."

Further resistance would have been a deadly insult. Unwillingly Burns let Mingo put on him the customary carbonaro cloak of the country. Japanese lanterns, carried by servants, swayed before the gentlemen like dancing fireflies.

The neatly hedged walks wound in arabesques through the rolling lawns, the rustling mimosa and the palm groves. Here and there arched wooden bridges crossed little artificial ponds and brooks, which glittered in the moonlight. The hoarse croaking of the bullfrogs, suggesting the monstrous splashing of rain, served but to emphasize the silence of the night. Don Pedro relieved his guests of the necessity of conversing.

They had not gone far when they heard the pattering of bare feet on the pebbly path. A breathless voice called behind them:

"Massa! Massa Don Pedro!"

It was Mingo, who came up panting. His long arms waved in the air like a wind-blown scarecrow.

Don Pedro stopped with a curse. "You dare to disturb my guests? You black brat of a mangy dog!"

Mingo seemed accustomed to such titles. "Pardon me, Massa," he whispered in his negro Spanish, timidly, "the Señorita. . . ."

"Be still, you beast!" Don Pedro raised his hand as if to strike. "I don't wish to hear anything. March back to the house!"

Mingo sneaked away a few paces.

The wrath of the Mexican was incomprehensible to Burns. "A spineless race, these negroes," he thought. "They cringe like whipped dogs before any whim, and then lick the hand that beats them!"

He came near missing the fact that Don Pedro turned to him and said in a tone of forced politeness: "Pardon this interruption, Sir William! These people are badly brought up and get too few whippings."

Mingo stood trembling a short distance away.

"Don't you suppose, Don Pedro," answered the archaeologist, "that it would be simpler to receive the servant's message and hear what the trouble is? It may be some important business affair. Mingo seems to be doing only his duty."

The words had a colder sound than Burns had intended. They sounded like a reproach. The black man looked at the speaker in amazement.

"There is nothing in the world more important to me at this moment than the contentment of my guests!" The hacendero bowed politely and took a few steps

forward, as though inviting them to continue their walk.

"Well, sir!" said Burns calmly. "You will increase our contentment, if you do not burden us with the responsibility of having in some way influenced your domestic affairs." With quick resolution he took his assistant by the arm and walked on rapidly. The darkness hid the surprised and almost hostile look which Don Pedro sent after his guests.

The Englishmen walked ahead quickly, to get out of hearing as soon as possible. Resounding blows and pitiful crying could be heard among the trees, proving that the hacendero was airing his displeasure.

"Did you hear, Sir William?" began Patson softly. He convinced himself that no one was following them, and then went on: "Mingo was speaking of the Señorita."

Burns did not reply. He was vexed, though he told himself that all this did not concern him.

"What kind of Señorita is it, of whom Mingo was speaking?" Patson commenced again, after a while. "It's certainly remarkable that we haven't been introduced to the lady of the house."

"Up to the present I haven't observed that there was any lady living in the hacienda except Mrs. Stulp, this German housekeeper. Perhaps it's the custom here to keep the ladies hidden from the guests."

"Well!" remarked Patson, thoughtfully. "It seems to me as though Don Pedro wanted to keep us from hearing the servant's message. There must have been more reasons for that than simply custom."

"Don't forget that custom counts here more than religion! After all, what business is it of ours?"

"I don't know. It seems to me as though. . . ." The Irishman stopped suddenly. A shadow appeared.

"Who's there?" cried Burns.

"It's just stupid bad Mingo!" said the oily voice of the negro. "Can Mingo come closer, massa?"

"Come here, Mingo! What's the matter?" Burns went a few steps toward the servant.

"Oh, Massa English is good. Massa had kind words for poor Mingo." He turned his body like a dog wagging its tail.

"Never mind that, Mingo! Have you a message for us?" asked Burns, shortly.

"Massa Don Pedro begs a thousand pardons. An unexpected event has called him back to the house. Mingo is to see what Massa English wants and. . . ."

"What else?"

With hesitation Mingo finished his sentence: "And say that Mingo got five blows from a cane."

Burns was disgusted.

"What's the matter with the Señorita?" put in Patson. "An accident?"

"Oh, Señorita Isabella is ill, very ill. Señora Estulp got scared an' sent Mingo to Massa Don Pedro. But Mingo must not speak of the Señorita. Massa Don Pedro does not wish it." He humbly folded his arms.

Patson whistled. "Is there a doctor here?" asked Burns.

"Massa never got a doctor from Tical when the Señorita had fits."

"Then Señorita Isabella is often ill?"

"Massa English won't tell on Mingo? If Massa Don Pedro learns that Mingo has told about Señorita Isabella, poor Mingo will get ten times ten blows." He rubbed his back with both hands, as though already feeling the fresh stripes.

"You may be sure that we will keep still, Mingo!" said Patson, assuringly.

A Warning

MINGO came closer to the Englishmen and whispered shyly, holding his hand beside his mouth: "Señorita Isabella often has an evil spirit. To-day things are very bad. Her eyes are turned up, and the spirit speaks from her mouth many words which Mingo cannot understand."

He put his hand to his cheek and rolled his eyes frightfully, to give pictorial emphasis to his story.

Burns was troubled at spying thus on his host. It seemed to him unworthy to find out thus the secrets of the hacienda de la Cosa. He prevented further questions by the inquisitive Patson by saying to Mingo:

"Now go, Mingo! Inform your master that we are well and that we wish him a pleasant evening."

The negro ran away. But he soon stopped and came back slowly and hesitantly. "Is Massa English angry if Mingo says something more?"

Before Burns could make an unwilling reply, Mingo went on quickly: "Massa English is digging over there in the stones of Uxmal. Mingo must warn Massa." The negro's voice became impressive in its well-meant anxiety. "A very, very evil spirit lives in Xlapak. It will enter Massa English and make good Massa ill—oh, as ill as the Señorita!"

* * * * *

In the hacienda everyone was still sound asleep when Burns set out the next morning with his little group of men. In order to be able to get to work again, freed from interruption, he had left a note for Don Pedro, telling him that he would spend the day in the ruins and would return on the evening.

The morning dew on the grass was shining in the oblique rays of the sun, which was just coming above the horizon. The harsh chirping of the crickets blended with the deep buzzing of the bees and the shrill singing of the mosquitoes to make the cheerful morning-song of the rolling meadows. The turf had a penetrating earthy smell.

Here and there the first workers in the fields might be seen. They leisurely plodded along through the plantations and glanced from under their broad-brimmed pointed hats at the sun, as though wishing to convince themselves that another working day had actually arrived. They wore weather-beaten caps of all colors—many broad-headed Mayas, a few light negroes, and some with unmistakably Mongolian features. Mostly, however, they were blends of all shades—mestizos, mulattos, zambos, creoles, and so on—types of such involved ancestry that the cleverest ethnologist could scarcely have classified them.

The edge of the primeval forest, which hid the ruined city, lay black in the north. Patson interrupted his churning on the cold breakfast to ask:

"What shall we undertake to-day?"

"First, the step-pyramid, of course!" replied Burns quickly, breaking off a long spear of grass to brush away the flies. "I found a temple court there which promises all sorts of interesting things."

The archaeologist's ill-burner of the previous evening had disappeared. He watched the dawning day with the joy of anticipated work.

"Yes, you spoke of the tree of life of the Toltecs!"

"You will be amazed, Pat! It is no symbolic stone representation. No, it is the living oak of Quetzalcoatl, bearing his thickened dart in the trunk."

"Strange!" replied Patson thoughtfully. "How odd do you suppose the oak is?"

"Certainly less odd than the temple. Probably later generations of priests planted the tree and kept it

hedge-d and cared for it and cut it, until it took on the form of the sacred sign and could be shown to the people as the wonderful tree of Quetzalcoatl. These Toltecs must have had six heads and a determined will, and their civilization was certainly not inferior to that of the Pharaohs. It is too bad that so few inscriptions and buildings remain."

"For that we may thank the glorious predecessors of our famous Don Pedro. Why, he claims that he is a descendant of that Juan de la Cosa who landed on Watling's Island with Columbus four centuries ago." Patson took off his hat and wiped the sweat-band with his handkerchief.

"That may be so! But the insistence with which he stresses his Caucasian descent and his pride in his white skin are actually suspicious. You know, Pat, how in this land of blended races people defend their Castilian blood—the more violently, the less they have of it. That the stock of de la Cosa was at one time invigorated with Indian blood is proved by the bluish lips of our charming host. However that may be, he is a worthy representative of his distinguished fore-runners. Even if Columbus's discovery was incontestably an advance in civilization, what the civilized Spaniards and Portuguese took upon themselves to do in the new world was the worst barbarism."

"In the hearts of the peaceful Mayas and Toltecs there remained unquenched the touching hope for the return of the white savior, Quetzalcoatl, the bright son of the gods, who should make them noble men and women. What was more natural for these red children of nature than to take the Spanish conquistadors for the emissaries of Quetzalcoatl and to throw themselves to the ground in shy reverence of the white strangers?"

Burns stood still in his eagerness. "Doubtless no nation ever had so cruel a disappointment! I do not know which was more terrible—the Spanish and Portuguese adventurers, greedy for gold, who in brutal cruelty and tricky cunning plundered the Maya realm with fire and sword—or the fanatics of civilization. For the latter saw in the heathen stone crosses, which greeted them from all the hills, a deception of the devil to mock Christendom, and in their narrow-mindedness utterly wiped out all that they could not comprehend!"

A Reappearance

BURNS leaned against a mighty white-barked baobab and waited for the red laborers, who were slowly trotting along. His glance went back to the white building of the hacienda, from the chimneys of which fine columns of smoke rose and wavered in the air. The buildings were surrounded by an impenetrable cactus hedge instead of a fence. A lively mass was pressing through the open gate. Coming out with their mule-trains and driving the little long-eared beasts ahead with cries audible far away were the mounted pons.

A single rider broke away from the crowd and quickly came nearer. The yellow mare sped over the fields at such speed that the dark mane stood straight out. The rider sat firmly and surely in the gently swaying saddle, bending forward and stroking the neck of the splendid animal. The horse swept along, galloped by, and went on with its nose close to the ground which was shaken by its hoof-beats.

"Hats off!" cried Patson enthusiastically. "That is what I call speed! Did you see, sir? It was a girl! Probably no one else than the mysterious Señorita!" He stepped beside Burns and gazed entranced after

the slender rider. "But she must have recovered quickly. Yesterday she was possessed by an evil spirit, and very early this morning she is on horseback and apparently completely recovered!"

Burns did not reply. With trembling hand he grasped the white tree-trunk.

"Quite a girl, isn't she?" said Patson with a grin. But when he looked into his chief's face, he started back in amazement.

"But, Sir William, what is the matter with you? You look as pale as the mummy of Tutankhamen! Are you ill?"

Burns's fingers grasped his assistant's arm. "Who was that, Pat?" he panted. His eyes glowed feverishly. He saw only waving black hair—a slender brown girlish figure—a firm little hand holding the reins.

In surprise Patson stammered: "I imagine that it was Seforita Isabella, sir. Why are you so excited?"

"That was no white woman," murmured Burns. "The sun of Yucatan burns all faces brown." Patson gave a careful sideways glance at the excited scientist. Then he watched the rider.

"She is turning at the edge of the forest. See, she is coming back!"

Again the horse sped on, coming nearer and nearer. Then—it stumbled, its knees giving way. A sharp fall at the bridle stopped it. For a moment the front legs thrust forward into the air. Then came a mighty bound forward. The rider wavered in the saddle.

"For Heaven's sake, she is falling!" cried Patson. Burns was already racing toward the site of the accident. The mare galloped past the Englishmen. The saddle was empty. Close to the baobab the horse stopped, with heaving sides.

The rider was lying in the grass. She lifted her head a little, and when she saw the two Englishmen hastening up, she sank back with a smile of satisfaction and triumph.

Burns found the girl lying apparently unconscious on the ground, with her eyes closed. Thoughtfully he regarded the delicate face, crowned with luxuriant black hair, the tightly compressed full lips, the elegant English riding habit of the latest style, which enclosed her slender body.

Patson unscrewed the top of his flask and rubbed the temples of the unconscious girl with alcohol. Slowly the long silken lashes parted, and the great dark eyes wandered about searchingly.

"That was a bad fall, Seforita!" said Burns, bending low over the girl. "Can you stand up?"

A quick glance met the eyes of the scientist. "Thank you for your kind help, Señor!" said the girl dully. "I am already getting better. Just a little headache. I must have fallen on my head."

Burns started. This voice! At last he heard it again, this deep and yet soft voice from the olden times, sounding like the cooing of a dove. His arm trembled when he embraced the girl's warm body and carefully raised her. Scarcely was the girl on her feet, when she released herself and carefully, gracefully removed a few bits of grass from her jacket. She did not appear to have been injured by her fall.

"Did I frighten you, Señors?" Her pearly teeth shone in a gay laugh.

Was this Tuxtla? Was this elegant tanned Mexican girl, speaking fluently pure Spanish and apparently enjoying the amazement of the Englishman, the girl of the wilderness, the reincarnation of the Maya Queen Moh?

"It might have been had!" remarked Patson cheer-

fully. "You have had fortune in misfortune, Seforita!"

"Have I the pleasure of thanking Sir William Burns and Mr. Patson, the guests of my brother?"

Burns collected himself. "There is no occasion for thanks," he replied, struggling with his embarrassment. "It is an honor for us to become finally acquainted with the beautiful sister of our splendid host."

"Finally?" The girl smiled sweetly. "Last evening I just returned from a—a trip, and this morning I was not alert enough to greet you before your very early start. Don Pedro will be inconceivable that he did not wish you good morning."

"Our work is pressing, Seforita Isabella. I did not want to disturb Don Pedro, and . . ."

"You know my name?" interrupted the Mexican girl. The dark eyes under the golden yellow brows shone half surprised, half ironical.

Burns bit his lips. "It seems to me, Seforita, as though we had already met somewhere before," he said evasively, yet desirous of an answer.

"It is possible," replied Isabella indifferently. "I often come to Merida. Perhaps it was on the Corso at the Plaza Mayor? Excuse my bad memory!"

"No, not in Merida!" said the Englishman uncertainly. "Here, not far from the hacienda. . . ." Suddenly it struck him as ridiculous to connect Seforita Isabella de la Cruz with the Indian girl Tuxtla, and he hastily added, "It was probably a mistake, a chance resemblance!"

Again Isabella smiled. "And was my double also named Isabella?"

A Family Scene

FOR a moment she enjoyed the embarrassment of the scientist, who was vainly racking his brain for a sensible reply. Then she gave a low call. The mare trotted up and rubbed her muzzle against her mistress's arm. Before Burns could aid her, she was in the saddle. She bent over, pulled at the laces of her riding boots, and got the ends together.

"Señor Burns," she cooed, "please help me a little! The horse is so restless."

Eagerly the scientist came to her aid, glad to escape further questions.

"Here, Señor! The lacing has slipped out. Yes here! Please make it tight!"

Holding the pommel of the saddle firmly with one hand, the beautiful girl bent down. Her sweet breath caressed his cheek and sent his blood pouring into his temples. In excitement, with awkward fingers, he pulled the laces below the well-shaped knee which shone through the thin silk stocking. For a moment longer he held the little foot of the girl in his hand, his eyes fixed on hers. Was he mistaken, or was there really in those dark depths a touch of softening and yielding?

But Isabella straightened up. A hissing call sent the horse away. With a cheery laugh she waved back to him. Burns stood looking after her, lost in dreams, but Patson brought him back to reality by a friendly dig in the ribs.

Isabella was lying on a high point, behind a clump of agaves and high ferns. The mare was grazing close by. The reins hung loose to the ground. No rope would have held the splendid beast as securely as a light call from its mistress.

Isabella, her slim neck stretched forward, was peep-

ing through the confusion of leaves into the distance. Far off, at the edge of the primitive wood, dark points were moving slowly, four of them in a row and two together ahead. It was the Englishman's expedition.

Which of the two dots was Burns? This sturdy man with the leamed face and the bright blue eyes, looking clever and energetic and yet boyishly dreamy! Could one person have so firm a will and yet such kindly understanding? Had Quetzalcoatl looked thus, the stranger who had come from the sea-girt land of Mu to bring freedom and peace to the nations? Or was it perhaps Votan, the earth-born companion of the savior, the sturdy colonizer, compelling his foes by his shrewd kindness?

Isabella compressed her lips. Her nostrils trembled like the nostrils of a thoroughbred horse that scents his master. Suddenly she laughed aloud. What would Don Pedro say, if he knew that the strange man had leant her boot, which after all. . . .

A warning snort of the mare warned Isabella. She started a little. Behind her stood Don Pedro with his arms crossed. His brow was gloomy. There were vertical wrinkles on his low forehead, shaded by the wide sombrero. In this pose his very thin body with the long withered legs was unexpectably laughable.

"The jailer!" thought Isabella, shuddering as if she felt a slight chill. "Good morning, Pedro," she said with an effort. "Is everything all right?"

"Where have you been?" The question sounded rude and discourteous, coming from lips accustomed to command.

"My brother is so concerned with me that he neglects his duties toward his guests," she answered, slightly mockingly.

Don Pedro stamped his foot on the ground so hard that his immense spurs rang. "Did you speak with the caballerías?" It sounded like a cross-examination.

Isabella looked at her long slender hand and the finger-nails which had a yellowish glint. "The gentlemen were very happy to meet the sister of their kind host," she replied calmly.

The Mexican's face was strangely distorted. "Didn't I forbid you to do so?" he hissed angrily.

Isabella quickly jumped up. Her dark eyes flashed. "A *de la Cosa* cannot be forbidden, Señor!"

"How ugly he looks!" she thought at the same time. In amazement the *hacendado* stepped back. The sudden resistance surprised him. "I do not know a *de la Cosa*! Only a. . . ."

"Are you ashamed of your sister, Pedro?" interrupted the girl bitterly. "Does not the blood of your father flow in my veins, also? Are you ashamed of your own blood?"

Don Pedro laughed scornfully. "The gentlemen would have felt it a great honor to have been greeted by a *metizta* as the lady of the house!" he cried angrily.

Isabella was again the yielding woman. "Señor Burns leant the *metizta's* shoe." She looked sideways at the *hacendero*.

"I shall take steps to prevent a repetition of this occurrence!" said the man with icy coldness.

"Then it is war between us, Pedro!"

"War?" repeated the *hacendero* contemptuously. "One does not wage war with the brains of Indians, one chastises them."

Isabella wanted to cry out and seize her tormentor by the throat. But she clenched her teeth. Silently she gazed with her great eyes into her brother's dis-

torted face. Gradually the expression of infinite grief vanished from the corner of her mouth, and from under her lowered lids shone only hate and desperation.

Don Pedro shrugged his shoulders and turned away. "You made me a lady!" screamed Isabella in passionate excitement. "I cannot go back, Pedro. I will not—do you hear—I will not. . . ."

Violent sobs shook the slender brown body. "I will not—I will not. . . ." the trembling lips groaned again and again.

Don Pedro went back to the hacienda whistling. After a brief and violent conversation with Frau Stulp, the German housekeeper, he had his horse saddled and galloped off toward Tlax.

CHAPTER IV

An Odd Tale

"MANY thousand years ago the lands of Central America were covered by the ocean.

At that time our moon was not in the sky. Another star then encircled the earth as nightly luminous, and it was much closer than the present moon. By its attraction it pulled the oceans of the earth together at the equator and heaped them up into a mighty flood which rose higher and higher, the closer the satellite came to the earth. Only mountain peaks and very high plateaus rose above the floods. You know the Indian myth, very wide-spread in Central America, of the great water of prehistoric times. It was then that there were made the puzzling holes and inscriptions in steep rocky walls inaccessible to tide.

"Closer and closer came the satellite, red as glowing iron. The mountains shook and the seas boiled. Horror seized mankind, and with sacrifices and prayers men tried to banish the evil spirit which had come from space to devour the earth. But the gods remained deaf to their pleas.

"Closer came the speeding star in its path around the earth, until the mutual attraction became so great that it burst into fragments. A hot scorching storm swept over the lands and seas of the tropics, the light of the sun grew pale, and an ocean of blood and flame filled the sky. A hail of fire fell incessantly and destroyed all living things.

"The masses of water heaped up at the equator, now free from the attraction of the shattered satellite, flooded the earth to the poles, its deluge destroying in the north and south what had been spared by the conflagration in the tropics."

Burns stopped, lighted a cigar, and leaned back in his chair. He slowly blew the fragrant smoke into the night air.

Mrs. Stulp was softly clicking her knitting needles. Now and then she moved uneasily on her chair and squinted over at the old full-blooded Indian woman who sitting apart in the grass in stolid indolence stared at the dwelling house.

Isabella lay idly in the hammock, listening attentively to the scientist's story.

"Three human beings," he went on, "were surprised by the frightful catastrophe in the open, far from any settlement. They were a tall white-bearded old man, a little seven-year old girl, and a young woman carrying an unborn child. The old man kept stying about for a place of refuge. As far as he could see, an insupportable sea of flame was rushing toward him. At the foot of a gnarled evergreen oak a spring came from the hot soil, sending its water high into the top

of the mighty tree and thus protecting it from the scorching heat.

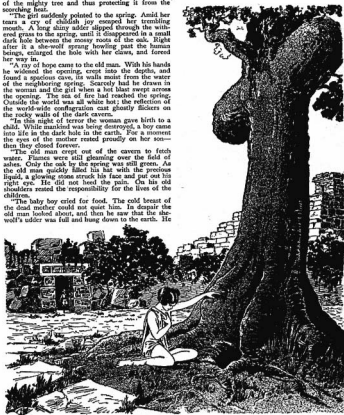
"The girl suddenly pointed to the spring. Amid her tears a cry of childish joy escaped her trembling mouth. A long shiny adder slipped through the withered grass to the spring, until it disappeared in a small dark hole between the mossy roots of the oak. Right after it a she-wolf sprang howling past the human beings, enlarged the hole with her claws, and forced her way in.

"A ray of hope came to the old man. With his hands he widened the opening, crept into the depths, and found a spacious cave, its walls moist from the water of the neighboring spring. Scarcely had he drawn in the woman and the girl when a hot blast swept across the opening. The sea of fire had reached the spring. Outside the world was all white hot; the reflection of the world-wide conflagration cast ghostly flickers on the rocky walls of the dark cavern.

"In this night of terror the woman gave birth to a child. While mankind was being destroyed, a boy came into life in the dark hole in the earth. For a moment the eyes of the mother rested proudly on her son—then they closed forever.

"The old man crept out of the cavern to fetch water. Flames were still gleaming over the field of ashes. Only the oak by the spring was still green. As the old man quickly filled his hat with the precious liquid, a glowing stone struck his face and put out his right eye. He did not heed the pain. On his old shoulders rested the responsibility for the lives of the children.

"The baby boy cried for food. The cold breast of the dead mother could not quiet him. In despair the old man looked about, and then he saw that the she-wolf's udder was full and hung down to the earth. He



At the foot of the tree was a woman. The embers cast a bluish gleam on her black hair. Burns stood breathless, his eyes devouring the woman at the foot of the tree of life.

(Illustration by Paul)

made the venture and let the child nurse there. Common trouble had banished all fear from the wolf, and she willingly permitted it. Thus the she-wolf became the foster-mother of the founder of the new human race. The old man and the girl stilled their hunger with the edible fruits of the evergreen oak, which by a miracle had escaped destruction.

"They remained in the cave until the reflection of the burning world faded and went out. Then they climbed up to the light of day. The moon was no longer in the sky. Out of the field of ashes new life was sprouting, and the time of eternal spring had begun. The boy and the girl grew up under the protection of the old man and through their children founded the new human race.

Burns was silent. His glance rested on the dress of Isabella, shining brightly in the moonlight, and the glowing end of her cigarette.

"That was very pretty, Sir William," said the voice of the girl a trifle wearily. "I never heard this before."

"What have I just told you, Señorita," replied the Englishman seriously, "is not merely a story—it is the tradition of all the nations on earth. In it we find many old acquaintances—Adam and Jesus; Noah and the suffering mother of the Saviour; one-eyed Wotan; the spring of Urd; the sacred tree Yggdrasil of the Eddas; the tree of life of your Mayas; Lake Ikaque; the wolf as symbol of the eternal city of Rome; even the German Christmas tree, which is nothing but the glorification of the life-giving tree at the fountain of youth. Am I right, Mrs. Stulp? You hadn't suspected, had you?"

"Gracious!" said the German lady in astonishment. "How do you know all this?"

Burns smiled. "From the old myths and tales of the nations. What terrible cataclysms of nature must have occurred, that their memory should be able to survive through tens of thousands of years and up to the present day! The passing of thousands of years has of course changed the versions of these tales. According to the conditions of life of the peoples, the stories took on varied form, and the events were placed in later times. But it is one and the same root from which these manifold far-travelled stories come. To investigate this parent stock is my vocation."

"I understand nothing of your science," remarked Mrs. Stulp modestly, "but what you told was beautiful. The poor children and the good old man!"

Isabella's Anger

"WON'T you tell us something of your discoveries of today?" put in Isabella with a certain sharpness. Burns was struck by the totally unexpected insight into the tone of this question.

"My experiences of to-day are closely connected with the story of the first Aryan couple, Señorita! To-day I was seeking the place in the temple court of an old pyramid where I recently had a—a meeting that was unusually romantic, according to present standards."

He glanced searchingly at the girl, who had half sat up in the hammock and suddenly betrayed great interest.

"A high evergreen oak stands alone there among the ruins. By its strange form it reminded me of the miraculous tree of the white savior. Surely you know the story, Señorita Isabella?"

"Yes. What did you find?"

"At sight of the holy tree my imagination became

active. I recalled the story of the world conflagration. I thought of the old life-giving oak, the cave by the spring of life, the snake which showed the way to the protecting refuge. Just then there was a rustling at my feet. A brilliant coral snake crawled up to the tree and vanished into a hole in the ground! You might imagine my amazement, if—if you were not a Mexican girl."

"And did you do the same thing as the old man of Lake Ikaque?" Isabella shot out the question hastily, as though in secret anxiety.

"I couldn't resist," replied Burns. "I opened the hole. . ."

Isabella breathed harder. "At the foot of the tree of life? On the east side?" she cried quickly.

"Quite right!" The growing excitement of the usually cool Mexican girl did not escape Burns. "I dug and made an interesting find."

A shrill scream cut short the words of the archaeologist. With a bound like a beast of prey Isabella left the hammock.

"Don't you dare to dig there any more! Don't you dare!" she hissed, and her dark peacock-eyes glowed as if in incipient insanity. Her slim fingers clutched the Englishman's shoulders like claws.

"For Heaven's sake, Señorita!" stammered Burns, quite beside himself. "What's the matter?" Involuntarily he grasped the slender brown wrists.

"The revenge of Zeus will fall upon the desecrator of graves!"

With a shriek the raving girl twisted under the firm grip of the man. Then, bending as quick as lightning, her strong white teeth flashed for a moment as she broke loose. With a dull groan Burns let his arms fall. Before he could master his confusion, the strange creature had vanished into the shrubbery.

* * * * *

Mrs. Stulp paced back and forth in excitement. "Horrible!" she lamented. "What a hateful episode! This is my punishment for failing to heed Don Pedro's words." She fell again into her chair and despairingly ran her hands through her greying hair.

Burns silently regarded his right hand, which bore the marks of a severe bite.

"Terrible!" continued the old lady tearfully. "Don Pedro will dismiss me, he'll send me shamefully out of the house, and—and. . ." the words were lost in heart-breaking sobs.

"Now, madam, it won't be so bad as that!" said Burns, trying to comfort her, while he bound up his painful hand with his handkerchief.

"You don't know Don Pedro, sir! He is frightful in his anger. He ordered me to keep Señorita Isabella away from the guests. I shouldn't have given in to her. She's always doing unexpected things, and I'm so sorry for her, poor Señorita!"

As best he could, Burns sought to quiet the excited little lady. "Have you been long at the hacienda?" he asked, to make her think of other things.

Mrs. Stulp Speaks

"I've been here a little over a year. I used to live in the city. As long as my husband was alive, everything went well. He was an official in the international travel bureau. We made a living, and I earned a little extra money by piano lessons. But when Alfred died, things were hard for me. I was supposed to get a little pension, but you know how things are in Mexico. I am still waiting for it. It's hard, sir, for

a woman who's no longer young to get on all alone here in this country. I had made some connections through my piano lessons, and I finally got a position in a girls' school in Mexico City as chaperone and music teacher. Señorita Isabella was one of my pupils. She was a wild little miss, but surprisingly clever and wide-awake. In spite of her mad tricks I won the affection of the orphaned girl and cared for her. What more is there to tell? One day Don Pedro came to fetch his sister home. At Isabella's request he took me also. I didn't want to enter this unhealthy fever-district. But Don Pedro made me an attractive offer, and, besides, I was attached to the girl."

Sorrow ran through this simple tale of disappointed hopes, bitter trouble, and hard struggle for life. The fate of the emigrant!

"You are a brave woman!" said Burns warmly.

"It would have been better for me to have remained in Mexico City," went on Mrs. Stulp sadly. "You don't know all. I should have left this house long ago, if it were not so hard for an old woman like myself to find other means of support."

"What! You wanted to leave the Señorita?"

"It's true I'm fond of the girl, and she needs a gentle restraining woman's hand. Still——" her voice sank to a whisper—— "I'm afraid of her. She's so strangely different from what she used to be in the city. She often runs off in a quite impossible garment and wanders about in the woods for days. And when she comes back, she acts as if she were bewitched. She rolls her eyes and talks all sorts of nonsense as though in a dream—speaking in the strange Maya tongue, which I could never learn. She has to be put to bed and have her body massaged, until she finally falls asleep, covered with perspiration. The next morning she generally knows nothing of what happened on the previous day. At any rate she is wholly rational and normal again for some time. It's uncanny, sir! Besides, she is so—inconsistent. She can be the sweetest little girl in the world; then suddenly she's wild again, unapproachable, as proud as—I can't find the right words to tell you. It seems as if there are two souls in her. You saw it just now."

"Mrs. Stulp," said Burns slowly, "I don't yet see quite clearly. But I believe that in a little while I can at least partially solve the riddles involving the young lady."

Mrs. Stulp started. "You? You, a stranger, who first saw her to-day? How can you see through a mystery which I've been puzzling over for many months and which weighs on me like the subtlety of a gathering storm? I'm afraid of the people here, but I do pity the poor creature. I always think there must be some cure somewhere for her sick brain."

"Then you think Isabella insane? Does Don Pedro think so?"

"No one can tell what he thinks! He's as moody as our German April. Sometimes he treats the Señorita like a slave. Once he took a whip to her, and it was enough to make your hair stand on end. Oh, dear! I wish I had never come into this house!"

Burns bit his lips. "In Mexico City did you ever notice anything of this 'insanity' in her?"

"Never!" replied Mrs. Stulp quickly. "That's just what worries me so now. I think her only salvation is in getting away from here."

"Well!" said the Englishman. "I want to ask you one thing more, madam. Have you ever heard the name 'Tuxtla'?" he asked with forced calm.

Mrs. Stulp stretched out both hands in a defensive

gesture. "Tuxtla?" she repeated in visible terror. "Oh yes, I know the word. When the girl has these terrible attacks, and lies in bed with her pupils turned upward, Don Pedro very softly whispers 'Tuxtla' to her. Then the convulsion leaves her, and she goes to sleep, smiling like a child. But good Heavens, sir, where did you learn this word?"

"I heard it in the ruins of Uxmal, madam—at the very spot where I to-day found something, the mention of which so excited the young lady just now."

"What was it you found, sir? Is it all right to ask?"

"Why not? I was digging between the hard, gnarled roots of the oak. It was slow work, and I haven't finished it yet. But at any rate there's no doubt that not very long ago a human body found a peculiar and romantic burial place in the maze of roots. Judging from the bones, the body can't have been there more than three or four years."

Mrs. Stulp listened with interest. "Then the tree of life is serving as a gravestone?"

"Yes. This fact alone would not have interested me so very much, though it is certainly surprising. But along with the body a number of singular objects, very valuable to the archaeologist, seem to have been buried. I found ornaments of the time prior to the Spanish invasion, goblets of pure gold, the remains of a chain made of tiny animals' teeth, which could not possibly have come from any sort of beast living to-day. Unfortunately the coming of night interrupted my work. Tomorrow, however, I hope to bring to light still more interesting things from the mysterious grave."

"Strange," murmured the German woman. "We live so close to the ruins and don't suspect what treasures they hide. Have you any idea about the source of these things?"

"Well, it's a well-known custom of the Indians to put into the grave along with the dead bodies their weapons and ornaments. Since I found no weapons, this is probably the body of a woman, which has found its last resting place at the strange oak. Apparently the relatives of the dead person did not suspect what treasures they were burying in the earth with the dead. I hope I can find out the heirs of the dead person, so that I may negotiate with them in the name of the Archaeological Institute for the purchase of the objects."

Mrs. Stulp gathered together her knitting and drew her cloak over her thin shoulders with a shudder.

"Where do you suppose the young lady is now?" asked Burns on the way back to the hacienda.

Mrs. Stulp twisted her hands nervously. "Mingo must look for her. She may be. . . ." The words died away into an inaudible whisper.

From the woods sounded the short hoarse bark of the puma seeking its prey.

What Don Pedro Saw

LATE IN the night Don Pedro returned from Tuxtla. He sat unsteadily in his saddle. At the great cock-fight in the posada he had taken part in the heavy excited betting, and to cool off he had poured glass after glass of pulque down his throat, hoarse from shouting. He was totally oblivious of time and space. Luckily he had already arranged the business beforehand. The dark-skinned Don Manuel Canosa had shown himself indeed a true *caballero*. He had at once understood the wishes of his powerful business friend.

"Yes, yes, Don Pedro!" the creole had said in his

mixture of Spanish and English, at the close of the tiresome discussion. "My coffee plantation on the southern border is very fertile, and my mother can well have some young company. Well! Before the first hurricanes commence the rainy season, I shall set out, and—damn it!—the little girl shall go with me. And you will pay me for the raw sijal two reales a ton above the market quotation in Florida. Good-bye!"

Thereupon the good man had spat in a graceful curve over two tables and had left the posada, to get a narrow gold bracelet from the local jeweler. "For the pretty little girl!" as he said.

Nothing farther had been said. Yes, Don Manuel was a caballero—and certainly not an inveterate bachelor. Perhaps something might come of the visit! Who could tell?

Don Pedro's horse whinnied and threw up its head. Scenting the stable not far off, it began to trot. The moon had set, and deep darkness surrounded horse and rider. The animal knew the way perfectly. Countless times it had carried its master home over the long road from Tical, after gay sessions at the posada by the plaza.

Already the workmen's huts could be made out on both sides of the road like dark shadows. All was in deep repose. A pale light in the eastern sky was the first indication of approaching dawn.

Don Pedro drew his woollen cloak closer about his bonny body. Even in the warm late summer night he felt cold.

He noticed a faint shimmer of light from one of the sky huts. "The scamps should sleep, so they can work by day!" he grumbled, while he rode nearer to the hut. "I suppose they are again spending the night gambling and drinking." He bent in his saddle and peered through the low unglazed window into the interior of the hut. An amazing sight met his eyes!

Around a dimly burning candle-end squatted four motionless ragged figures. In the uncertain light the dirty, sharp-featured faces with their broad foreheads and coal-black eyes resembled grinning devils. If they had not occasionally clasped their pipes in their claw-like fingers and taken them from between their yellow teeth, they might more easily have passed for stone images than for living beings.

Amid the strange-looking Indians stood erect the slim, graceful form of Isabella! In muffled tones, but with violent gestures, she was passionately addressing the stolid redmen, who occasionally contributed harsh sounds to the conversation.

Don Pedro got off his horse and stole close to the window. He could make nothing of the conversation; languages had never interested him. The rogues had to learn Spanish, if they wanted anything of him!

"Another new and crazy whim of the girl," he thought. "Well, birds of a feather flock together! It is at any rate better than to have her sit with the English caballeros and tell her foolish stories!"

He got his long slender body partly through the window. "Isabella, my little dove!" he called, still under the influence of his drinks. "What are you doing here in the middle of the night?"

The girl stared. The Indians turned their heads and stared indifferently at the intruder. Isabella whispered a few more words to the redmen, in a threatening tone, and then slipped through the low doorway into the open air. Don Pedro grasped her arm.

"Isabella, let us go home!" he said gently, almost tenderly.

Isabella turned her head stubbornly to one side and

walked silently beside her half-brother, who was leading his horse by the bridle.

"Well, my little sister says strange visits!" he chattered on. "What sort of mysterious stance was that? Those fellows are supposed to sleep at night instead of chatting with pretty young girls!"

Isabella did not seem to be listening to his words. But when the hacendado began to sing in a drunken voice: "*Alma de mi vida—soul of my life!*" she interrupted him with the brief and pointed question, "When are the Englishmen leaving?"

Pedro started. "As soon as the rainy season begins, I believe!" he replied, adding mischievously, "And so you will soon lose your cavalier, poor girl!" "Send Señor Burns away at once!" said the mestiza calmly.

Don Pedro stopped in surprise. "What do you mean? At once? Why so?"

Isabella looked at the ground. "I hate him!" "You hate him? Ha, ha, that's good! But didn't he fasten your boot, Señorita Isabella de la Cosa?" He slapped his boot with his riding crop and laughed rudely. "Didn't I always tell you that English lords were no fit society for Indian girls? Now he has insulted you. Ha, ha, I see!"

"Then you will send him away?" insisted Isabella. "Cavensho! Are you crazy, girl? A Mexican of Castilian blood does not send his guests from his house."

Isabella pressed her hand to her heart and drew a deep breath, as though struggling with some resolution. "Pedro, I beg of you!" she finally said.

"You beg of me? That hasn't happened for a long time." Then Don Pedro seemed to soften. "I can't, little girl—but—" For a moment he hesitated; then he said her of his business friend Don Manuel and his plantation on the border.

"He is inviting you to pay a visit over the rainy season. You will not insult the caballero with a refusal!"

Isabella knew the creole. A harmless, good-natured soul in a rough husk. He was a matter of absolute indifference to her. "I shall go with Don Manuel," she said wearily, "when the Englishmen are gone, if you promise me not to receive any more guests who go gipping in Xlapach."

A yellowish red light shone in the eastern sky, as Don Pedro and Isabella entered the cactus gate of the hacienda. Mrs. Sculp, who had not closed her eyes, was much amazed to see the brother and sister approach the house chatting so pleasantly. Then she went sighing back to her room, to get a few hours of sleep.

CHAPTER V

Xlapach

THE ruins of Uxmal shone in the oppressive heat. Yellowish clouds veiled the sun, bathing the stones in a dull tawny light and making the sultriness intolerable. Not a leaf stirred in the trees. Only the monkeys playing in the branches caused the dry withered creepers to stir and rustle. All growth seemed to have ceased. Nature was parched for water and waited in dull resignation for the nearing rainy season.

"What shall we do, Mr. Burns?" Patson was endeavoring to wrinkle his cheerful brow. He looked in utter perplexity at his chief. Burns was thoughtfully whittling at a cactus. He did not reply.

Before the entrance of the temple-pyramid stood erect one of the four Indian laborers, as though intending to protect the holy place with his body. His black eyes from their deep sockets shone tridly under his bushy eyebrows as he gazed at the white scientists. The other ragged chaps were squatting in the moss a bit to one side, stupidly and apparently unconcerned.

"We won't give you the pay you've earned, if you don't keep your contract!" Patson cried over and over again to the spokesman of the Indians, in Spanish.

"We keep our contract," the latter replied calmly, "but we will not permit the destruction of the sacred tree."

"Go to the devil, you rogues!" burst out the Irishman angrily and took a few steps toward the Indian.

"Heed the wrath of the gods who dwell in Xlapalh!" hissed the redskins. He held his arm straight out and did not budge. His comrades arose and moved slowly nearer.

"Shall I land you a good smash on your jaw, my boy—you and your famous gods?" Patson began rolling up his sleeves in an unmistakable manner. "Get away from there, or something is going to break!"

With a most engaging smile he held his clenched fist under his adversary's long hooked nose.

"Don't do anything foolish, Pat!" cried Burns in English. "There's no sense in using force. They are four to two of us, and if we use our weapons we shall stir up all the Mayas in the vicinity against us and finally get ourselves in Dutch with the police. That must absolutely be avoided."

"Then are we to let these gutter-pops triumph, sir? That will be a dreadful shame—for sons of old England! They will lose all respect for English scientists." Burns could not help smiling. "Is it more dignified for sons of old England to indulge in fatuousness with gutter-pops?"

"It's terrible, damn it!" growled the angry Patson. "But what shall we do now?"

"To-day we shall go on digging at the Koh monument!" decided the archaeologist shortly. "Forward march!"

Cursing, Patson gave in and followed his chief, who was striding along rapidly. The Mayas followed silently, trotting along as though nothing had happened. Only occasionally half-concealed looks of hostility fell on the Irishman.

Burns smiled thoughtfully to himself. He knew to whom he owed this revolt. Then he suddenly thought of the tiny guardian of Tutankhamen's rocky tomb. It was an insignificant poisonous fly, which by an almost imperceptible sting had killed Lord Carnarvon, the bold intruder into the mysteries of the ages. Was it the revenge of Pharaoh?

* * * * *

It is a dark moonless night! There is insufferable silence about. Even the buzzing of the mosquito is stifled in the frightful drought. Heavily, as though storing up trouble, the electrically charged air lies motionless above the sea of withered green.

In uncertain outline the cross of the tree of life stands out against the black sky. Now and then there is a ripple of sand from the cracks of the rocks split by the heat.

Cautious steps approach. The narrow beam of light from an electric torch moves over mossy ruins. Like a cool groping hand it touches the trunk of the ancient oak. It remains fixed on the roots. These massive roots extend into the earth on all sides, spanning great

holes, as bare as skeletons. It is the grave among the roots.

There is the shadow of a tall powerful man. . . . the sound of falling earth and crumbling sandstone.

* * * * *

Burns straightens up. The light has gone out. A fresh battery must be put in. He searches his coat pockets. Then he suddenly stops.

He hears a soft, dull sound, like a very distant pistol shot. He raises his head to listen. Again he hears the sound! It is no shot. It comes from the near-by wall of the temple court.

* * * * *

From the mass of agaves and climbing cactuses on the wall two eyes shine like those of a puma on the hunt. A slim brown hand clutches the prickly knobs and creepers. A panting breath comes through half-opened lips.

The hand trembles, slightly shaking the splendid cereus plant to which it is clinging. With a dull sound the buds of the strange cactus spring open.

* * * * *

The Encounter at the Grave

BURNS again bends over the excavation and digs further between the roots of the sacred tree.

He understands now. On the wall a noble flower has suddenly opened for its brief rightly blooming, the queen of the night.

The woman in the shrubbery gnashes her teeth. He is digging in her mother's grave!

Her slim body trembles as in a fever. The eyelids are lowered, the pupils turned upward. The blood pounds in her temples.

Every thought sinks into a bottomless sea. Vainly reason struggles against the demon which is taking possession of her. Black veils are floating about her like the inaudibly flapping wings of a night bird. . . .

A dreadful cry sounds from her tortured breast. A supple dark shadow speeds like lightning across the grass.

The scientist starts up. A heavy object plunges on him, and presses him down. Two hands madly clutch his throat.

In falling Burns stretches out his hands in the excavation. His fingers seek some hold. They grasp a round hard object and hold it fast mechanically, in senseless terror.

Suddenly the sky lights up unaccountably with a weird yellowish light! All around it becomes bright. A cloud shimmers as pale as dull frosted glass before the light.

Isabella's fingers release the throat of the Englishman and clasp behind his neck. The girl's body rests on his broad breast, with no life except in her eyes, while her firm white teeth are pressed against his lips. In confusion Burns strokes her thick black hair.

"Tuxtla!"

"Sir F" whispers the mestiza questioningly.

The pale glowing cloud moves about in the sky, this way and that, like the light from a giant reflector of more than earthly power.

In amazement the two human beings watch the uncanny nocturnal spectacle. Hand in hand they cower at the foot of the tree of life and stare upward, until suddenly, without gradual transition, the mysterious cloud vanishes.

Again complete darkness veils the ruins of the enchanted prehistoric city at the Tropic of Cancer.

"Tuxta! Why did you wish to kill me?"
 "You were disturbing the peace of my mother, sir!"
 "But not now?"
 "No! Tonight my mother has died."

CHAPTER VI

Beyond the Equator

IN the little Chilean port of Caldera a solitary guest sat in the restaurant. A dark brown linen suit amply covered his slender little figure. On his head was an immense broad-brimmed straw hat. He appeared to be over fifty, but his quick movements indicated youthful elasticity.

In boredom he stared, now into the half-empty coffee cup standing on the marble table before him, now through the hardly transparent window panes into the almost empty street, which had a dazzling glow in the noon sun and sent harsh lights into the narrow uncomfortable restaurant.

"Steward!" he cried loudly into the corner, where at the bar a dark-skinned waiter in a white coat was leaning and lazily watching the merry dancing of the mosquitoes.

"At your service, your grace!" announced the mulatto in Spanish, without stirring from the spot.

"The devil!" thundered the guest. "Step nearer, boy!"

Slowly the waiter paraded up on his horribly long and shabby legs.

"The whiskey has to be fetched from the States, does it? I've been waiting almost an hour now. What's the matter?"

"Your grace will be served at once!" A poor attempt at a bow emphasized the politeness of the words. "The liquor is in the ice-house at the harbor. We seldom have guests so early. We are not provided for them."

"But the harbor is not a quarter of a league away! How does it take so long?"

"Fardon me, your grace! No one has gone to the ice-house yet."

"What! No one gone yet! Man, what game are you playing on me?"

"The little ladino isn't here yet, and your grace must see that I can't possibly go myself and leave the business to take care of itself."

"Where is the scamp?"

"Who knows?" replied the waiter, shrugging his shoulders and speaking in all seriousness.

The guest looked at his watch. Only half past eleven! How slowly the time passed! "Have you the *Santiago Times* here?" he asked.

"Certainly, your grace!"

The mulatto went to the bar, pawed over a mountain of crumpled papers, and after a long search pulled out a newspaper of immense size, which he handed the guest with irresistible grandiosity.

"Damn it! This dates from the time of the late Christopher Columbus!" cried the guest in disappointment, after he had cast a glance at the front page.

"It is the latest number, your grace!"

"Your latest number is three weeks old!"

"The service between Santiago and Caldera is often very irregular, your grace!" was the extremely polite reply.

Grumbling, the guest buried himself in the long, closely printed pages, and the waiter resumed his position as onlooker at the corner of the bar.

The mosquitoes were buzzing. A sleepy feeding came over the reader. He was just about to lay down the paper with a yawn, when his eye fell on a small item which seemed to fix his interest. He spread out the wide sheets on the table, smoothed them out, and bent over them eagerly.

The news item was from Mexico City and was dated May 15. It ran as follows:

A STRANGE PHENOMENON IN THE SKY

According to information from Merida, a peculiar and mysterious natural phenomenon was observed during the night of May 12 over the northern portions of the peninsula of Yucatan. About an hour before midnight small clouds here and there shone without color save in a pale yellow light of such intensity that the deep darkness of the summer night was changed into a dim twilight, similar to the illumination in the case of a total eclipse of the sun.

The phenomenon lasted exactly eight minutes, according to all reports. Apparently this is a case of electrical repulsion phenomena in the atmosphere—a sort of heat lightning, favored by the tropical heat and dryness of the past dry season.

Berger and Finkle

A TRICKY smile passed over the clever, wrinkled face of the guest, and his left eye winked cunningly.

"An imaginative people, these Latin Americans!" he thought with a grin, while he reached in his pockets and searched around among a collection of pipes of all sizes, until he found a tobacco pouch of immense size. With extreme care he filled a very brown meerschaum pipe, slowly moved the blazing match back and forth over the glowing particles of tobacco, and puffed mighty clouds of smoke over the coffee cup which still stood waiting for further use.

From the harbor sounded long drawn out, shrill whistles, the steam sirens announcing the noon hour.

The glass doors of the restaurant were hurriedly pulled open. A broad-shouldered man of middle stature entered quickly and searched the room with a glance. His energetic white face, striking in these latitudes, colored with pleasure at the discovery of the solitary guest.

"Yes, thank Heaven, here we are!" he called from across the rows of tables. "How are things going with you here in Chile, doctor? This damned heat! I'm sweating like the engine of a torpedo boat!"

"I've been sweating this way for months, Mr. Berger!" The guest rose and shook hands with the newcomer. "And you let me wait a day longer than was agreed! Have you been occupied up there with so serious a game of cards that you quite forgot old Sam in this God-forsaken corner of the world?"

Berger shrugged his shoulders. "It isn't my fault, doctor! As soon as we get into regions where people live, our troubles begin." He pulled out a large handkerchief and wiped the sweat from his face and neck.

"Has anything happened?"

Berger looked cautiously around in the restaurant. When he discovered nobody but the sleeping waiter, he asked in a lowered tone, "Does that man understand German?"

"That would be asking too much of a Chilean bar-keeper, Berger. Speak up without fear!"

"Well," went on Berger, "nothing has really happened, but there have been delays. Yesterday, when we sailed over the bay about seven thousand meters* up, to find an entrance, there was so much shipping down on the coast that we couldn't possibly descend without being seen. Then we had to go far out to sea to come down without being observed. We slowly

* About four miles.

came along to the coast under water. That took eight hours. But in front of the bay is a barrier of sharp reefs, one shallow behind another. Entering under water was impossible. So we came up and got right within telegraphic range of a Japanese steamer. You know how all the world is trying to find out about our ships. Meetings must at all events be avoided. So down we went again to the jelly-fishes and star-fishes! Well, it was night before we finally succeeded in getting over the reefs and disembarking in the bay. Nothing more could be done at night. Probably I should have looked for you in vain."

"Where is your ship now?"

"In the bay, on the bottom."

"Well it's a mighty good thing that you finally got here, Berger. By Jupiter, tomorrow I should have been gone. You would have had a fine time asking your way through a country where everything is on a grand scale, even to storms. Do you think I'm going to stay here forever, feeding on wretched *termites* and fighting for every drop of decent alcohol?"

"But I see there's no lack of tobacco!" remarked Berger pleasantly.

"I should say! If that had been so, instead of Samuel Finkle you would have found a fine corpse."

"Where do you want to go, doctor?"

"Where? Only a person who has fallen from the moon could ask a question like that. Home, of course! My practice is falling off, and Mother Barbara's wines are spoiling!"

Berger sank back in his chair. "When do you want to be in Friedrichshafen?"

"Want!" grumbled Finkle. "As though that depended on me! Yesterday a cutter went to Antofagasta to connect with the *King George* of the Valparaiso-Panama-London line. In five weeks I should have been in Rotterdam. Now a steamer is going tomorrow to Valparaiso. But there I'd have to wait at least a week for the next Hamburg-American ship. It will be on your conscience, Berger, if my patients die out and Mother Barbara has to close her café for want of customers!"

"Don't worry, doctor! You'll easily catch up with *King George*."

"You mean . . . ?"

Berger nodded. "Certainly! I mean that you'll go with us."

"But aren't you starting too—too far up there?"

"Surely. It will certainly interest you to become acquainted with our splendid construction up there. Or wouldn't it?"

"I want to go home, Berger. I've had enough of this vaporous life."

"Doctor, it is far from my intention to keep you at Astropol. Immediately after my arrival Mr. Koef will start in the *E. K. III* for the plant on Lake Constance, where he is to present to the company council on the twelfth the results of his new experiments with electron rockets. To-day is June 7. If all goes well, we shall be up there on the tenth, and you can then go right on to Friedrichshafen with Mr. Koef. Thus in all probability you can be in Mother Barbara's café by the evening of the twelfth at the latest."

The doctor's mouth remained open in astonishment. "What! Five days from Chile to Lake Constance?"

"By way of Astropol, doctor! Unfortunately I cannot afford you the pleasure of going directly to Germany. That would of course take hardly twelve hours."

There was a brief pause, while Dr. Samuel Finkle

took in the unheard-of proposition. Then he struck his hand on the table, so forcibly that the waiter started up out of his nap.

"Lads! You are the stuff!" he cried enthusiastically: "We must drink to your health! Hey, waiter!"

The maltster, knowing no German, did not stir.

"But," added old Sam, as he was fond of being called, "maybe we shall be at Mother Barbara's before that chap brings the whisky. You'll have to content yourself meantime with coffee. That's excellent, anyway."

When Berger declined with thanks, Sam remarked, "Then do at least light a cigar. Unfortunately I can't offer you one. I've nothing but tobacco, and I believe you don't smoke a pipe. Or do you? Then go ahead! How is it possible to fill around our globe as though it had shrunk like a toy balloon with the gas leaked out? What new discoveries have you made?"

"Why talk of new discoveries?" replied Berger. "We've simply applied the rocket principle to ordinary aeronautics. That's all. In this way we get speeds up to 500 meters* a second, which are impossible for airships with propellers."

"Five hundred meters a second?" repeated Sam, amazed. "That's—why it's almost 2000 kilometers an hour!"

"Certainly! Simple propeller airships can't accomplish that, even with the most powerful motors. The propeller needs dense layers of air to be effective. For this reason airships are limited to the lower altitudes. But the highest layers, with extremely thin air and little resistance, are exactly the right medium for speedy fliers like our rocket machines. One thing helps another there: the thin air allows tremendous speeds, and the speed of the flight replaces the greater supporting power of denser regions of air."

Unforeseen Delay

FOR some time Berger went on talking about the new machines, arousing in old Sam the greatest curiosity with regard to the adventurous flight that was soon to take place.

Then Berger suddenly asked, "Is the cargo ready, doctor?"

Sam gave a reassuring gesture, calculated to remove all doubt. "For four days the petroleum casks have been ready at the bay."

"How much?"

"Eleven tons, net weight, as agreed."

"Is the weight exact? You know how important that is!"

"It has all been weighed twice, every cask alone and then the entire load together. It all agrees."

"Good! How long do you need to turn over the work?"

"One afternoon will be enough. In three hours by auto we can be up at the saltpeter mines in the mountains. Who is replacing me?"

"The engineer Zimmerman. You know him from the laboratory at Friedrichshafen. He is waiting for us at the bay. If we start at once, we'll be back by night, load up immediately and leave before morning."

He got up as though wishing to lose no more time. "Where's your car?"

"Under a safe roof!" Finkle calmly puffed away at his pipe and gave no sign of intending to get up.

"Naturally you're in a hurry, after making me wait

* About 20 miles a minute; 1,200 miles an hour.

here until I've actually become rooted. Just sit down again, Berger. We still have a long time."

"A long time? I thought you were in a hurry to get home."

"A day more or less doesn't matter to me."

"But why waste time here?"

Berger appeared vexed, but the physician remained unperturbed in his calmness.

"First, I don't want to abandon the whiskey I ordered two hours ago!" he remarked, pleasantly. "I'm parched for a real drink."

"If that's all," put in Berger, impatiently, "I have some bottles of excellent liquor on board."

"Second, we must wait for the rain to stop. It ceases at three o'clock."

In surprise Berger looked from the placid face of the speaker out into the street, where the sun was shining brightly. "Are you seeing things, doctor? Where is it raining?"

"It's evident, Berger, that you haven't traveled much on this earth. Watch out: it's now half past twelve, and at one o'clock sharp the flood-gates of the sky will open, so that you'll thank Heaven and me that you didn't go out. At three o'clock sharp the sun will come out again for the rest of the day. Can you make that out, or shall I write it down for you?"



(Illustration by Paul)

Suddenly there was a roar which became louder as the hurricane were coming. Over there the sea was becoming violent. From the stormy waves shot out a spray of sparks.



than you! Depend upon it! This is the beginning of the rainy season. Every day from one to three in the afternoon all the streets are regularly flooded. The sky in these parts is ordered and disciplined."

With an incredulous smile Berger sat down again.

"A wild storm outside the regular hours," continued Finkle, "is here one of the rarest phenomena of nature and disturbs everybody. Anyway, here is an example for you."

He took up the newspaper and read aloud the item about the "strange phenomenon in the sky."

"What have you to say about this untimely heat lightning?" His sharp little eyes sparkled with pleasure under his scanty eyebrows.

"What have I to say about it?" Berger laughed aloud. "I say that Korf will do well to study up the weather conditions of every spot on earth before continuing his experiments."

"I thought," agreed the physician with a smile of satisfaction, "that he had a hand in the game. But how and why—that's really rather beyond me as yet."

"For the present it is to remain as secret as possible, doctor! As secret as the sodium transportation which we carry on from all parts of the world."

"The damned secrecy has banished me for six months to the Chilean saltpeter mines!" grumbled Finkle. "Heaven knows that he could have found a more

"Do you believe in the tree-frogs, doctor?" cried Berger. "Your prophesying is a bit incredible."

"The speech of youth is hasty!" philosophized the old doctor. "My prophecy is exact—more punctual

sensible person. I should never have dreamed of having to play the part of director of a Solvay plant!"

"Well, you seem to have solved your problem as well as any chemical engineer could have done. You know that Korf must by all means avoid taking too many persons into his confidence. Just yourself, as a much traveled globe-trotter—pardon me, as an experienced traveler—well, you were undoubtedly the right man for the difficult start in Chile."

"Just pin on me the Order of the—"

A loud crash swallowed up the rest of the sentence. More crashes followed in quick succession. The window panes rattled. The sunlight vanished, and a yellowish twilight settled heavily over the streets, which suddenly became unpleasantly dark and gloomy. The roar of thunder filled the air, as though the Wild Hunstman and his band were riding over Caldera.

Then the rain broke loose. It was as though a giant hand had lifted the basin of the ocean and poured it over the continent. In a few moments the streets were rushing rivers.

CHAPTER VII

The Capsule of Bone

THE ocean! As far as the eye could see, there was water. Overhead was a deep blue cloudless sky. A gentle breeze ripped the endless expanse of water. The Atlantic was calm as a mill-pond.

Isabella stretched out comfortably in her chair on the promenade deck of the steamer *Rejador*, now a week out on the way from Havana to the Canaries.

Her eyes rested on the sea—on this ocean so great, so immensely vast, that one could travel weeks on it without seeing land! And these same bluish green waves that washed the shores of Yucatan also swept far over the sea against the shores of the distant northern lands which they were approaching!

How would it look there? Portugal—England—the vast city of London, of which Isabella had already heard so much?

To be sure, she knew it all from school, where she had been well instructed in geography. But what was all teaching compared with the thrill of reality and the direct experience of the boundlessness of the sea? What were all words compared with the actual taking of an ocean voyage?

Isabella closed her eyes. She suddenly felt the need of seeing nothing, of being undisturbed even by the sight of the sea in her splendid consciousness and knowledge: "I am traveling over the great water, as did formerly the beautiful and hapless Queen Moh in her search for the land of Mu."

* * * * *

Sir William Burns was walking uneasily up and down in his cabin. Nervously he lighted a cigarette, but after a few puffs he threw it away.

"But it's incredible!" he said excitedly to Patson, who was lying back on the little sofa, comfortably peering a banana.

"Yes, sir, it's incredible!" echoed the assistant. "We shall have to use force."

Burns's fingers passed for the hundredth time over the egg-shaped body, which was large enough to fill his hand. No joint or fissure was to be found anywhere. The ivory-like yellowish case had been put together in some unrecognizable manner.

"Use force? Impossible, Patson! You can hear something hard rattling around inside this bewitched

egg. If we used force we might destroy a discovery of real value to us. An object preserved in such a way has certainly been of great significance. But it's ridiculous that on the whole ship there's no file fine enough or sharp enough to cut open the bony casing without endangering the contents!"

"We should have bought a good diamond-cutter in Havana."

"I hardly believe such a thing could have been procured there. Anyway, we didn't have time. We ought to be glad we caught the Portuguese ship to Lisbon. We shall reach England four days sooner than if we had had to wait in Havana for the first ship direct to Southampton."

Patson sat up and in his turn examined the puzzling find anew. "But how was the thing made? Easily enough, if it were solid! It would be child's play to turn such an egg of bone! But the hollow inside! Well, haven't there been, somewhere and sometime, craftsmen who knew how to soften ivory?"

"So they say. Dynasties of Chinese mandarins are said to have handed down this art from generation to generation. I don't know how much truth there is in the story. But even so, that doesn't aid us at present in cracking this nut."

Patson preserved a worried silence. He had long since worn himself out in impractical proposals. Nor could he understand why Burns had so much interest in this special object—why his thoughts ran night and day on the contents of this capsule of bone. The unsuccessful nature of all his attempts to open the casing had brought the scientist into an excited frame of mind which already had a marked resemblance to a "fixed idea."

"I think," said Patson, after a brief period of useless reflection, "that there is a harder nut to crack than this one! A nut for which there is no diamond-cutter and on which likewise force cannot be used."

"What's that?" asked Burns absently.

"Well, isn't the girl just as unsolvable a riddle as the accursed capsule with the unknown contents? It seems to me as though I recognized just such an unfathomable nucleus in Tuxtla. Only you don't hear it rattle."

Burns shook his head. "You are speaking of Señorita Isabella de la Cosa, Patson?" It sounded like a reproof.

"Indeed I'm not! Miss Isabella is a fine girl, with whom it is pleasant to converse. More than that, she is a lady of all-around education and, for a Mexican, strikingly clever and well read. She speaks fluent Spanish and English and even some German, which this Mrs. Stulp has taught her. It will not be hard to get her a position as secretary in the Institute. At the same time she has a protector by the name of Sir William Burns."

The scientist kept on pacing silently back and forth in the narrow cabin.

"But when Miss Isabella turns into the Indian girl Tuxtla," went on Patson in a lowered voice, "then—then she gives me an uncanny feeling. The way she left the hacienda was certainly peculiar, sir! To gallop with flowing hair, in the old Maya dress, on that yellow horse, right through the city of Tuxtla, making the thin-legged dons open their eyes and mouths—right through the station, over the gate and the track in one bound, striking sparks and making the railroad men as rigid as pillars of salt,—well, sir, you know it as well as I. I must say, sir, that I thought she was crazy, and even to-day I can't understand how you

could help her in this flapper trick. Don't think ill of me for saying it, because I can't keep it back any longer."

Introspection

BURNS hit his lips and remained silent. He could not be angry with his assistant, who had become more and more a true friend, because of the freedom with which he expressed his views. He himself did not know what to think of the manner in which he had been taken by surprise.

Taken by surprise?

No, a strange power must have influenced him—a power which could not be resisted, emitted by Tuxtla like a fluid which worked imperceptibly but as surely as a secret poison. There was no escaping it.

Escape? He almost laughed. Was he already so deeply enamored by the magic of this strange woman that he had no wish to escape?

Was he in love with her? Was she in love with him? He did not know. He only knew that Tuxtla belonged to him, that there could be no other way than for Tuxtla to be with him. Life without her seemed meaningless and impossible. Was that love?

Burns had clearly perceived that not only the passengers of the *Bojador* but also Patson saw certain tender bonds between the Mexican girl and himself, regarding them as absolute facts, though no external reason for this assumption had appeared.

Were there actually no other powers at work than the simple relations between man and woman?

Burns began to analyze the matter. He pictured his arrival in England, the parties and dances, the flirtations with the daughters of his colleagues and seniors, even the possibility—thought out in the minutest detail—of his standing at the altar with pretty blond Biddy Kingsley! And in all these pictures the thought of Tuxtla in no way troubled him. Could it then be love which linked him with the girl?

On the day when he had first seen Tuxtla by the tree of life, an inexplicable unrest had come over him. And in that sultry night when the scimitar had attacked the plunderer of her mother's grave, in animal fury, to strangle him with her slim brown hands—when he felt in his hand the smooth round surface of the mysterious capsule of bone, while at the same time the strong teeth of the mad girl had pressed his hand—then he had suddenly known: This woman is mine!

And then at the station in Ticul, when she leaped into the starting train, without a ticket, without baggage, without even sensible clothing! When she stood trembling before him and looked pleadingly at him with anxious eyes, saying, "Take me with you, sir! I must be with you"—then his problem had been solved; all the unrest had left him, and he could have shouted for joy in the clear understanding: "She belongs to me, like part of my body!"

Like part of my body! That was it! He loved her as little as he loved his hand.

"And if my hand pains me," he thought further, "I don't become angry with it and strike it off; I try to heal it. Not for this reason or that, but simply because it is my hand. What am I without my hand, and what is my hand without me?"

"Patson," he said aloud, "can I rely on you?"

"You know you can, Sir William!" Patson was almost terrified by this sudden and unexpected question.

"Good! Then promise me, Patson, that you will never again ask why I have brought Tuxtla with me."

When his assistant silently nodded agreement, Burns softly added, as if to excuse himself, "You know, she is my hand!"

In amazement Patson looked into his chief's face. But when he saw the quiet light in the grey eyes of the young scientist, he knew that his promise had been unnecessary. There was nothing more to be said.

CHAPTER VIII

Over Two Oceans

IT is a few leagues to the south of the harbor of Caldera. Two hours ago the sun sank into the blue waves of the Pacific, and the little bay, enclosed by mountains, is very lovely. Land and sea blend indistinctly in the uncertain light of the rising moon, which peeps out now and then between the ever changing cloud-banks. On the reefs is heard the monotonous roar of the ground-swell, the only sound in the quiet night.

Suddenly there is a violent crackling. The sound echoes dully from the cliffs and mingles with the more and more rapid explosions to make a long shrill howling. The startled monkeys and parrots of the woods on the shore join in with the ill-sounding cries.

The uproar lasts only a few minutes. Then it becomes weaker and is lost in the distance. If an observer had stood on the shore, he would have seen something dark rise from the water with flashes of light and circle up, until with the speed of lightning it shot to the northeast like a meteor and vanished in the clouds.

* * * * *

At incredible speed the ship rushes through the sea of air. A faint light comes from behind it like the tail of a comet. In the west shimmer the endless expanse of the ocean left behind. Elsewhere all is black night.

Higher and higher the mad flight goes. The altitude-ruler is still set. In an oblique course the steel bird speeds forward and up.

The cloudless moon shines high in the sky. Already far below is the sea of clouds, shining palely in the flood of light from the moon, with the high snowy peaks of the Cordilleras showing through like islands.

Onward, and ever onward! The rocket-exhausts at the rear of the strange flying machine shoot their hot streams of gas into the thinning air. The cloud-banks vanish. The stars shine clearly and with less twinkling. With amazing quickness the moon sinks toward the west.

An hour has passed. Doctor Samuel Finkle is lying in a hammock of broad straps hanging on strong springs. Electric lights brighten the small control room, and the round thick-glass windows show black all around. The mats covering the lower windows move slightly, and the uniform roar of the rocket motor comes only very slightly into the hermetically sealed interior of the hull. There is nothing to show that the occupants are carried along at a velocity of fifteen hundred kilometers an hour.

Berger is busy with the steering levers and the countless measuring instruments mounted on a board in the centre of the room. Now and then brief commands sound through the speaking tube to the engine room.

"If you hadn't forgotten to build a smoking room," remarked old Sam after a while, "we could really believe you had made immense strides in the construction of your ships. How gently it goes! When I think

of the first ascent in the *Geryon*, the unpleasant pressure which seemed to drive our bones individually through our skins, I can't withhold my compliments, Berger."

The doctor smiled. "Don't go in for praises too soon, operative!" he replied, without looking away from the indicators. "The pressure will come soon enough. Without paying tribute to the gravity of the earth, no case is permitted to go beyond the limits of the atmosphere."

"Well, how do you mean? We've been going for more than an hour. After that length of time in the *Geryon* all the unpleasantness was past, and I was comfortably sleeping off the exertions of the start."

"Certainly! The *Geryon* began its course into space from the surface of the earth, to be sure—on the gliding track in Friedrichshafen, which was afterward broken up and used for junk. Where do you think you are now?"

"Somewhere between Mother Earth and the moon, I guess. I hope you're not taking me for a ride in the Milky Way!"

"Even the Korf Company doesn't go so fast as that, doctor. We have not initiated the 'shot into infinity'; for the present we are floating on our wings over the South American continent, just like any ordinary terrestrial airship. Only we are not carried forward by a propeller, but are driven through the air by recoil action, according to the rocket principle."

"Have you noticed how fast the moon and the stars seem to be moving? If we should ever fly to the east like this, you could experience the peculiar spectacle of seeing the sun rise and set twice in twenty-four hours. And if the course were toward the west, the sun wouldn't rise at all, and eternal night would surround our ship."

"How so?"

"It's very simple. It's because our ship has approximately the same speed as the rotation of the earth. In the one case we go toward the sun with double the speed of any point on earth, and in the other case we equal the rotation of the earth, making it exactly as though we stood still in space and the earth revolved below us."

"I don't follow you. But do tell me when and where the trip into nothingness takes place!"

"Not until we've risen so high that the last remnants of the atmosphere are just enough to support us. Then the main exhaust is started and the flight into infinity begins. That will be in half an hour."

"But for Heaven's sake! Why all this fooling around? Why this loss of time?" Finkle could not make out the advantage of this innovation.

"This apparent loss of time," explained Berger placidly, "means a considerable saving in operating materials. Remember, doctor, that a rocket which rises at the edge of the atmosphere no longer has to penetrate the atmosphere. On this principle the space ship can also attain considerably greater speed for the trip, in addition to which the attraction of the earth at heights of a few hundred kilometers is decreased by quite a welcome percentage."

"That's something that even my medico-chemical brain can understand! But in any case we have to penetrate the atmosphere which surrounds our planet, whether in rocket style like the *Geryon* or like an airplane as you are doing now!"

"Your logic has one weak point, which you really could not foresee. For a terrestrial airship, moving slowly in comparison with a space ship, the air resistance is really insignificant. But for speeds of many

kilometers a second, such as space rockets must have in order to be able to overcome the gravity of the earth at all, this harmless bubble of air becomes a veritable wall. In breaking through it a large part of the fuel is consumed. Also, such a wall would smash like an eggshell ships of light construction like this one. This is quite apart from the heat of friction and other difficulties which Korf formerly overcame in truly brilliant fashion in building the *Geryon*. But have you any idea what the trip to the moon of the immense *Geryon* cost? For merely financial reasons it would have been quite impossible to use cargo-ships of the construction of the *Geryon* to transport the material for building *Astropol*."

Reminiscences

WITH sorrowful pride Finkle thought of that late summer when he had returned from his journey to India and had found his brother-in-law August Korf, chief engineer of the airship works at Lake Constance, perplexed by his half-finished task. At that time the whole world had distrusted the mad invention of the Swabian. Technical science had stamped as impractical the project of overcoming gravity by means of the rocket-motor, and no German capitalist had summoned up the courage to squander his money on the fancy of a mathematician who was confused in his integrals.

To be sure, hesitant offers of capital had several times come from foreign countries, but Korf had resolutely declined. His work was to be a national opportunity for the German people—the people, by the way, who laughed at the genius and his efforts and made sport of him in the comic papers.

Not until the powder-rocket of the Russian engineer Suchinow, built with Roumanian money, had ascended to the moon and had not been able to return, did the occupants' call for help stir the German conscience, and open its purses.

As yet not quite a year and a half had passed since the fortunate space ship *Geryon* had returned from its flight of discovery, rejoiced at by hundreds of thousands who had gathered at Lake Constance to greet the bold pioneer of spatial navigation. The entire civilized world was in an uproar. August Korf, the commander, Hans Berger, first officer, Dr. Finkle, the ship's doctor—these were names more known than any others of the present time, and all the nations strove for the honor of being able to greet these men within their boundaries as guests.

But Korf's restless fiery spirit had not been content with this brilliant success. He had not rested on his laurels. He advanced his work toward the complete freeing of the human mind from the limits imposed by gravity.

The Korf Space Ship Company arose almost overnight. And what this company had thus far accomplished under Korf's guidance would have stupefied the world, if the world had even guessed it.

In all civilized nations it was known that the company was building a series of new and improved space rockets, and that these ships were constantly undertaking flights to investigate space. Korf's publications regarding the make-up of the moon were occupying the world of astronomy, the representatives of which were engaged in the most violent literary warfare. But what the men from Lake Constance were really doing up there between the earth and the moon was subject to guesses and wild rumors. Thus far the company had been able to keep its secrets.

A Forced Landing

"DOCTOR!" Berger interrupted, the physician's thoughts.

"What is it, Berger?"

"Were you actually present when the sodium cargo was weighed?"

"Certainly I was present."

"Do you know for certain that no error took place?"

"I read the weight myself."

"What sort of a scales was it?"

"The chief hydraulic scales at the mine. Why do you ask?"

"Because the weight doesn't agree, doctor?"

"How do you conclude that?"

"From our courses. With the correct load we should be making eighteen hundred kilometers an hour, and we are making just fifteen hundred. The load is too heavy!"

"Isn't that perhaps due to my person?"

"With a smile Berger looked at the slender little man.

"We are again four men on board. Herr Zimmerman remained behind to take your place. It can only be the cargo."

"Does that matter much?"

"Not now—but . . ."

"But what?"

"We dare not venture the ascent into space. The fuel for the main exhaust is exactly reckoned for a cargo of eleven tons."

"Damn! I'd be willing to put my hand into the fire, if the weighing is not correct, Berger!"

"I certainly believe that you read it off and added correctly, doctor, but perhaps the scales were defective?"

"I can't vouch for that. Who could guess it? The mine loaded all its output on this scales."

"Bad business. It is fortunate that we discovered the state of affairs before leaving the atmosphere."

"But what now?"

"We must sacrifice twenty per cent of the sodium. There's no other choice."

Sam felt visibly relieved. "Well, if there is nothing worse, let us just discard it!" He jumped up and began turning back his cuffs, as though getting ready for the work.

Berger shook his head. "We can't just throw it off."

"Why not? The casks won't fall on anyone's head."

"If they did, it would be no loss to have a few less gay devils running around in Chile. They should keep their scales in better shape!"

"You've become very humanitarian in the land of monkeys and parrots!" said Berger with a laugh. "We won't and we can't burden your conscience with killing anyone, doctor, for several reasons! First, there are no longer any casks. The sodium is floating freely in the petroleum in the specially constructed tank. Second, the bits of sodium in falling from one hundred and fifty thousand meters would disintegrate into atoms which wouldn't hurt a mouse. Third, we can't throw it out at all."

"You can't? In the *Geryow* you uncoupled half the ship, when the fuel of the auxiliary rocket was burned up!"

"The *Geryow* was built for this purpose out of three separate rockets. Naturally no provision was made for throwing things out of the sodium tanks. Our designers will henceforth take into account the reliability of

Chilean scales.—From within we can't get at the cargo at all."

The doctor and "director" of the *Caldera Selway* Plant scratched his head thoughtfully and looked up at Berger, who stood a head taller.

"Then we shall have to turn back, Berger!" sounded softly from the compressed lips.

Berger had already set the wings for descent and had throttled down the rocket-motor. "We're already sinking, doctor. We're going down in a glide. We shall be very late, and I'm afraid we sha'n't find Mr. Korf at *Astropol*."

Finkle was vexed. "Such nonsense!" he muttered. "One can't rely on anything in the land of the dons. We must notify Engineer Zimmerman before the next cargo is taken on board. Where are we now?"

Berger looked at the flight indicator. "We've gone three thousand kilometers ahead since the start. We're now about one hundred and forty thousand meters above the eastern coast of Brazil. In an hour at the latest we shall again be floating on the ocean."

The flight went lower. In the distance ahead of them the wide ocean again glistened. But this time it was the Atlantic, north of the equator.

CHAPTER IX

The Dot in the Atlantic

LIKE a chain of gay Japanese lanterns the brightly lighted windows and port-holes of the *Bojador* shine in the night, reflected in the clear water, while the spray at the sharp bow of the solitary steamer gleams like the autumn harvest at sunrise.

Now and then the sounds of a waltz pass out over the dreary waste of the Atlantic. There is a dance on board. The great dining room has been cleared. The central light casts a white illumination over the warm excited faces. The stewards in pure white coats pass among the whirling couples balancing great pyramids of glasses and plates of ice cream.

Isabella is dancing—dancing with the joyous seriousness of her twenty years, with the abandon of the rucos of nature, passing from one partner to another.

Patson was sitting in the corner with a stout Dutch dealer in dyewood and a black-haired Budapest violinist, watching with almost jealous eye the brown girl, whose extraordinary beauty was celebrating its triumph. The dancers were crowding about her, in spite of the rather ordinary character of her wardrobe, hastily purchased en route.

"Do you think, sir," said the fat man to Patson between two drinks, "that the lady will favor me with the next one-step? You know waltzing is too much for me. I'm past the waltzing age!"

He laughed grossly. The black eyes of the Hungarian were fixed on the thick gold chain which hung across the well-filled waistcoat of the Dutchman.

"Pardon me, sir," said the Hungarian, whose harsh accent came out even in his English, "but the lady has already promised me the next dance. I am very sorry."

The music stopped. Heated and breathless, Isabella returned to Patson's table. At once the Hungarian sprang up and with a flood of compliments tried to have her sit beside him, as though he wished to be sure of his prize for the next dance. But the Mexican girl declined with a smile.

"Mr. Patson," she said in a voice which trembled a little, as though from fatigue, "please accompany me

on deck. I have a sudden great desire to see the night sky and the ocean."

Patson was accustomed to her quickly changing moods. When Isabella, taking his arm, lightly walked through the hall to the stairs, the Dutchman grinned and poked the slim nervous Hungarian in the ribs. "A fine girl, isn't she?" For answer he got an angry glance from the coal-black eyes.

On the promenade deck Burns was walking slowly up and down. He cared nothing for the ball room, and since he knew that Patson could look after her, he had withdrawn early.

The splendor of the clear, starry sky had attracted him. Alone with himself and his thoughts, he was much closer to Tuxtla than to the stifling atmosphere of society, whose chatter came between them like a wedge, even though he felt her physical presence.

Midnight was long past. In the east Venus was rising in full splendor above the clear horizon—Venus, the morning star, a courier to announce its mighty lord, the sun, and the coming dawn.

Burns leaned on the railing. He drew in long breaths of the sea air. As he leaned, he felt the pressure of a hard object. Mechanically he put his hand in his pocket and held the capsule of bone between his fingers.

The secret of the puzzling object seemed to be ever present in his mind, as if it were trying always to remind him of its existence, to entice the scientist's thoughts into fathomless abysses. Suddenly he laughed out loud.

Was he if the thing were merely fooling him! What if it was nothing but a pretty plaything turned in bone, a solid piece of elephant's tusk with a natural air-bubble in the centre, a crack which had gradually widened by shocks until a splinter had broken loose! And this splinter, this nothingness, had so excited his imagination and so tensed his nerves that the mere thought of the contents of the bony egg made him physically uncomfortable.

In a sudden burst of anger he raised his hand to throw his fist overboard, into the Atlantic at its deepest part. Let it rest down there among the coral reefs and the sightless deep-sea monsters! That was where it belonged, in the realm of bizarre nonsense. "Eet, no!" Burns's hand sank down. Would he in this manner be freed from the bewitched gift of the primeval forest of Mexico? Though it were at an unattainable distance, would it not still control his thoughts? Would he not be saying to himself all the more, in painful uncertainty, "Now the riddle is forever unanswerable?"

The riddle, which had perhaps no other secret than to be no riddle at all! Perhaps!

One is not freed from a chain by greasing the links, in order not to hear them clanking together. A chain must be broken!

Burns gritted his teeth and started back. "Break it! With the carpenter's axe! What if the contents are broken also! Only thus can I be freed from the spell and cast the fragments along with the senseless splinter into the sea. I must know!"

He stopped. A muffled but resonant voice, like the cooing of a wild dove, sounded in his ear. A tall, slender woman was coming along the deck beside Patson.

The voice of Tuxtla, the form of Isabella! Tuxtla, the unfathomable, incomprehensible nucleus! Isabella de la Cosa, the smooth, jointless shell, on which every chisel slipped! All at once Burns's desire for the carpenter's axe vanished.

Tuxtla's Excitement

ISABELLA and Burns were occupying deck chairs side by side. Now and then giggling couples passed by, who had fled from the glaring lights of the ball room. Distant voices sounded, with occasional snatches of the dance music. Then again there was no sound at all but the rushing of water and the tireless pounding of the engines.

"Why did you send Patson down again, Miss Isabella?"

"So good a dancer is easily missed in the ball room."

Burns was again silent for a time. Then he said, "Miss Isabella, by coming on deck you saved me from committing a folly."

"Then even I have been able to do something good, Sir William? What sort of mischief were you contemplating?"

Burns began to take the egg of bone from his pocket. "I was going to smash this pretty thing with the heavy axe of the carpenter, merely to satisfy my childish curiosity about its contents."

"And now?"

"I'm afraid of heedlessly breaking some costly contents with the rude tool," went on Burns very slowly, "or—what would be still worse—of finding nothing at all in it!"

Isabella half turned toward him. "May I see it? What is this object that makes Sir William Burns a philosopher?"

The Englishman handed his neighbor the capsule, which shimmered in the half-light of the port lamps. Isabella made no sound. But suddenly there was a hard, heavy blow; the egg had fallen to the deck. Burns picked it up quickly and leaned over toward Isabella. To his amazement, the girl was lying back in her chair, motionless, with her head fallen back.

"Miss Isabella!"

There was no reply. Burns seized her brown hand, which was resting on her raised silk coat. It was as icy as the hand of a corpse. The dark color of the thin face had faded to a dull yellow. It contrasted unaccountably with her deep black hair.

In horror Burns jumped up. For a second he reflected.

"The first blow of the axe!" shot through his mind. Then he tried to raise her up. The girl's eyes were not closed. The lids with the long silken lashes were wide apart showing the whites of her upturned eyes while the pupils were hidden. She seemed to stare fixedly at the Englishman.

With a quick glance he surveyed the deck. None of the noisy curious crowd of passengers was near. He tenderly stroked the girl's arms.

"Tuxtla!" he said softly.

Tuxtla slowly raised her hand, but it fell back heavily. She breathed again, but her pupils were still turned up under her lids.

"Tuxtla!" Burns repeated. He remembered what Mrs. Stulp had told him.

Tuxtla breathed heavily. The air whistled spasmodically through her clenched teeth, as though she were struggling with some oppressive force. Burns watched her in eager suspense.

There was a loud sigh, and then her lips parted.

"Huitaca," she whispered.

A moment of welcome silence followed. Then all at once she screamed, "The waters—the waters are coming—oh!"

Tuxtla's body twisted and writhed as though in

frightful anguish. Filled with horror, Burns listened to the disjointed Maya words. Again the girl's look mirrored the inner struggle.

"Sir—Huataca has the stone—but—she did not want it!"

It sounded like a cry dying away. The tension appeared to lessen. Burns thought the attack was already past, when suddenly a cry to chill the marrow in one's bones rang through the night: "Botachika—the morning star—I am burning!"

Tuxtla started wildly up from her chair. Burns held her back with all his might. "Tuxtla! Tuxtla!" he kept saying, the only remedy he knew.

"Hey! What's wrong here?" It was the voice of the officer of the watch, close by.

"Oh, nothing, sir!" replied Burns as calmly as he could. "Just a little fainting spell! You understand, the heat down in the hall—and the wind up here on deck—"

The sailor grinned. "Some natures are so delicate that they get seasick from just hearing some one set down a basin. Shall I call the doctor, sir?"

"Thank you for your kind attention. But it won't be necessary. The spell is already over."

In fact, Tuxtla was entirely calm. Her breast rose and fell as evenly as in sleep.

Over Buried Lands

THE officer of the watch saluted and walked on. Burns followed him a few paces.

"I'd like to ask you something, sir!" He was struggling with his excitement and striving to appear calm and unconcerned. "Would you have the kindness to tell me where we are now?"

"About fourteen hundred miles west of the Canaries and a bit to the south," replied the officer, after a slight pause for reflection.

"Thank you very much! Would it be possible for you to give me the exact longitude and latitude of our present location?"

The officer looked at him in amazement. "How can that possibly interest you, sir? Besides, it would first have to be reckoned."

"I beg of you to do it, sir!"

Burns was so insistent that the officer at length shrugged his shoulders and grumbled, "Then for Heaven's sake come along to the bridge!"

Sir William spread a few robes and cushions over Tuxtla, after convincing himself that she was sleeping soundly and peacefully. Then he followed the officer of the watch.

Obedying a sudden intuition, he had made the unusual request for taking the ship's position. The few disconnected words of Tuxtla had shaken him strangely. Huataca! He knew well the old Indian story of the beautiful refined wife of King Botachika.

Huataca, so the story ran, had found out and misused the secret of her husband and king's power over men, beasts, and natural forces. She caused the streams to flow over the land so that all the continent was under water up to the tops of the mountains. To punish her for this crime, King Botachika had cast his wife Huataca up to the sky.

Who was Botachika?

Other forms of the story were adorned with other names, and Botachika's flooded city was transported to other lands. But an actual natural phenomenon must have been at the basis of these accounts, an event of such violence and impressive significance that it re-

mained in the memory of the tribes and lived on in the traditions.

Feverishly the archaeologist waited for the result of the observation. After a bare quarter hour, which seemed endless to him, the report came:

"Forty-two degrees fourteen minutes west longitude, twenty-five degrees thirty-eight minutes north latitude!"

Dry numbers, these, but they struck Burns like a violent blow. They designated the exact position of Atlantis, the position assigned by science to the sunken isle of Poseidon, according to the report of the sage Solon!

The *Sejador* was floating over Thula, the golden city at the bottom of the sea—the fabulous capital of steered Mu, the land sunk in mid-ocean.

Had Tuxtla sensed this? Was it a strange coincidence, or what?

CHAPTER X

The Illuminated Ocean

STARTLED and disconcerted, Burns hastened back to the sleeper. Meanwhile the deck had become full of life. More and more couples, tired of dancing, had appeared. All wanted to get a breath of the cool night air before going to bed. On the starboard side Burns found a crowd of people. Evidently there was something to be seen there, and some of the passengers hurried to their cabins to fetch field-glasses.

Tuxtla was still in the deep sleep of exhaustion. She smiled in her dream like an innocent child, and all excitement had left her brown face.

For some time Burns gazed reflectively at the puzzling creature, whose terrifying divination touched on the oldest mysteries of mankind. What might slumber hidden from consciousness behind that clear, un-wrinkled brow? Had she herself any idea of what at times took place in her? Did she know that through her mouth the grey past reached out into the present, with serious and foreboding words, like prophecy itself?

A crowd ran past the Engine-room, gesturing and chattering in lively fashion. The noise increased. The entire company of guests of the floating hotel had assembled on deck and were pressing to the starboard rail.

Burns slowly walked over. "What's the matter here?"

"There's a light on the sea to the south!" cried one of the mates as he rushed by.

Further astern the chain of observers along the rail was thinner, and now Burns could see it himself.

Far out in the distance a glow of light was shining in the night, as though the water or the air shone with some sort of phosphorescence. A doubtful yellowish gleam penetrated the darkness. The distance could not be estimated. Phosphorescence in these latitudes?

All at once the light had disappeared. Hundreds of eyes greedily pierced the darkness. Then the crowd began to move. They began running aft so that the planking groaned. The gleam had reappeared. It was now in the west, and, unless there was some illusion, it was moving nearer to the ship.

Soon there could be no more doubt. The phosphorescence was moving, or rather, it was flowing. The luminous part of the sea was spreading out, increasing in breadth, and at the same time becoming in intensity. After a few minutes the whole horizon seemed bathed

in pale twilight, as though the morning were approaching from the west.

The captain stood undecided on the bridge along with the officer of the watch. In his many years at sea such a phosphorescence had never come before his telescope. He continued to survey the horizon silently through a mighty marine glass, while a mob of excited questioning passengers swarmed about him.

Gradually the illumination in the west began to condense again, as though a giant reaper with a mighty rake were collecting the shimmering particles of the sea into a heap. The nocturnal light shone more and more intensely. Its centre moved—came rapidly nearer—and then...

A hundred throats uttered a single cry!

The ship was flooded with a blinding light. The stacks glowed like molten iron, the wires of the antenna flashed against the sky, and the planks gleamed as in the tropical sun at noon.

It was only for a second. Then it was over, and again dense darkness settled over the steamer, which was still pursuing its course unchanged. The eyes dazzled by the brilliant flash could not make out anything at all.

In frightful excitement passengers and crew swarmed together. Like a spirit hand from beyond, the ray of light had clutched the careless gaiety of the dance. Not a loud word was spoken. Whispered words, disconnected and slow, came over the pale lips which trembled with horror. The sound of the ship's engines had an uncanny effect in the pronounced stillness.

What had this phenomenon been? An extraordinarily strong phosphorescence?

Some claimed that the light had climbed the vessel's sides like dust and had flowed down over the ship. The captain grumbled something about the very powerful searchlight of a warship, which had passed its rays across the *Bojador*.

The officer of the watch kept shaking his head thoughtfully. When he saw Burns quietly leaning on the rail, a half-mistrustful, half-wondering look fell across on the Englishman.

Burns kept away from the crowd. A dim suspicion was forming in him—a suspicion of the connection between the luminous cloud of that sultry night in Yucatan and this phosphorescence which did not come from the ocean. Through narrowed lids he had observed the shadows of the stacks in the moment when the ship was flooded with light. They had been extremely short, like those cast by the sun overhead at noon. The inexplicable light had not come from below but from above—out of space!

A Fresh Surprise

NOBODY thought of going to bed. The excitement of the passengers of the *Bojador* reached a still higher pitch because of a further episode which added to the tension of their nerves.

The captain had not put down his telescope. He kept scanning the horizon where the pale light of dawn was just beginning to appear. Then he perceived a dark dot dancing on the waves far ahead in the path of the ship. He was just trying to focus the dot more exactly, when the lookout's cry sounded over the deck: "Wreck in sight!"

Then followed the giving of the direction and the apparent distance away. The crowd of excited passengers began to move again. A wreck in sight! A

new adventure not readily experienced every day!

The *Bojador* steamed nearer. After ten minutes the naked eye could distinguish a dark extended mass that seemed to be floating on the water.

"The thing looks like a submarine afloat on the surface!" remarked the captain. "But why don't the fellows have lights? It's incomprehensible!"

The passengers standing near had caught the words, and now conjectures went from mouth to mouth: "Submarine—defective—used up—crew dead—scurry!"

Excitedly they watched the maneuvers of the *Bojador*. The engines stopped, while the propellers turned a few more times in slowing up. For a while the steamer continued forging ahead; at last it came to a standstill, and the low waves gently lapped against its high sides.

Orders rang out from the bridge. In a few seconds two motor launches were lowered and brought to the ladder. The officer of the watch had charge of the boats. With some hesitation he had permitted Burns to take part in the trip of investigation. In the hurry he had not been able to prevent some other passengers also who desired a sensation from getting in with the crew.

The darkness had meanwhile lifted enough for the wreck to be seen even from the low boats, and for the proper direction to be kept. Burns stood in the bow of the first boat and gazed steadily ahead. His ideas shifted about in confusion, causing him a painful headache.

Hutcha! The phosphorescence! This wreck! It seemed to him that there must be some connection between the events of this mad night. But as soon as he tried to establish logical relations between them, his half-conscious reflections faded away into nothing.

He called himself an unversed fool and undertook to think no more, but just to wait. But Tuxta's cry kept ringing in his ears: "The morning star! I am burning!"

Violent calls and signals from the *Bojador* interrupted his reflections. Even the steersman turned and gazed back at the dark mass of the ship. Certainly the noise was intended for the boats. Something was being shouted to them. Burns put his hand to his ear. Disjointed words came over the water.

"Phosphorescence—East!"

"Aha! The searchlight is at work again!" said the officer, with a look at Burns. "Let it, for all I care! Forward!"

The motor started again. The scientist's eyes were fixed on the wreck, the cigar-shaped hull of which was now plainly recognizable.

"Well!" remarked the officer in surprise. "That thing has outriggers."

In fact, now and then, at the side of the hull a darker edge appeared from the waves, like the outrigger of a Malay proa which was pitching considerably. As they went along Burns thought he saw something moving on the back of the completely enclosed boat. It seemed to him that he saw two men climbing from the stern to the bow. But when the officer halted the unlighted vessel, there was no answer. Likewise a second call from close by died away unheeded. Nothing stirred in the apparently uninjured steel body.

The motor launches slowed down and went cautiously and slowly in an arc about the strange vessel. It was easy to see that the supposed outriggers were nothing but rather small airplane wings, which by lying flat on the water lessened the pitching of the hull.

On the side of the steel wall five letters shone in

brass. "V-E-N-U-S!" Burns spelled out and started in surprise.

On board the *Bojador* the course of the two boats was carefully observed. The captain cursed the loss of time caused by this episode. The passengers, chilled by the morning cold, were lounging around on deck and were bringing the troubled commander almost to despair by their unceasing questions. Nobody obeyed the requests of the officers that they go to their cabins.

Patson, vainly seeking his chief and Isabella in the confusion, was leaning on the starboard rail, chewing a cigar that had gone out. The fat Dutchman had stuck to him. He had followed the Irishman about like a shadow, doubtless in the vague hope that through Patson he might come closer to the beautiful Mexican girl.

"I'm very certain," he chattered in his greasy manner, "that the lady is in one of the boats. I saw her standing at the stern in her charming bright coat. I'm not mistaken. I always have a good eye for the ladies. Ha, ha!"

He gave a coarse laugh. His red-rimmed, pale blue eyes roamed from the boats, the lines of which were just visible, to the wreck, and from it to the bland face of Patson, always cheerfully beaming and not in the least betraying the annoyance of its possessor.

The fat man jovially slapped the silent Irishman on the back. "What do you think of the whole business, sayway? The searchlight our good captain mentioned is all poppycock, isn't it?"

Patson wheeled suddenly around. "I can give you the exact facts, sir!" He seemed to haul the words right into the face of his questioner. "It is the 'serpentine mariner!'"

"What's that?"

"*Serpens marinus!* The giant sea serpent! You know there is an immense water snake in the Atlantic, Christopher Columbus met it. Don't you remember? This monster is three thousand years old, six hundred meters long—if it hasn't grown meanwhile—and at times it radiates from its back fins a powerful fluorescence, just from rage, because it can find no worthy mate on earth."

"And you believe. . . ." stammered the merchant in horror.

Patson nodded seriously. "Sure!" he said in a deep voice. "The wreck over there is nothing but the tip of the tail of the sea monster which has just dived. They say this beast is accustomed to devour ships like the *Bojador* for breakfast! Now don't ask any more questions, but make your will! See! The serpent is just coming up again!"

Patson pointed to the east. In fact, the sea was again gleaming with the mysterious light.

The Dutchman was about to retire, insulted, but the excitement of the night had so confused him that he really did not know whether to take the fantastic story of the Irishman seriously. He remained beside Patson.

Cold sweat ran down his back when he saw the centre of the light race over the sea and speed toward the *Bojador*. He clung to Patson's arm, while his glances wavered between the wreck and the circle of light.

The launches had just circled around the dark body of the supposed submarine, when for the second time a blinding light flooded the ship. This time it remained for several seconds, and the few who ventured to look found the surface of the ocean bathed in weird light for a long distance around, as though the sun were at the zenith.

The Missing Boats

THE beam of light seemed to have come to rest close to the wreck and to have collected about it. The *Bojador* again sank into the grey light of early morning. But the steel hull of the wreck shone brilliantly, and the surface of the water illuminated about it became narrower and narrower. At last it was confined to a circle not over thirty meters in diameter, which radiated such intense brilliance that the burning and smarting eyes could not make out any individual object within the ring of light. It seemed as though the sea about the wreck had become white hot.

Suddenly there was a roar, which became louder, as though a hurricane were coming. A sharp wind blew over the deck of the *Bojador* toward the centre of the glow.

Over there the sea was becoming violent. Geysers spouted up and plunged down, spring tides (as it were) lashed the water into columns of waterpots. On the *Bojador* a tumult began, and the engines started.

Pale as death the captain leaned over the rail of the bridge. His trembling hand went through his grey hair, and he stared in stupefaction at the frightful spectacle of supernatural powers.

Cries rang out, half stifled by the storm—the cries of human beings in mortal need! The boats! What had happened to the boats?

A terrible crashing was heard above the thunder of the storm and the masses of water. There was a crackling as though a battery of machine guns were sowing death and destruction about.

From the stormy waves shot out a spray of sparks; a flaming line rose into the grey morning sky, then vanished like a shooting star.

All at once the circle of light vanished from the sea. The noise ceased. The sea slowly grew calm, and breaking dry shone over the waste of waters. The wreck had disappeared.

The whole phenomenon had vanished like the spectre of a nightmare, and only the occupants of the two capsized boats, struggling in the water, proved the sad reality of the weird event.

Quickly the luckless ones were fished out and taken on board. The entire crew was saved. It was harder to determine whether any passengers were missing, since nobody knew exactly who had taken part in the trip without permission. There was no other course than to call the roll of the entire number of passengers.

But when it was done it was found that no one answered to the name of Isabella de la Cosa.

Several occupants of the second boat asserted that the Mexican girl was the last to jump into the boat as it put off. But when the burning tornado had set in, each one had been too busy saving himself to think further of the girl.

During the entire forenoon the sea around the place of misfortune was searched. Various bits of clothing, life preservers, and the like floated on the warm water, but there was no trace of the girl. Isabella had doubtless been drowned.

With a heavy heart the captain at noon gave up the hopeless search, and the *Bojador* continued its course across the Atlantic, toward the Canaries.

Patson anxiously watched his chief, who sat sunk in thought by the stern of the speeding ship, staring with empty eyes at the place that had swallowed up Tuxida.

"Sir William," said Patson softly, "you ought to go to bed and rest, after such a frightful night. Your

whole body is trembling, and—" he hesitated a moment—"you can't alter the sad fact."

The archaeologist ground his teeth as though in a fever. "Patson," he said wearily, "do you believe that she is dead?"

The assistant looked silently away.

Burna seized his hand—"I know—Tuxtla is not drowned. I still have the capsule of bone. I shall find her again."

After a brief pause he arose. "Let's go to breakfast!" he said.

A fearful idea struck Patson to the heart as he led his pale chief and friend into the cabin. Inexpressible pity seized him—pity for this man who had saved from the sight of horror his body but apparently not his mind.

CHAPTER XI

A Belated Guest

"IT'S getting worse and worse, Buddy! Worse and worse, and there's no end in sight!"

Angrily Lord Kingsley, General Secretary of the London Archaeological Institute, threw the rustling pages of the *Times* on the table. His slender fingers drummed nervously on the carved arms of his wide chair.

"What's getting worse and worse?" asked Buddy carelessly, without lifting her blond head from her embroidery. Her slim, nimble fingers moved rapidly over the soft cambric.

Lord Kingsley leaned far back and looked up at the colored circles of light cast on the ceiling by the mosaic shade of the great table lamp.

"If it keeps on this way," he continued, wrathfully, "there soon won't be heads enough to work up all the discoveries that have rained down on mankind for months like a hailstorm. Already it's not enough for this Swabian to dig up twenty new planetoids every day, to upset the Laplace theory of creation, the way one discards an old glove, to dictate the weather predictions to the weather bureau, and God knows what else! No—he has to take a hand in paleontology, to mix it all up. The fossil bones he lately dug out of the ice on the moor have actually turned out to be man-like skeletons—pre-Neolithic types with a developed hand, half-erect carriage, and the habits of a reptilian mammal. It's—it's simply horrible, and there's unfortunately no doubt about it! Korf doesn't announce hypotheses—he merely gives out facts! Nothing fits any longer! Some day he's going to give an absolute proof that man is not descended from either the ape or proposithecus, but that he was floated over from the Milky Way! What's all this going to lead to?"

"But father! This man is affording the greatest services to mankind. Doesn't he reveal old errors, doesn't he point out new paths to lead eventually to long sought truths? He is serving science as no other before him has ever done!"

During her speech Buddy's blue eyes left her embroidery and gazed under the lamp at her father, in surprise and reproach. The full light fell on her beautiful face, which was slightly colored by her zeal, and colored flecks of light played in the luxuriant curly hair which seemed about to slip from the knot at her back.

"He serves science, does he?" repeated Lord Kingsley grimly. "Yes, in his way! He throttles it, entirely uproots it, in order to put another science in its place—his own! The success of this Swabian has gone to

his head. He's suffering from megalomania and will soon think he is the Lord!"

Buddy was startled, because she had never seen her father so angry—and unjustly, too, it seemed to her.

"What are the astronomers of to-day? Scientists? Bah! They are calculating machines, with sums set before them like schoolboys. And the observers? And the meteorologists? It is to laugh! Nobody dares open his mouth without guidance from 'up there.' The greenest freshman turns up his nose at his professors and gets his science from the newspapers. The public has gone mad. It is really all nonsense, everything that has been investigated, thought out, and calculated since Pythagoras? It actually seems as though we should all have to go out of business, unless we want to be lowered to the rank of workmen and assistants of one individual."

"But Mr. Nielson spoke very differently about August Korf this afternoon, father!" Buddy ventured to put in timidly. "The head of the Lick Observatory was clearly enthusiastic about the rediscovery of Halley's comet, and—"

"Child, you speak according to your understanding. Of course we are all enthusiastic. The grandeur of the revelations is incontestable. But in his heart my good old schoolmate Nielson is as deeply concerned as I am about the great danger that threatens science."

"Father, aren't you confusing science with the scientists?" Her face showed an almost imperceptible smile.

"Damnation!" thundered Lord Kingsley. "What nonsense you are talking, girl! Just kill off all the professors and experts, and then where is your science? It will look just like some of the lecture rooms of Cambridge that have been almost empty for months, because the stupid students no longer want to fill their precious heads with knowledge that they think is all foolishness."

Buddy arose. "It's ten o'clock, father!"

Buddy

SHE noiselessly put away her fancy work, cleared up the tea set, and folded the newspapers.

For a while Lord Kingsley looked on. Then he also arose. His shaven-belt figure cast a long shadow on the figured carpet. "I'm going now, darling!" he said, hastily touching the pure brow of his daughter with his lips. Then he left the room slowly.

Buddy opened a window. Across the warm summer air came the endless noise of the metropolis, formless and monotonous as the dull notes of the frogs.

She took out a paper. For the tenth time she read the few lines, so important to her:

"—And if I connect with the steamer *Bojador* in Havana, I shall be in London again on Friday the seventeenth of June. I have so much, so infinitely much to tell you—"

"William!" whispered the girl and pressed her soft lips to the paper. "Four days more—four long days!"

She knelt by the window resting her head on her arms and sank into blissful fancies. The clock by the fireplace busily ticked off the moments. Second after second flew into the past. Then suddenly the doorbell rang through the house with an unpleasant startling tone. Buddy jumped.

Steps shuffled down the stairs and the lock opened; then followed a soft murmuring of voices which could not be understood. The belated guest seemed unwilling to be sent away and addressed old John in great

haste, like one who has the police at his heels.

Buddy stepped into the upper hall. "What is it, John?"

A powerful masculine voice quite drowned out the servant's feeble reply. "Please help me, Miss Kingsley! I must see Lord Kingsley tonight. The hour is unusual, but it is necessary! Everything depends on it!"

Buddy pressed her hand to her wildly beating heart. This voice? Was it possible?

"William!" she cried. She stopped and improved it quickly to: "Sir William! Is it really you?"

He had already very simply pushed old John aside and was now standing before the confused girl, after a mad rush up the stairs.

"This surprise, Sir William! I thought you were still on the *Atlastic*."

Burns did not heed the girl's joy. He did not see her eyes shining with happiness.

"May I venture to ask Lord Kingsley for an interview?"

"I will tell father at once, Sir William."

In a short time the insignificant figure of the peer came into the room almost lost in his immense dressing gown.

"Welcome to London, my dear young friend!" he cried from the doorway. "I am greatly surprised to see you here so soon?"

"A special event compelled me to make the greatest haste, sir. I left the Portuguese steamer at the Canaries, took a motor ship to Gibraltar, and came from there by airplane. I arrived an hour ago."

"It is charming of you to make your first visit to me!" said the old man with a mysterious smile.

Buddy curled up in the corner in an armchair and kept her eyes on the young scientist. How strangely he had changed! What sunken cheeks! How nervously his nostrils quivered! How hastily he spoke, as though every moment were precious! Was this troubled, anxious man actually her William? What could have happened to him? A wave of pity swept over her. She longed to stroke his hand. She had pictured the meeting so very differently!

Lord Kingsley sat down. "When you tell me, my dear Burns, the nature of this event which compels you to spend your trip in such an unusual manner and gives me the pleasure of your visit tonight?"

Burns paid no attention to the reproach. "I'll tell that later, sir!" He cast a troubled glance at Buddy. "First let's come to the vital point! I have to go away on urgent private business and must request a few weeks' leave."

Buddy grew pale. A tear stole from between her lashes.

The peer elevated his eyebrows. "I understand you less and less, my dear fellow?"

"Mr. Patson is coming on Friday and will give you all the reports. He has full information and all the plans. My presence won't be needed."

"But where do you want to go?"

"That depends on the information I hope to get from you, sir!"

Amazed and somewhat piqued the old gentleman leaned back. "How can I serve you, Sir William?"

"To put it briefly, sir, what does the world know—and what do you know—about August Korff?"

The peer bent forward with interest. "What have you to do with the Swabian?"

"Perhaps nothing! But probably very much! You know I was buried in the forests of Yucatan for nearly

a year. I seldom saw a newspaper, so I am only slightly informed about the further development of the Korff Space Ship Company, the founding of which made such a stir shortly before my departure."

"Your interest in these events seems to be so urgent," replied Kingsley, who was unable to understand the behavior of the successful archaeologist, "that I must probably assume special reasons for it."

"Surely, sir. This interest was aroused in the middle of the Atlantic by a frightful occurrence. I could learn but little on the steamer. The papers, which I got in large quantities in Tenerife and Gibraltar, gave very contradictory accounts, and of course presupposed a knowledge of what had happened earlier. I could not make it clear to myself and hurried here as fast as possible."

The Space Ships

"WHAT I can tell you, my dear Burns, is not much. The Korff Company loves to involve itself in secrecy. The fact is that there are already eight space ships constantly making voyages, partly to investigate the moon, partly to discover possibilities of improvement. These ships take along specially constructed telescopes, admitting of almost any desired enlargements, since in space there is no loss of light, because there is no air. You can imagine what an amount of new observations flooded the world! The smallest space ship is far superior to the most efficient observatory on earth."

"Simply to cite a few of the new discoveries. . . . The orbits of most comets have been satisfactorily determined as very extended closed ellipses. Jupiter has not nine satellites, but thirty-four. The moon is surrounded by a shoreless sea of ice, full of yellow iron oxide, and in the ice have been found traces of extinct plant and animal life. The planet Mars has been found assuredly not to be inhabited by rational beings—a discovery which brought an abrupt end to this old controversy. Venus has a tiny little satellite—"

"Has Korff already been on Venus?" interrupted Burns, excitedly.

"No! Up to the present time the trips have been only between the earth and the moon. But very likely the first interplanetary voyage is not far off."

"How do the space ships look, sir? Are there no photographs of these ships?"

"Not of the newest rockets! Korff has become very cautious. They are described as closed steel torpedoes with little airplane decks—something like submarines with wings, from eight to more than one hundred meters in length. They vary fundamentally from the type of the *Ceryon*. Korff no longer builds in such huge dimensions."

"And how does a rocket ship start?"

"They seem to have given up the runway. So far as I know, the ships rise exclusively from the water, just like very powerful airplanes! Only they are not driven forward by a propeller but by the expulsion of explosive gases."

"Does it look as though a little comet, spitting out fire, were going toward the sky?"

"Yes, one might say that!"

Burns sprang up in excitement. "Now I am sure! It was a space rocket!"

The peer gazed at him in astonishment. "You met a space ship? That's interesting. Where was it?"

"West of the Canaries we found an object on the ocean which we took to be a damaged submarine, until

it shot up before our eyes and disappeared."

Kingsley's interest increased. "It is news to me that these rocks start from any place besides Lake Constant. Do tell me about it!"

In a few short sentences Burns related the meeting on the Atlantic. He did not mention Tustla, however. When he had finished, Lord Kingsley jumped up and walked about the room in excitement.

"The light came straight from above, sir. Don't you think it was also connected with Kori?"

Kingsley looked at the clock. "Past eleven!" he murmured. "Perhaps we can still reach him. Buddy, just call up Claridge's and see whether Mr. Nielson is still up."

Buddy obeyed, and in a few seconds Lord Kingsley was holding the receiver to his ear.

"Hello—Lord Kingsley—yes, if you please—I'll hold the line." He turned to Burns. "Do you know Mr. Nielson, Sir William? No? He is the famous investigator of the moon, the head of the Lick Observatory in California. He was an old schoolmate of mine. He happens to be in London just now, to attend the Astronomical Congress at Greenwich tomorrow. It will be an interesting matter and will finally clear up what this Kori is—"

Then he stopped and spoke quickly into the mouth-piece.

"Good evening, my dear fellow! I am surprised that you're still awake. Do you want to snip off a bit of your life? Well, old friend, I hope you don't miscalculate! But, jesting aside, I have a great favor to ask of you, Nielson! Just take a taxi at once and come over to my house! Yes, right now! You'll get some material for the meeting tomorrow. Good-bye!"

Kingsley turned again to his guest. "He's coming right over. I'm curious to know what he'll say about it."

CHAPTER XII

The Obsidian

FOR a while there was silence in the room. Burns sat broodingly at the table. Occasionally he looked over at the corner where Buddy was nestling among the cushions, and his glance every time met her anxious blue eyes directed at him.

He was fond of the clever, beautiful girl, and it seemed to him that he owed her an explanation, that he must lift up her white chin with the little dimple in it and whisper in her ear softly, very softly, "Don't worry, little Buddy! Everything has got mixed up, but it will be all right again!"

But then Buddy's sweet blond face vanished from his sight. Black hair waved above glowing panther eyes, a brown hand pointed into the distance, and a low voice said with the cooing of a dove, "Do not seek me, sir, and then you will find me!"

Lord Kingsley slapped Burns on the shoulder. "In twenty minutes Nielson will be here. Won't you make use of this brief interval to explain to me at last what all this means?"

"But I did tell you, sir—"

"Nonsense, my young friend! You can't fool me. Your experience on the Atlantic was doubtless very interesting, but not sufficiently so to make Sir William Burns rush off, head over heels, leave his work in the berth, turn night into day, and take a sudden private journey which can't be put off. I knew you too well

and think too highly of you to refuse to accept a very special reason. Is it to remain a secret?"

For a long time Burns hesitated. Then, in sudden decision, he put his hand in his pocket and drew out a capsule of bone, as large as his hand, which he placed on the table.

"Do you know, sir, what that is?"

The capsule had been cut open longitudinally. With interest Kingsley lifted the lid. In the thick-walled lower part lay a bright blue stone, polished smooth, and the size of a hen's egg. It was almost transparent but not really glassy, and had a general resemblance to amber except in color.

The peer raised it to the light. "Heavens! That might be an extremely beautiful and uncommonly large turquoise," he remarked, with a questioning look at Burns.

"At first that was my opinion, too, but it is evidently false, if the stone is viewed by daylight. I take it to be an obsidian, one of those rare minerals of which it has been assumed that they do not originate on earth but have fallen upon our planet from space, as meteorites. A stone from the moon, then, as they call these cosmic foundlings?"

"An obsidian of this bright sea blue color?"

"I surmise that the stone has been colored in some way with cobalt. Its age can be reckoned in thousands of years. The enclosing capsule of bone, which I had to cut with a diamond, is made of a mammoth's tusk by some process no longer known to-day. Have you taken a good look at the stone, sir?"

Lord Kingsley set his horn-rimmed glasses on his sharp nose and bent over the blue obsidian. "I can discover nothing further especially notable about it," he said hesitantly.

"Please touch it!"

He obeyed the request, took the stone in his left hand, and passed the fingers of his right over the rounded surface.

"It seems to me as if there are rougher places on one side. Or am I mistaken?"

Burns silently took the stone. He walked away from the lamp into a half-dark corner of the room. With a few short strokes he rubbed the stone on his coat sleeve and then quickly held it up. "What do you see now, Lord Kingsley?"

The old peer clutched the arms of his chair. Buddy cried out and stared in amazement at the phenomenon. In the dark corner a sign flamed out in fiery red. As though pointed in lines of fire, it stood out above the head of the archaeologist, plainly recognizable as a circle resting on the cross-beam of a cross.

A strange excitement seized the peer. "What is that?" he cried.

"Don't you recognize it, Lord Kingsley?" sounded the solemn voice of Burns. "It is the eternal sign of life, the precursor of the cross, which has outlasted nations and kings, wars and revolutions, ages and epochs! It is the symbol of the demonic powers of nature, which the intellectual man of to-day, freed from his bonds with the earth, can no longer understand."

Slowly Burns walked back to the table.

"It is the old Egyptian sign of life—the hieroglyphic of life!" said the peer softly.

"This stone comes from the graves of Uxmal in Central America, sir!"

The old man arose. "My congratulations, Sir William! This find is of great significance. It constitutes one more link in the chain of proof that the apparently rootless civilization of the Egyptian Pharaohs and the

Central American civilization of the Aztecs are connected and perhaps have a common root."

"I am on the trail of this root!"

"How so?"

"There is a strange thing about this stone from the moon. One does not wrap up a simple jewel in an almost impenetrable armor of mammoth tusk. It was passed on from generation to generation, through a countless number, from mother to daughter. And the last owner—" he hesitated a moment—"I know her. The properties of this stone indicate an astounding degree of physical and chemical knowledge. Not merely the fact that this stone—like amber—is electrically charged by rubbing must have been known to the artist in primitive times, but he must also have possessed means of treating the surface in individual points in such a way that they change color like certain animals under the influence of the electric charge, from the blue of the water to the burning red of fire. What was the use of this stone thousands of years ago? Was it a talisman which in the hoary past gave power to kings and priests?"

"You have a great imagination, my dear Burns!" said Kingsley, who had slowly recovered from his terror and was now ashamed of his excitement. "You might well become a novelist! But at any rate the find will adorn the British Museum."

"Probably, sir! But first I need it myself."

"What for?" asked Kingsley, with a forced laugh. "Have you yet surpassed the task of establishing or even testing the mysterious powers of this—this talisman?"

Burns nodded. "Just that, sir!"

With a mixture of irony and paternal anxiety the peer looked searchingly into the troubled face of the young scientist.

"And your hunt for the secret of the stone from the moon takes you to Korf?"

"You may think me crazy, Lord Kingsley," replied Burns, bluntly, "but—this sign on the obsidian, which signifies the tree of life, the hieroglyphic of life, and is the astronomical sign of the planet Venus as well—it seems to me that it points out into eternal, infinite, cosmic space. I know the idea appears fantastic and baseless, but I have seen some tests of the incomprehensible power of this bit of cosmic rock!"

"The devil take that reasoning!" cried Lord Kingsley rudely.

A sigh from the corner where Buddy was sitting made the two men look around. "What's the matter, darling?" asked Kingsley over his shoulder.

"Nothing, father! I'm simply so—tired!" replied Buddy in a tortured tone, as though a world had just been destroyed in her—a world of secret happy hopes.

CHAPTER XIII

The Satellites of Venus

"MR. NIELSON!" announced the servant, opening the door wide. An elderly, venerable gentleman entered. His clever face was almost covered from view by his immense grey beard. His trembling hand, with skin like parchment, rested on a stout stick. But the astronomer's voice had a fresh and almost youthful ring as he greeted those present with a cheery "Here I am!"

Kingsley took scant time to introduce Sir William Burns to the old scientist, then went at once to the point.

"A new observation of solar reflected light, Nielson! Listen to what Sir William has experienced!"

The aged astronomer listened attentively to the story. Then he thoughtfully stroked his long flowing beard and said slowly, as though speaking to himself: "It agrees. It is the eleventh observation in the course of six weeks, and it most clearly supports my theory."

"May we hear your theory, Mr. Nielson?" asked Burns respectfully.

"Thus far these light rays have been seen in very different degrees of intensity and at points on the earth very far apart—among others, over Alaska, the Sahara, the plateau of Tibet, the North Cape, Central America, South Australia, and Northern China. Public opinion in civilized countries considers these phenomena to be stray light messages from space ships, which are known to be in constant communication with Friedrichshafen during their voyages by means of light signals."

"And do you consider this opinion incorrect?" asked Burns with a smile. He was thinking of the "light signals" which had changed the peaceful sea into a storm.

"I think it at least improbable! First, it is remarkable that these signals are observed only in outlying sections of the earth, either thinly populated or without inhabitants. This suggests a certain intent. Second, their intensity is sometimes so great that they could originate only in immense concave solar mirrors, the surface of which is to be measured by the acre. Such mirrors are inconceivable in space ships. Third, we must take into consideration that the intensity of the light evidently has some definite relation to the local time of the place in question. Neither during the daytime nor at midnight has this reflected light ever yet been observed. The weakest phenomena appear in the hours shortly before or after midnight, the strongest at the times of sunrise or sunset. The amazingly powerful effect of which Sir William just told us was observed in the dusk before dawn, was it not?"

"That's correct," confirmed Burns, who suddenly thought again of the gleaming clouds of that sultry night in Yucatan. "But I don't yet see the connection. For the assumption of a constant source of light, to which you seem to be pointing, runs counter to the widespread observation over the whole earth."

"To understand the connection, it is necessary to be acquainted with one further fact," said Nielson in professorial style, almost solemnly. "For a long time I have devoted myself almost exclusively to observing the paths of Korf's space rockets. Unfortunately these tiny bodies, flitting about in infinite space, cannot be seen at all as luminous dots unless their surface possesses a sufficient degree of reflecting power, nor unless they are outside the earth's shadow in opposition to the sun. These favorable conditions seldom come together with clear transparent air, and we must content ourselves with determining a comparatively small number of individual points. In most cases, however, the observations have been sufficient to enable us to calculate the paths. Putting our results together, we obtained the following picture:

"First, none of the ships has as yet gone farther into space than about thirty diameters of the earth, which corresponds to the distance of the moon.

"Second, by far the greatest number of the voyages have the moon as their goal.

"Third, the velocities are very different, which sug-

gets continual experimentation and improvements in the ships.

"Fourth, giant ships of the type of the *Geyser* are no longer in use, with one single exception.

"Fifth, about twenty per cent of the voyages observed are found to be encircling the earth at various distances. These ships appear to serve purely geographic studies.

"Sixth, one of these last mentioned ships, which is considerably larger than any of the others, has for months been circling about the earth in a constant, unchanging gravitational orbit, without having made any descent in the meanwhile."

Burns leaned far forward. "Is this done voluntarily or is it forced?"

Nielson smiled. "If the orbit of this—let us say, stationary—space ship owes its origin to chance, then chance has certainly worked to perfection."

Lord Kingsley breathed hard. "This Korf is in league with Satan!"

"This space ship" went on Nielson, "moves in an orbit having a radius of ninety-five thousand kilometers,* passing over the two poles of the earth and having its surface perpendicular to the sun's rays. That is, the orbit is always over the shadow line of our sphere, and the ship is always vertically above the points of the earth for which the sun is just rising or setting. Since this ship to make its complete course from the north pole to the south pole and back again requires exactly seventy-eight hours, and the earth in this time revolves three and a quarter times on its axis, it is above every point on earth within the span of thirteen days.—It commands the entire earth from pole to pole."

Kingsley interrupted violently. "Commands? With what? With artillery? How is that comprehensible?" Nielson lifted a protesting hand. "With what? With perfectly harmless solar rays, which can be collected in great parabolic mirrors and concentrated on any desired spot on earth. Our young friend, to his cost, has had a little experience of this game."

Burns Decides

FOR several moments no one spoke. Lord Kingsley gnarled his teeth. Burns drew many figures in the ash tray with a pencil. His thoughts seemed elsewhere.

"How can one communicate with this stationary space ship, which circles about the earth like a second moon?" he asked finally, tired of hiding his excitement.

"By flashes of light! The smallest alterations of light must be visible in the powerful telescopes of the space ships. Quite often terrestrial observatories have tried to get into telegraphic communication with Korf's ships. But there has never been any answer. To be sure, the Greenwich Observatory has now and then picked up a few messages which were sent to Friedrichshafen. But they were always coded according to a very complicated key which up to the present has defied all the assaults of the mathematicians. Besides, it is probably changed every day."

Sir William's decision remained unchanged. "I thank you very much for your highly interesting conclusions, Mr. Nielson. Early tomorrow I shall start for Friedrichshafen."

There was a sarcastic look on the astronomer's face. "There you will find many colleagues and will help to

increase the number of those who look on from outside, Sir William."

"I have a special mission to fulfil," replied Burns. "They will listen to me."

Nielson shook his head doubtfully. "I wish you success in this—mission!"

Burns arose, as though he wished to set out at once. But he stood still a moment in hesitation, fumbling undecidedly in his coat pocket. Finally he drew out a crumpled newspaper sheet.

"Please allow me one more question, Mr. Nielson! The day before yesterday I read a report of the discovery of a satellite of Venus. Lord Kingsley had also mentioned this earlier. Surely you know about the matter."

This question seemed painful to Nielson. In evident discomfort he tugged at his beard.

"I must confess to you, Sir William, that this new announcement, which at first glance is not particularly startling, and which probably has had hardly any special attention directed to it, seems to me the most puzzling of all Korf's surprises. I don't know what to think of it."

Burns stepped back a pace. His pulse beat quicker. Even Lord Kingsley listened eagerly. "You never told me anything about that, my dear Nielson!"

The astronomer granted morosely: "I don't like to speak of problems for which I know no explanation."

"It struck me," put in Burns, "that this satellite was described as actually dwarfish. In the report it spoke of a few meters in diameter."

"These estimates are probably extremely doubtful, and are in themselves less interesting than—," he hesitated.

"Than what?" asked Burns eagerly.

"Than the very existence of this satellite. Where did it come from?"

"It is probably nothing but a meteor captured by Venus."

"That is simply impossible, Sir William! All the planets from the earth outward to distant Neptune can catch moons for themselves. But the two planets next the sun, Mercury and Venus, cannot do so. Simple calculation shows that. A body plunging toward the sun from the depths of space has already on reaching the orbit of Venus a velocity of fifty kilometers* a second. Tiny Venus is powerless in the face of such speed. Its powers of attraction can doubtless divert the passing meteor a bit but can never force it into a closed ellipse. There is no doubt about it."

"But Venus must have acquired the satellite somehow, unless we want to discard Korf's observation as an out-and-out deception."

"More than a hundred years ago a noted builder of telescopes thought he had discovered a satellite of Venus, and several very earnest scientists even set out to calculate the orbit of the new heavenly body. But since in the meantime this discovery had never been confirmed, it was forgotten. It was thought to be simply an error of vision. But now Korf's figures agree exactly with these old ones. The satellite of Venus exists beyond a doubt!"

"My dear Nielson," said Kingsley, "isn't it possible that this satellite originated in the vast number of tiny planetoids which whiz by thousands around the sun?"

"No! These little planetoids are limited exclusively to the space between Mars and Jupiter. Only two of these little bodies, Eros and Albert, extend their orbits

* About 55,000 miles.

* About 33 miles.

nearer to the sun than to the orbit of Mars. But even they are so far from the sun that any fall toward it, such as might perhaps be caused by impact between them, would reach such a final velocity as would overcome the attraction of Venus. In short, a satellite of Venus could only come from the space between the orbits of the earth and of Venus, for only there would the velocity of the free fall at the orbit of Venus still be within the limit which would decide the fate of the little body."

"And the space within the earth's orbit is empty?"

"It is full of meteorites speeding from great distances to the sun—through passagers, so to speak. But it is empty of gravitating planetoids, from the ranks of which alone the satellite of Venus could originate. Even Korf has been unable to find a single one of these little planets in it."

Burns showed signs of great excitement. "Then this moon of Venus can only have come from our earth!" he cried.

"And thereby it forms an unsuspected field for archaeological research!" added Lord Kingsley. Nielsen slowly continued:

"If only he does not arrive too late! The days of this little star are numbered. Its period of revolution is only one hundred and five minutes. In three-quarters of an hour, then, the satellite races around Venus. According to Kepler we may calculate from this a mean distance of 6300 kilometers* from the centre of Venus. If we subtract from this the radius of Venus, there remains only a matter of 215 kilometers** separating this little body from the surface of the planet. That is, it is already touching the outside of the atmosphere which apparently surrounds Venus as it does the earth.

"The little satellite is therefore in extreme danger of being slowed down by air resistance. That would necessarily result in its fall to the surface of Venus. Any day may bring the catastrophe."

The morning was almost at hand, when Burns left Lord Kingsley's house. Blindly he hurried through the dimly lit streets, as though chasing a phantom.

Tuxtla—Huixtla—Venus—!

Behind him the mist shut in the house in which blond Buddy was tossing sleepily on her pillow.

CHAPTER XIV

In Space

SLOWLY Tuxtla came back to consciousness. The veils lifted little by little from her mind. The confused dreams vanished, and her senses awoke. She felt a soft bed beneath her. The air was biting and dry, and she was tormented by thirst. Though her eyes were closed, she had a definite sensation that it was still night.

She raised her lids slowly and looked up into black darkness. Yet around her it was not dark. Somewhere a light was gleaming. It seemed as though she were lying in a lighted room without a ceiling, with a starless night sky arching overhead.

She felt along the edge of her bed. There was a thin mattress and on it some soft covers. In bewilderment she sat up. Although all her limbs pained her, she felt free and strong, as though some oppressive weight had fallen from her. Gazing about, she saw that she was in a tiny little room with primitive furnishings, similar to a cabin on shipboard.

Through a circular porthole at the side the yellow sunlight was streaming in. A long, sharp-edged reflector was fastened to the opposite wall. The light was so bright and dazzling that it pained her eyes. And yet, the cabin seemed dark. The shining window frame and the reflector on the wall seemed to be floating in darkness, freed from their physical characteristics.

For a while Tuxtla remained sitting listlessly on the edge of the bed. Then she noticed that she was wearing men's clothing. She got up and walked to the window with uncertain steps. Dizziness seized her. At every step she tottered and threatened to fall forward. She clung to the recess of the window and looked out through the thick, tight-fitting glass.

All around was a deep black sky, spangled with strangely bright stars which did not twinkle. It was night, assuredly night! Yet far down on the horizon the sun was shining in a supernatural brilliance.

Tuxtla waited, but the sun did not set. It stood still in the sky, and the army of shining stars moved quickly about the glowing ball in even courses.

Tuxtla rose on her tiptoes, to enlarge the downward angle of vision. She was startled. Here too the starry sky spread out, as though she were standing over an infinite motionless spread of water in which the stars were reflected. But the reflection of the sun was missing. And down there, actually, was the thin crescent of the moon! It, too, was coursing about the sun.

Was she in a tower of such infinite height that the surface of the earth could no longer be seen? A fearful feeling of immeasurable loneliness weighed upon her. She sank to her knees and wept.

Then a soft murmur came to her ear. She listened. Somewhere, far off, human beings were speaking.

STEPS came near, the narrow door of the cabin opened, and in the doorway stood a man.

It seemed to Tuxtla as if she had already seen this active little figure some day.

"Our beautiful young guest seems to have recovered from the hardships of the unusual trip!" said the man kindly, and then introduced himself as Doctor Finkle.

Tuxtla drew back into the corner.

"Do you understand German at all, my dear young lady?"

She nodded. "Where am I?" she asked in English.

"In safety and in good keeping. For three days you have been lying unconscious, and you must be very hungry. I'll have a good dinner served at once. How do you feel?"

"Where am I?" repeated the girl, insistently.

Dr. Finkle scratched his sparsely covered head in embarrassment.

"You—you'll learn all about that later. At any rate, you're saved. You'll have to pardon the costume—" he pointed to the rough trousers which hung loosely on the girl's slender form—"for unfortunately we're not equipped to receive women, and we couldn't possibly leave you in your soaking evening dress. You would have had a fine case of pneumonia.—You needn't blush, dear child! I am a doctor and also an old man."

Tuxtla stared at the narrow face of the speaker, all covered with countless wrinkles. Slowly and uncertainly remembrance returned to her. "William!" she cried. "Where's William?"

"I don't know who William is. But he certainly didn't get drowned in that silly affair. A rather mixed-

* About 2,900 miles.

** About 137 miles.

up light-message just arrived, containing also the report of the captain of the steamer *Bojador*. A great weight was lifted from our minds. You needn't be anxious, young lady! The only person drowned was yourself. And it strikes me you're looking very healthy for a drowned person. To be sure, your life hung by a hair. It was this way:

Finkle Explains

"YOU were in one of the boats which came over from the Portuguese steamer to pay a very undesired visit to our harmless tank rocket. Unluckily we were not yet entirely ready to start, and so the boats kept coming closer. But our remarkable telescope artist up here noticed what was going on and played the silly prank of concentrating one of the great solar mirrors on the boats, to keep them from boarding the rocket. Perhaps he also wanted to give us some sunlight for our work on the rocket. The business is not yet entirely cleared up, and the man will have an unpleasant time when August Korf returns. Naturally, when the cat's away, the mice will play. But our chief does not permit such tricks, and I shouldn't like to be in that poor scamp's skin. I guess he was well frightened at the harm he did with his instrument. The air was so heated by the concentrated sunbeams that vertical whirls of air resulted, making a sort of miniature typhoon. No wonder your boats capsized! Nobody was prepared for a heavy sea, and the rocking was very troublesome for us, too.

"Well, my dear, we nearly had your death on our consciences, and we are deep in your debt. Of course the Korf Company will make up for all material losses. Only it's annoying that one of Korf's secrets seems to have come to light prematurely through this episode. Well, that doesn't interest you further!

"Anyway, you fell into the water. Still I don't understand why you didn't cling to the capsized boats, like the rest of your companions, instead of swimming quite a distance from the site of the mishap to our rocket. You must be a good swimmer. And, by Jupiter, if Berger hadn't chanced to look out a second before the start and noticed that a figure was holding on to one of the forward windows, you would have been torn to atoms by the starting rocket. We pulled you in at the last moment and had to take you along by force in this way.

"I judge you saw little of the fight. You were terribly exhausted, and it's a wonder you managed to stand the unpleasant pressure during the ascent.

"Yes, that's the story, and now my best wishes! Don't be too angry with us, dear child! You must recover yourself a bit here, and then I shall take you home on the next ship."

This unusually long speech had exhausted old Sam. He wiped the sweat from his brow and looked over at the beautiful brown maiden, who sat motionless on the bedstead and silently looked at her yellowish fingernails.

"My dear young lady," he said after a pause, "won't you tell me who you really are?"

Tuxtla slowly raised her hand and passed it over her eyes, as though banishing some dream.

"My mother called me Tuxtla!" she whispered, almost inaudibly.

"I beg your pardon?"

"My mother called me Tuxtla!" repeated the mes-

sis mechanically and monotonously, as a child speaks a piece learned by heart.

"Tuxtla? That seems to be a given name. You're from Mexico, aren't you, and were on a voyage across the Atlantic? Where were you going?"

"I don't know!"

Sam felt uncomfortable. "You don't know?" he stammered in surprise. "Well, where shall we take you?"

"To William!"

"Who is this William?"

"Sir William Burns!" explained Tuxtla, adding after a brief pause. "He was digging in Uxmal in Ylapakch."

This meant nothing to Sam. "Where does this Sir William Burns live?"

"I don't know!"

"Well, then—" The doctor suppressed a heartfelt curse. Then he took a notebook from his pocket.

"Please just tell us about yourself. I know your first name. We still need your last name, place and date of birth, residence of your parents, nationality, and so on. All right, then! I can do so damn little with just Tuxtla."

"My mother called me Tuxtla. She died long ago."

In despair Sam shut the book. "I shall have your dinner brought you, Miss—Tuxtla. That's the most important thing for the moment. Then I shall show you where you are. Good-bye!" He felt the cabin, shaking his head.

In the narrow passage lighted by electric bulbs Dr. Finkle ran into a man hurrying past.

"Is it something urgent, doctor?"

"Oh, it's you, Berger! Fine! I was going to look for you, but I didn't know just where to find you. Our foundling is on her feet again. But it would take the devil to understand her. What was the name of the drowned girl in the report of the *Bojador*?" Sam held Berger by the coat.

"Isabella, if I remember correctly. Wait a minute."

He took a paper from his pocket. "Yes, that's right! The last words of the dispatch are: 'Unfortunately one person fell victim to the waves and was drowned, a young Mexican girl named Isabella de —' and that was all we got. The clouds over Lake Constance were so thick that nothing more came through. Well, since the lady is again possessed of her senses, your curiosity will soon be satisfied."

"It's a strange business!" grumbled old Sam in vexation. "The black-haired girl insists that her name is Tuxtla. Tuxtla! Did you ever hear such a silly name! Nothing else can be got from her. She doesn't even know where she was really going on the steamer *Bojador*. Either there is some error, or else she had a nervous collapse through fright."

"Well," laughed Berger cheerfully, "she'll soon recover her memory."

"What are we going to do now, Berger? When can we send the poor thing home?"

No Way Out

"THAT depends on Korf. I'm sorry, doctor, that you didn't find him here on our arrival. He seems to have altered his plans for some reason, probably on account of the impending long distance flight. At any rate, he left orders for me to take over the command here and await his return under any circumstances. The tank rocket *Fremy*, which brought us here, had to leave at once for the moon power plant,

and the next supply ship isn't due for two weeks. So for the present I can't get either the girl or yourself away from here. Besides this, all communication with the earth by light-signals is just now interrupted. All of Europe, including Friedrichshafen, is covered with clouds. It will be two days before we get in sight of the auxiliary station in Sydney, and the new station in the Ural Mountains isn't yet ready for us. Things arn't yet altogether as they should be, but they'll surely be so after a while."

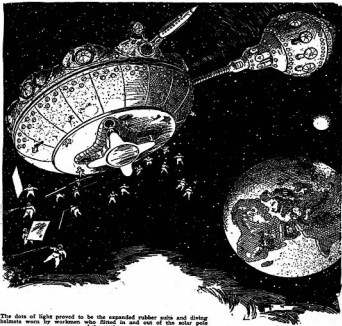
"But in some way we must send the news that this —this Tuxta or Isabella is not drowned. We can't just let the relatives of the girl grieve for her."

Berger shrugged his shoulders. "If better weather

doesn't set in around Friedrichshafen, we're helpless for the present."

"Well, some one or other of the thousands of observatories on earth must have clear vision. They can't all be clouded. So let's simply flash down to the earth, or across, or up—I don't know where our planet is! Someone will notice it, all right."

Berger laid his large hand heavily on the shoulder of the little man and replied with a smile, "Dear doctor, how do you imagine it can be done? Do you think we can experiment through a hundred thousand kilometers the way we might do on a drill-ground? Our flashes can be seen on earth only through the most ultra-modern telescopes with very powerful enlarge-



The dots of light proved to be the expanded rubber suits and diving helmets worn by workmen who flitted in and out of the solar pole of the station.

(Illustration by Ford)

ment and extreme illumination, and even with these rare instruments only when they are pointed exactly at us. The orbit of Astropol is apparently totally unknown to most observatories as yet. Surely we can't flash in turn at all the observatories available and hope that just at this moment the telescope is pointed at us, that there is also at the eye-piece a chap who knows that our light flashes are signals—one who likewise knows the Morse alphabet, and who is clever enough to forward to Friedrichshafen code messages which he can't understand. You're making heavy demands on chance, doctor!"

"But can't we send uncoded messages?"

"Impossible! That mad trick with the collecting mirror was enough for me. I really have no desire to conjure up new episodes and difficulties on my own account."

In the meantime the two men had reached a room like a hall, the arched ceiling of which extended all around down to the floor like a bell. In the middle an enclosed elevator shaft rose to the top point of the arch, which was pierced by numerous thick glass windows. On one side brilliant yellow sunlight streamed in, while on the opposite side the windows lay in darkness and appeared to be covered by thick black curtains.

"Then there's nothing for us to do but wait for better weather at Lake Constance!" remarked Sam in a tone of resignation.

Berger nodded. "At any rate the shutter is kept in constant readiness, and the earth is always watched sharply for possibilities of communication. That is all that can be done at present."

Berger turned to the elevator. "I must go up again, doctor. The long-distance ship must be ready by the time Mr. Kerf comes back. I'll see you at table."

The double doors of the shaft closed behind the engineer. A slight rushing and buzzing showed that the elevator was going up.

Finkle looked through the upper windows of the hall. The view kept startling him anew. Outside the hall the shaft continued to run vertically in the form of a cable, shiny and more than a meter in diameter, shrinking in the distance to a thin gleaming thread. At the end of the thread, high up on the black sky like a captive balloon on a rope, hung an immense sphere, very much flattened and with a bluish sheen on the sunny side, with many dots of light fitting this way and that about it.

It seemed to Finkle as if the immense mass must plunge down on his head in the next moment, shattering the entire hall to atoms. He could no longer endure the sight, and he turned again to the passage.

"Good Heavens!" he thought. "How the poor child will be frightened when she sees that!"

CHAPTER XV

August Kerf

IF Sir William Burns had ever been in Friedrichshafen before, he would not have recognized the little city on Lake Constance. The quiet idyllic spot had become an industrial city, stretching far out to the east. On the northern side, where fields and meadows had formerly reached down to the shining Alpine lake, chimneys and radio towers now rose up toward the sky, and workmen and motor trucks swarmed around between the machine shops and the storeshouses.

A high brick wall ran up from the shore in a curve over hills and valleys, enclosing the immense territory of the Kerf Space Ship Plant. It also ran out into the lake as a wide breakwater.

Evening was settling down under heavy rain clouds as Sir William drove up to the main entrance in a taxi. He quickly got out and went up to the gatekeeper's lodge.

"May I see Mr. August Kerf?" he asked in rather bad German.

The stout gatekeeper smiled condescendingly. "Mr. Kerf is receiving nobody. Besides, it's already nearly seven o'clock."

Burns reflected. "Can't someone in authority give me a brief interview?" he asked. "Perhaps the head of the light signal station?"

"Tonight Station B is in use. Then you want to see Observer Grimmer."

"I don't know any of the gentlemen."

With a snort the gatekeeper put down a pad of paper. "Just fill out the application!" he said impatiently. "Your name, position, purpose of visit, and so forth. It's all printed."

Burns thought it best to accede to this demand. Perhaps Observer Grimmer might then show him the way to more influential persons. With professional seriousness the porter read the Englishman's signature.

"Are you Sir William Burns?" he asked suddenly. "Well, you ought to have said so at once. This afternoon a telegram arrived from London from the Aris—Archis—"

"From the Archaeological Institute, you mean! The Institute has announced my arrival by telegram and has requested an interview for me."

The porter took out a roughly scribbled note. "Yes, yes! A telephone message came from headquarters that Sir William Burns should be conducted to Dr. Gundlach."

"Who is he?"

"The head of the Information Service."

"Good! Have me taken to this gentleman!" said Burns, contentedly.

The porter called a boy. "Building four, room fourteen, Dr. Gundlach!"

A few minutes later Sir William stood in a comfortably furnished conference room. Almost at the same moment there entered through the side door an elderly man, whose gait and bearing showed that he had formerly been an army officer.

"Dr. Gundlach!" he said by way of introduction.

"My name is Burns," said Sir William.

He invited the Englishman to sit down and silently waited to hear what he had to say.

"First, a question, Mr.—Mr.—"

"Gundlach!"

"Thank you! Mr. Gundlach, you have information, have you not, about the adventure of the steamer *Bojedor* in latitude 25?"

Dr. Gundlach regarded his guest from beneath lowered lids. "I know of the lamentable accident from the newspaper."

"Only from the newspaper?"

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that probably your space ship *Penit* has also reported something about this affair." Burns had difficulty in hiding his excitement.

Dr. Gundlach casually placed his finger tips together and regarded them intently. "For several days the sky has been uniformly cloudy, and all our signal-commu-

nization with the space ships has been interrupted," he said in a matter of fact tone. "But I don't understand why you should be interested in our internal communication system."

Burns moved a step closer. "You know that on the occasion of the mishap, the cause of which we will not discuss at present, a lady lost her life."

Gundlach nodded his head slightly.

"This lady is very close to me," went on Burns. "You may assume that she is my fiancée."

"Well?"

"I think you at least owe me some explanations."

The head of the Information Service in no way betrayed how painful this affair was to him. He had to proceed cautiously. This Englishman might be a spy who was using the fatal episode on the sea to extort admissions and explanations for which he could get good pay from some London paper. They had had experience before!

"Ask your questions!" said Gundlach after a pause.

"Have you received any news at all from the space ship *Vesna* since July 9?"

"No!" replied Dr. Gundlach quickly, quite in accordance with the truth.

Burns drew a breath of relief. "Then there is still hope! Where is this ship now?"

"Probably on the way to the moon."

"Is there no possibility of getting into communication with the rocket?"

"Not at present! But won't you explain your purpose in asking these questions?"

"I will tell you very definitely!" cried Burns excitedly. "In the space ship *Vesna* there is, living or dead, the lady who was reported as drowned."

Gundlach started up. "Impossible!"

"I was among those who were captured. I believe that through the spray of the waves I saw for a moment a dark figure on the hull of the space ship and then a movement, as though a window was being opened. Of course, I may have been mistaken. But an inner voice tells me that Isabella de la Cosa is alive. And therefore I beg you—no I demand of you, to do at once everything in your power to establish communication with the space ship *Vesna* in order to ascertain the fate of the unfortunate girl."

For a while Gundlach walked back and forth reflecting. Finally he stepped up to Burns, who was again sitting sunk down in the chair, with his head in his hands.

"If your suspicion should be correct, it is safe to assume that the crew of the ship *Vesna* will use any possible chance to send a report. I will have all our signal stations ready. Let us hope that tonight there will be clear vision for at least a few moments. Otherwise—" Gundlach stopped, as though he had already said too much. "Please be so kind as to wait here for me a short time. Meanwhile, I shall give the needed orders."

* * * * *

Alongside a pier extending far out into the lake lay rocking the thick hull of a space ship. The wings had been dismantled. The top of the twenty-meter monster rose high above the pier and rubbed against the planking. On the stern there shone in brass letters "B. R. K. III."

On the narrow road of the pier stood stoops full of great steel cylinders, which were rolled one after another through the open side window and came out again empty. Out of the forward port came a man with unusually broad shoulders.

"Eder!" he called to one of the mechanics. "The gas pumps ar'n't sufficiently oiled and there's a worn-out bearing on the gyroscope. Do you call that being ready to start? Isn't the detonating gas in yet? And where's Krüger with the flight curves?"

He jumped out. In figure he was a giant. His mighty limbs were covered by an oil-smeard blue flying suit, and his steel-blue eyes flashed from a sooty face.

He hardly listened to the mechanic's reply, but walked over the pier to the rear end of the space ship and climbed over the stabilizers into the exhaust. His long, flexible fingers touched every one of the rocket-exhaust pipes, arranged like the cells in a beehive.

"Bring an oil rag here, Eder! A lot of these exhausts are stopped up!"

The dull sound of falling steel cylinders, mingled with hammer strokes and the clanking of oil cans, came from within the steel monster. The giant in the exhaust tube did not hear that someone was calling to him.

On the pier stood the elegant Dr. Gundlach. Eder came climbing over. "Doctor Gundlach is here!"

"Well, what does he want?"

"An urgent matter, he says, and if you would please—"

"All right! You finish the work here! Look, the outer row of pipes is considerably oxidized. Get off that layer! But be sure to wipe off all the oil afterward!"

With a few powerful strides he was over at the pier. "What's wrong, Gundlach? Anything important? I haven't much time."

"A silly affair!" The information chief walked quickly toward the land, to get out of hearing of the workers. The blond giant followed him.

"Gundlach, you're making up a face as though the moon had exploded!"

"There's a gentleman here," replied Gundlach, "who identifies himself as Sir William Burns of the Archaeological Institute in London."

"Ah, the Egyptologist!"

"Well, then, you know him! That simplifies matters!"

"I've only read some of his works. He seems to be a hard worker. Go on!"

"Burns claims that he experienced the episode of the *Bojador*."

"A devil of an affair!" growled the giant. "Still no word from Berger?"

"No, the clouds over Europe—"

"I know all about that. But go on! What does the Englishman want?"

"I don't know what he wants! He claims that the Mexican girl who was reported drowned didn't die but was taken on board the tank rocket *Vesna*. And now he's after us. He wants to be sure."

"What's the girl to him?"

"He says she was 'near to him'. He's very much excited and—"

"If we don't calm this man down," put in the other, "the Portuguese government will be making demands on us. London will derive special enjoyment from playing the protector of the small nation, and there'll be diplomatic trouble. Why, they're just waiting for a chance like this! Berthold shall suffer for this, when I get up there. Why did the rogue have to fool around with the reflector on his own account?"

In his anger he walked so fast that Gundlach could hardly keep up with him.

"Is Sir William Burns still here?"

"Yes, he's waiting. If only the clouds would clear

away! If news should soon come from Berger, confirming the Englishman's suspicion, the affair will be pretty well settled. But if we don't get a report, then—well, I can't let the man stay sitting around forever! How do I know he hasn't based the whole story on what he saw in the paper, to get a chance to spy around?"

The giant stood still, best over to his subordinate, and said briefly:

"I'm leaving at 9:28. If the affair isn't explained by then, I shall take the Englishman along with me. That's that!"

This plan did not seem to please Dr. Gundlach. "But—what if he has just fooled us? It wouldn't be the first time!"

"Oh, well! If it turns out to be trickery, I shall pull him apart on route. Now I'll talk with him. Is he in the conference room?"

Dr. Gundlach again wore his look of calm and rather thoughtful reticence when he returned to Burns. "You're lucky, Mr. Burns. If you'd come two hours later, you'd have missed Mr. Korf. He invites you for an interview."

The Englishman sprang up delighted. "I'm very glad to meet Mr. Korf in person. When can I do so?"

"Right away!" said the powerful voice of the giant in mechanic's clothing, who had entered behind the informant chief. "I've heard of your misfortune, and am extremely sorry for it. I'm glad I can help you to the extent of my powers."

Burns started back in amazement. "You—are you August Korf?"

The giant nodded.

"You're the man who's set the world in an uproar?" added Burns in embarrassment.

"It would please me very much, if the world would bother as little about me as I bother about it!" laughed Korf, pressing the archaeologist's well-kept fingers with his dirty hand.

An Invitation

FOR a while Burns said nothing. He looked searchingly into the bright eyes of the famous Swabian and tried to conceal his surprise. He had pictured the creator of the *Greyow* very differently. He had expected a purely intellectual type of person, and was almost disappointed to meet this powerful and cheery man of action.

But it was strange! The longer he felt Korf's steel-blue eyes on him, the more clearly there went through him a feeling of calm security. From this man there went out waves of self-assured power and health. It seemed as if all cares and doubts must be stilled when Korf spoke, as if all problems and confusions were solved when he was near.

Burns suddenly felt a great longing to have this man want him for a friend. "Mr. Korf!" he began, and in his words there was the tone of complete confidence. "It's a serious but not hopeless affair which brings me in utmost haste to you."

Korf made a brief but not unfriendly gesture to stop him. "I know all about it, Mr. Burns. In twenty hours at latest you'll have certainty, and I hope it will be a happy certainty."

"Twenty hours is a long time for a man who waits in inactivity!"

"Not so long for one who is speeding toward his goal. Tomorrow evening at five o'clock you will see Isabella de la Cosa—or else know that you will never see her again."

As he spoke, Korf bowed his head. He was thinking

of a day which had raised him to the pinnacle of fame and which at the same time had plunged him into the bitterest suffering. The first space ship, the *Greyow*, had landed successfully, amid the jubilation of hundreds of thousands. He had stood at the goal of his most ardent wishes, but also at the pier of Natalia.

"What do you intend to do?" Burns was staring uncomprehendingly into the energetic face of the great engineer, over which a trace of sorrow was passing. Korf shook off his sad remembrances and looked the Englishman in the eye. "I'm thinking of asking you to take a little excursion!"

"Where?"

"To certainty!" Korf's eyes were shining again. "Are you ready to start with me in an hour and a half?" Overcome, Burns grasped the Swabian's hand. "I shall never forget this!"

The giant shook his head. "Not so fast, sir! The trip is neither a pleasure nor a gift. You must be prepared to do without earthly air for several weeks. For I intend to utilize your ability and knowledge for my excavations on the moon. It's a great advantage to have an authority like yourself on the spot."

"That would be my boldest wish, Mr. Korf. I'm absolutely at your disposal!" replied the Englishman enthusiastically.

"You don't yet know my conditions. The first is absolute submission to my orders or those of my representatives. You will come into situations where the least arbitrariness on your part may cost you your life."

Burns nodded.

"Further, I require of you to devote yourself, after your return, exclusively to the scientific evaluation of the paleontological and archaeological finds, setting aside all other work. Can you promise me this?"

Sir William did not reflect a second. "I can answer for it to the Archaeological Institute, and I give you my word."

"Good! Now for the last and hardest condition!" Korf smiled slightly. "The presupposition for everything is—silence. You must preserve unbroken silence regarding everything you see, and about all you observe of the technique of space-flying. You must, as it were, swear an oath of loyalty."

Burns hesitated with his answer. "It is hard, Mr. Korf," he finally said, "to experience marvels and remain silent."

Dr. Gundlach, who had followed the conversation with increasing dissatisfaction, raised his eyebrows, as though he had trouble in suppressing a satisfied "Aha."

Korf watched the young scientist, who was walking up and down undecided. Then Burns turned around.

"Give me a quarter of an hour to test whether I am strong enough to undertake this pledge!"

"Very well!" agreed Korf calmly. "We shall meet at Pier Number Three at nine o'clock sharp. You'll have a good hour to get ready for your oath of loyalty and the voyage."

With a benevolent look Korf gazed after the slender young man, who left the room with a correct bow.

Dr. Gundlach laughed scornfully. "Well?"

"He's a man who takes his word of honor for what it is; a jewel not to be handled lightly!" replied Korf with satisfaction.

A Telegram

NIGHT had set in. Out on the lake, a short distance from the pier, lay the ship, its wings spread out ready for flight. The lighted port-holes were reflected in grotesque distortion in the dark ruffled waves. A

fine, steady drizzle was falling from the starless sky.

From the church tower of Friedrichshafen came the dull strokes of the clock across the sultry air of the summer evening, as a motor-boat came up and laid alongside the space ship.

"Well, Sir William, are you ready?"

"I believe I can wholly accept your conditions, and I give you my word of honor to remain silent."

A small trunk was lifted in from the boat. Then the two vanished into the interior of the ship.

A quarter of an hour passed. A second boat approached. In the bow stood Dr. Gundlach, gesticulating wildly.

"Mr. Korff!" he cried out from far across the lake. Scarcely had the boat reached the rocket, when he hurriedly leaped on board.

"Mr. Korff, the station at Astropol is flashing to the Madrid Observatory!"

Korff wrinkled his brow. "In code, I hope?"

"Surely! By the merest chance the Spanish observer caught up a few disconnected signals and luckily telegraphed them here. Fearfully mixed up, of course. The decoder couldn't make any sense out of them. Only a few words could be made out with any certainty, but they're enough, I guess!"

Gundlach climbed back into the boat. Korff followed him and read the telegram in the uncertain light of the green starboard light.

"—steamer—Venus—named Tuxtla in—danger of her life—"

"He was right!" murmured Korff.

"Right? What do you mean? What did he call the girl who was supposed to be his fiancée? Fiancée of an English peer, mind you!"

"Isabella de la Cosa!"

"That name," said Gundlach, "was in the newspaper and was probably due to a mistake of the captain of the *Bojador*. But it's strange that the bridegroom-to-be should make the same mistake, and it confirms my suspicion that his acquaintance with this Mexican girl comes solely from the newspaper. Here it says plainly: 'named Tuxtla! Where should Berger get the name, if not from the girl herself? That settles the matter.'"

Gundlach spoke in a low tone, but with the assured tone of a triumphant conqueror. Korff bit his lips. "Mr. Burns!" he called loudly.

The Englishman appeared on the gangway.

"Mr. Burns, what was the name of the lady on whose account—"

"Have you news of her?" interrupted Burns in a voice trembling between joy and anxiety. "Is she alive—or—? Quickly he climbed down.

"She's alive!"

"Thank God! She's alive!" The darkness hid the tears of joy which filled his eyes. "I knew it—Tuxtla is not dead!"

Korff glanced meaningfully at the amazed official. "She's alive," he said seriously, "but she seems to be in some danger."

Burns grew pale. "Let's hurry up!" he groaned.

"Hold up your head, my young friend! Tomorrow you'll embrace your sweetheart!"

"My sweetheart?" repeated Burns in some confusion.

A quarter of an hour later a flash of light sped into the night and vanished into nothingness.

CHAPTER XVI

Astropol

DURING the entire trip Burns did not sleep for a moment. His anxiety about Tuxtla and the overwhelming impressions of the strange journey kept him in continual feverish excitement.

After the first few hours of the flight through the atmosphere came the brief but fearful period of the actual start into space. All at once the exhausts working in unison shot out their streams of combustion gases, and the ship sped out of the atmosphere of the earth like a stone hurled by some unimaginable power. Second by second the velocity increased, and an insupportable pressure weighed down on everything. This was for only a few minutes; then the speed of ten thousand meters a second was reached, which was sufficient to overcome gravity, and Korff shut off all the exhausts.

From now on the ship merely obeyed the laws of gravitation and rushed through space along a parabolic course determined by its own speed and by the influence of the earth.

At the same moment the mighty pressure vanished, changing to the exact opposite—to absolute weightlessness. The ideas of up and down lost all significance. Whoever did not hold fast to the leather hand-holds placed all around the walls floated like an angel in the rooms of the ship.

For Korff and the two sailors this condition was nothing unusual. But the Englishman at first kept bouncing back and forth between floor and ceiling, helpless and senseless, bruising all his limbs, until he learned to avoid all hasty movements and to curb his natural muscular power.

For hours he and Korff sat in the control room, firmly fastened in armchairs screwed to the floor. This was the only possible way to maintain a position of the body corresponding to terrestrial habit. Tireless the Englishman gazed at the marvels of the stellar world and the receding earth, which stood out as a very clear globe.

"Mr. Korff," he said once, "why am I chosen to experience all this, for which thousands have sought in vain? They say it is impossible to penetrate the secrets of the Korff Company. Why was it given to me?"

"Why?" said Korff slowly. "Because you are one of those who came to me with proper and honorable purposes. Also," he added, with a smile, "because you can be useful to me."

It was about the eighteenth hour after the start. Korff pointed the little telescope in the control room at a dot in the sky, scarcely visible to the naked eye. He called to Burns.

"Look through it!" he commanded the Englishman, and a peculiar triumphant smile was on his face.

Burns adjusted the eye-piece. "A remarkable double-star!" he said doubtfully. "It looks like a planet around which a little moon is revolving very rapidly and close to it. Both have a strikingly blue light. What is it? The planet is surrounded by little moving sparks and which threads!"

When the other made no immediate reply, he asked, "Is it Venus?"

Korff laughed loud. "No, indeed! The star of Aphrodite is at present more than two hundred million kilometers away, and with this little telescope you would seek vainly to recognize any of its details."

"That is to say, this double-star is either very large or else very near us?"

"So near that in just two hours we shall be there! It



(Illustrated by Paul)

"The entire solar construction is planned for a surface two thousand meters in diameter. Up to now only five thousand steel facets have been built into the framework."

is a second satellite of the earth and goes around it inside the orbit of the moon at a distance of about one hundred thousand kilometers, that is to say, one-fourth of the distance of the moon."

"And nobody knows yet of this second moon?" asked Burns in amazement.

"It has not existed long," Kerf's eyes were shining. "I built this moon! It is Astropol, our destination."

Burns recalled Nielson's remarks about the stationary rocket, flying in a constant orbit around the earth.

"Then this body is a space rocket?"

"No! It has no mechanical propulsion. It is, in fact, nothing but a small artificial heavenly body, constantly maintaining a fixed orbit."

"And why doesn't it fall down to the earth?"

"For the same reason the old moon doesn't fall to the earth, nor the earth to the sun. It was only necessary to give it the requisite tangential speed. From the attraction of the earth and the body's own lateral motion there results quite naturally the proper Kepler ellipse, and this does not change so long as the motion of the artificial star is not somehow accelerated or retarded by technical means."

"But you must have had to take this structure up from the earth, set it in motion, and—" he interrupted himself. "How big is the whole thing, anyway?"

"The main body is one hundred and twenty meters in greatest diameter," stated Kerf.

"What? As long as a respectable ocean liner! Do you mean to say you raised this monster a hundred thousand kilometers above the earth and set it in motion?" cried

Burns, incomprehendingly. "And the public has noticed nothing of all this immense work?"

Making a Planetoid

"WE didn't go to all that trouble!" explained the engineer good-naturedly. "Do you believe, for instance, that the Zugspitze Observatory was first built in Garmisch and then transported to the top of the mountain?"

"You mean that Astropol was built on the spot?"

Kerf nodded.

"Well, on what spot—in space? And of what?"

"The affair was tedious and slow, but luckily it was not so difficult as you imagine. First we had our largest space ship, the old *Geryon*, gravitate around the earth in the orbit intended for the artificial moon. That offered no difficulties at all."

"I can see that all right!"

"The *Geryon* had a force of workmen, thirty in number, who were regularly relieved. These workmen gradually built up Astropol—very simply, around the *Geryon*."

"During the flight? That is, while the space ship was maddly speeding around the earth?"

"Of course! It's like this, Mr. Burns. Here you are, sitting fastened to your chair, because you no longer possess the least weight to keep you in your seat. But if you slip into a diving suit such as we have and climb out through the double doors, you will float comfortably beside our rocket and feel nothing of the fact that we are shooting through space faster than the best airship on earth. As long as the exhausts don't work and there's no air resistance to check us, absolute weightlessness prevails. It's exactly as though we stood still and Astropol hurried toward us—the old story of the relativity of all motion, which in space suffers no disturbance!"

Burns did not reply at once. It was hard for him to rid himself of his terrestrial viewpoint. "Of what material is Astropol built?" he finally asked.

"Chiefly of sodium, which is continually brought in great pieces from all parts of the earth by four of our

own tank rockets. The rocket *Press* is such a sodium ship and was just en route here from Chile."

"I hardly dare offer any objections, Mr. Korf; but sodium, according to my knowledge, is a metal as soft as butter, and so active chemically that it has to be kept under petroleum to prevent its immediate destruction."

"Can't you get entirely rid of your earthly thinking? To be sure sodium burns, as soon as it comes in contact with the air. But under the conditions of airless and heatless space this metal gives the most excellent building material that can be desired. In the cold of two hundred seventy degrees below zero it is like the best steel in firmness, and it also has the advantage of weighing very little. Of course that doesn't mean anything so far as the construction goes, but it plays a decisive part in the transportation hither. Working this material is a very simple matter, since it is still soft when the task-ships arrive. It can readily be rolled out into sheets of any desired thickness. You must also take into account the absence of weight at the site of construction, which makes it possible for a workman to accomplish at least fifty times what he could on earth. This is why we have succeeded in completing, in about eight months, a structure that would have taken many years on earth."

In deep admiration Burnas gazed at the man who spoke so simply and naturally of accomplishments reaching out into the stellar world. "I'm beginning to see that nothing is impossible for you, Mr. Korf."

"And I understand less and less," said Korf, "why they make so much fuss about all this work, which is so much easier to do in weightless space than on earth. Just think how many people are occupied, when building a house, in merely passing tiles from one story to another. Here a man holds in the tips of his fingers many hundredweight of heavy sodium plates and pushes them where they belong. They weigh nothing at all."

"The only trouble is that the human organism doesn't very well endure a permanent stay in a weightless condition. To be sure, individuals vary in this respect, but the need of a gravity cell kept getting more and more acute."

A Gravity Cell

"A GRAVITY CELL? You mean a room with artificial gravity?"

"Certainly! You've already seen with your own eyes the solution of this problem. You just described Astropol as a double-star, and this was correct. The arrangement consists of a main body—a hollow sphere, considerably flattened, somewhat like a disk—and a much smaller accompanying body shaped like an extended pear. These two structures are joined by a sort of pipe sixteen hundred meters long, and revolve around each other at this distance apart. Since the mass of the small body is only a fraction of that of the main body, the common centre of gravity or point of revolution is so close to the centre of the disk that the latter simply revolves on its axis, while the pear on the cable swings about it in an orbit. Do you understand?"

"Perfectly! The entire system is a small replica of the relation between the earth and the moon."

"Just so! The only important difference is that the force of attraction which holds the earth and the moon together is here replaced by the solidity of a hollow metal cable. The quick rotation of half a revolution a minute produces in the little pear-shaped satellite a centrifugal force, which nearly makes up for the normal gravity on earth. So that here again there is an up and

down. The person in it feels his weight and can sit, lie, and walk perfectly normally. Of course the living and sleeping quarters are in this part."

"Marvelous! And the disk?"

"That's the real station—the platform in space, which we need as a fundamental condition for the further development of spatial navigation."

Burnas was just debating whether to ask about the purpose of the whole arrangement, when Korf anticipated his curiosity.

"You know that we set foot long ago on the inhospitable moon and erected solar power plants there which melt the ice of the moon and decompose it electrolytically into oxygen and hydrogen. In the chilly temperature of space these two gases of course solidify into solid crystals and make up the principal fuel for our space rockets. In this matter we've been independent of Mother Earth for a long time."

"But the products of our power plants on the moon had to be located somewhere for storage. It would be absurd to fetch them first to earth, and then lift them up again as cargo in the tanks of the rockets, above the earth's field of attraction. Nor was it practical to store them on the moon. Merely to make a landing on the airless surface of the moon requires careful and somewhat dangerous maneuvers. Besides, all the space ships in need of fuel would have to enter first the somewhat considerable field of attraction of the moon. In short, there were difficulties which actually compelled the building of a practical fuel station, and Astropol is the result."

"The special significance of Astropol, however, lies in the fact that its existence for the first time makes at all possible future advances into the realm of the planets."

The Englishman looked up inquiringly, and Korf went on:

"A ship that intends to go as far as Mars must be provided for the long voyage with ample supplies of food, air, and everything else needful. There must also be room for a sufficiently large crew. In other words, it will be of considerable size. If this ship, already extensive in itself, starts directly from the earth, it must take along fuel, first, for raising its own weight above the earth's field of gravity; then, for the trip itself, and, finally, still more to lift this fuel up from the earth."

"You can see at once that a space ship for interplanetary travel doesn't need the first and last of these loads if it starts the trip right from the station in space, where it's built. And saving fuel is everything! If a rocket uses too much fuel, it must have greater dimensions to be able to hold it. But the increased size again demands more fuel, and thus it goes on in a vicious circle until it passes the limit of technical possibilities."

"When are you thinking of undertaking the first voyage among the planets?"

"In four days, to Venus; or else to Mars, but in the latter case not for two months. The starting time depends on the relative positions of the planets and the earth. We can't just set out when we please."

Burnas eyed the engineer intently. "Then for heaven's sake set out for Venus first, Mr. Korf, if you possibly can!" he said quickly.

"Why so?"

"Because otherwise you might arrive too late!"

The Great Mirror

AS the ship approached its destination, the great mass of Astropol loomed up before the astonished eyes of the Englishman. He was soon able to recognize all the details with the naked eye.

The gigantic revolving disk was so placed that one of the grossly fattened poles was pointed directly at the sun and shone in dazzling illumination. The shadow line was sharply marked at the bulging "equator," and the other pole was constantly in absolute darkness.

Around it like the spoke of a giant fly-wheel, swung the thick sodium cable, which ran out from the equator of the disk and which, at its outer end, held firmly the little pear which sped around it, as if gripped by the stem.

The dots of light observed through the telescope proved to be the expanded rubber suits and the diving helmets, shining in the sunlight, which were worn by workmen who fitted in and out like bees at the solar pole of the station. Now and then tiny little rocket boats glided out into space, pushing before them some shiny pieces of metal.

The whole traffic seemed to move chiefly in one direction, and Burns soon discovered at some distance from Astropol a dense accumulation of the shiny points.

"Is something being built out there in the direction of the sun?" he asked Korfi.

"The men out there are working on the principal concave mirror," replied the latter.

"So far from the station?"

"The entire mirror construction is planned for a surface two thousand meters in diameter. Up to now only four thousand single facets, each one hundred square meters, have been built into the frame-work. These can collect the sunlight on a surface of forty hectares* and concentrate it on one area."

"Where is this vast amount of mirror surface manufactured?" asked Burns in amazement.

"At the station of Astropol. It is very simple. The sodium which arrives is rolled out into sheets as thin as paper; the individual pieces are unfolded by being turned on their own axes and are then put into the frames. You mustn't think of terrestrial quicksilver mirrors! The facets are as thin and light as paper, and every day the total surface grows a few hectares more. But it will be a long time before the structure can fulfil its real purpose."

"And what is that?"

Korfi laughed. "You'll be surprised. Listen. The mirror has no other object than to make money!"

This sounded so grotesque that Burns too had to laugh. "Make money?"

"Certainly! Money, and then some! The stockholders of the Korfi Company are only persons of flesh and blood, and they want dividends on their investments. Thus far our rockets have simply swallowed up money—unthinkable sums! It can't go on this way for ever. The golden breath of life is bound sometime to leave even the richest firm."

"I really can't imagine how the mirror can bring in money, no matter how large it is," replied Burns incredulously.

"Oh, it has important purposes of civilization to serve. By concentration of heat and light it can make barren regions of the earth fruitful, keep the northern Siberian ports free from ice, prevent the dreaded storms of the springtime, and thus save the fruit and vegetable crops of entire countries. I estimate that with one hectare of mirror-surface about three hectares of fallow land can be cultivated. Of course the owners of the land, which means first of all the states, will have to pay accordingly, and that is how we shall rent out our mirror."

"In other words, we shall sell solar energy. Of course

* Four million square feet.

—"Korfi hesitated a moment—"by uniting all the reflecting facets on one single spot on earth we can obtain frightfully devastating results. It won't be hard to blow up munition factories, to produce storms and hurricanes, even to set fire to whole cities and burn them to the ground. You yourself have experienced a tiny example of the power of the solar reflector, Sir William!"

"Then you actually control the whole earth!" cried Burns in amazement. "Henceforth you can nip every war in the bud!"

"Certainly! And that's the reason for our secrecy of action. If the so-called civilized nations guessed what is going on up here, a mad war of annihilation would be directed against me, and instead of building up and advancing civilization it would cause senseless destruction! Simply from fear! Only when the mirror is completed, and I have full power in my hands to check all such plans of destruction, will mankind learn of our work and enjoy the fruits of our science."

"Believe me, Sir William, it has been hard for me to keep silent about this great work. The Space Ship Company assumed a great responsibility when it decided to build above the heads of all the nations a plant which will henceforth determine the fate of the nations."

The Landing

BEFORE Burns could find an answer to these tremendous revelations, Korfi had turned back to his instruments. The landing maneuvers were about to begin.

The gyroscopes commenced to buzz and whistle. Slowly the space ship turned, until the exhaust-end pointed straight at Astropol. Then came a few discharges of brief duration—braking shots which reduced the speed of the ship more and more until it was the same as that of Astropol.

A few hundred meters from the goal this complete equalization was secured. The rocket ran in the same orbit as the station, and both seemed mutually motionless.

"It requires a great deal of skill in maneuvering and a lot of practice," remarked Korfi, who could now give his attention to his guest again. "To stop the space ships at the right point, so that the equalization in speed does not take place too far from the destination. Once Berger did succeed in laying a ship directly at the solar pole of the station. But that's a serious matter. The least lack of precaution may lead to a collision which would have destructive results for the ship. It's safer to carry out the braking maneuvers at a respectful distance from Astropol, to 'anchor out in the roads', so to speak."

"Now how do we get across?" asked the Englishman, who was still impressed by Korfi's account of the unlimited power of the solar mirror.

"Look!" said Korfi, smiling and pointing ahead. "Our 'pilots' are coming out! It won't take long now."

Two of the shining balloon-like suits were gliding toward them. With the aid of the recoil action of pistol shots they sped through space as little living rockets. They pulled along behind them a flexible cable, which shone against the black background of the sky like an iridescent snake; this they fastened about the hull of the ship and, the first connection was secured.

The cable was pulled in, and the space ship neared the vast mass of Astropol. Straight toward the solar pole it went, and was at once involved in the revolution. For a moment Burns struggled against an uncomfortable feeling of dizziness, but this quickly subsided. He no longer felt the rotary motion. Instead, the stars now

seemed to be moving in a circle in a measured course.

Korf made no move to leave the ship, and Burns had to control his impatience for some time. He clung to the handholds and tried as best he could to survey his new surroundings through the windows. Then the ship began to move again, and suddenly it was dark. It seemed to Burns as though the rocket was being pushed along sideways.

Several minutes passed. Outside could be heard a very soft rustling, which soon increased and changed into a whistling, as though a strong wind were blowing. After a short time the noise died away. A faint light came through the port-holes.

At last Korf opened the various fastenings of the inner door of the double entrance. "Are you ready to leave, Mr. Burns?" he asked.

"I've been waiting for a long time, Mr. Korf," said Burns, looking around at the rubber suits.

"You may leave the ship just as you are. We are already inside Astropol, and you needn't be afraid of freezing or suffocating. Come along!"

Korf grasped the Englishman by the arm and pushed him out through the door. The men now floated beside the ship in an enclosed twilight room. Light was streaming in from somewhere. All around on the walls were hand-holds in the form of loops.

In some confusion Burns followed the engineer, who was pulling himself along the wall toward a great gate-like opening. Then they came into a vast hall, brilliantly lighted, through which ran a maze of bars and taut hemp ropes, going in all directions. From one curved wall, which was pierced by hundreds of windows, the sun blazed in and warmed the air perceptibly. The other limits of the room Burns could not see. His gaze was fixed on the network of ropes, and he had the feeling that the room was infinite and endless.

"We are now in the main hall of the disk, under the solar pole," explained Korf. "The chamber we just left is the great entry shaft for space ships, the outer gate of which was suddenly closed after our entrance. We had to wait while the shaft was being pumped full of air. Like all the entrances, it is of course built as an air-lock with an inner and an outer valve, in order not to endanger the air pressure within the station."

Inside the hall it was full of life. Men glided here and there through the great meshes of the network. One scarcely noticed that they pushed themselves through the meshes with their hands and feet and corrected their motion by momentarily grasping at the cables, for they appeared to glide through as freely as goldfish swimming through the confusion of plants in an aquarium.

Burns suddenly understood the purpose of the ropes. If the room had been empty, it would have been very difficult to move from place to place in the absence of weight, and people would have been reduced to pulling themselves slowly along on the walls.

Some men came up to Korf and engaged him in conversation which Burns could not understand. He purposefully remained at a little distance, for he had no desire just now to talk, in this unusual situation, nor even to be formally introduced to anyone. For the moment, his most ardent desire was to feel a floor under his feet as soon as possible.

Korf now turned and motioned for Burns to follow him. Carefully Burns imitated all the movements of his guide and marvelled at the speed with which he learned to move from rope to rope like a monkey.

At the extreme edge of the hall Korf stopped and pushed his guest into a tiny room like an elevator, which

was electrically illuminated. He seemed to be in the best of humor.

"Excuse me, Mr. Burns," he said while pointing out to him a particular place in this very narrow room, "if I treat you like a child. But it is literally true that here you must first learn to walk. Just put your feet into these overshoes which are fastened to the floor, and hold onto those loops with your hands!"

Burns obeyed. It seemed to him as if his body was being drawn by some force in a certain direction, and when he had forced himself into the position mentioned, he plainly felt a slight pressure of the overshoes against the soles of his feet. He told the engineer of this observation.

"That's right!" the latter replied. "We are now in the equatorial bulge of the disk-shaped main body, and here the centrifugal force of the rotation is felt rather plainly. Your head is pointing toward the centre of the station and your feet toward the living quarters, down to which we are just going to travel."

"Then there is actually an up and a down here?"

"Oh, yes! Since the centrifugal force always presses outward from the centre of rotation in the form of rays, we feel every radial direction from the station as down. I warn you not to change your position now. You'll soon feel your weight again, and cats are not the only things that are supposed to land on their feet."

To the Living Quarters

A SLENDER little man also slipped in, so that the elevator, barely a meter across, was completely filled by the three men. Then Korf pressed a button, the door shut of itself and, with a dull rubbing sound, the elevator moved.

"We are now traveling inside the communication cable from the station to the gravity cell, or rather to the living quarters, as we generally call the revolving pear. Centrifugal force alone operates the elevator. All that's necessary is for it to be sufficiently braked, so that it shan't get too much speed in the free fall. This lever serves as a brake. See, I now turn it a bit! Do you feel anything?"

"I must admit that my head feels simply terrible. I feel as if my brain had dried up and lost all power to think. A visit to Astropol is more than normal human reason can grasp!"

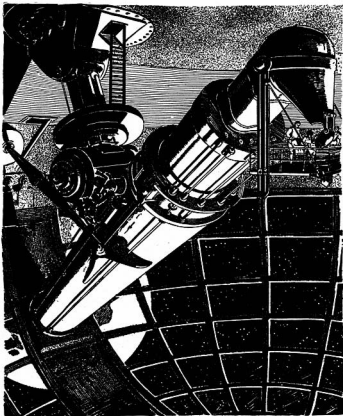
"That's just how I felt a week ago!" put in the slender man. "The mad life on this crazy star is enough to get any halfway sensible person completely mixed up. But one gets used to it far quicker than I thought possible at first. After that, floating around among the ropes is real fun, and the madhouse becomes a joyful place! Permit me—my name is Finkle, Dr. Samuel Finkle, space ship doctor and director of a Solvay plant, but now retired from those things."

"My name is Burns!" said the archaeologist wearily. "I'm glad to meet the famous ship's physician of the Geryon, who is also the brother-in-law of the great traveler of space," he added politely.

Talking was hard for him. The floor pressed harder and harder against his feet, so that his legs threatened to buckle in the middle—a feeling familiar to every visitor to a very high tower, when he comes down to the level street after descending a thousand steps.

There was again a vertical direction, again an up and a down. The floating was over. Burns grasped the handholds convulsively, in order not to sink down. Korf took hold of his arm.

"It's only your own weight that presses on you, and



(Illustration by Paul)

Korf laughed. "One to ten thousand. Objects on the earth three meters long can be recognized as dots. See for yourself; you can make out the Thames and Trafalgar Square . . ."

even that not to its full extent. The long stay in weightlessness has weakened you, Mr. Burns.

The Englishman leaned heavily on his neighbor.

"Yes, my dear Sir William," said old Sam, cheerfully, "here is where one learns for the first time what a respectable weight one possesses! But it's just as well to be reminded once in a while that you're made of flesh and bone and not of air or a vacuum. I must say, it was a very clever idea of Gus to provide for sufficient variety in Astropol! In the living quarters one can eat like a respectable person and lie in bed; he can shoot up to the stric like a pile in a pool of carp, and if this isn't enough, it's possible to take a little fight in the splendid sunshine from the station over to the solar reflector. Only the wine cellar isn't very well stocked, and that—"

A sharp squeaking outside drowned out the doctor's chatter. With a gentle shock the elevator came to rest. The three men got out and found themselves in the top of the living quarters. Uncomprehendingly the Englishman stared out through the top-windows up at the sky, where high above, on the end of the tube through which they had just passed, the mighty oval of the station was floating.

"Is the whole system now motionless?" he asked uncertainly.

"Not at all!" said Korf with a smile.

"But the disk doesn't move. It doesn't revolve a bit."

"You understand that the pressure of centrifugal force is always directed outward from the centre of rotation."

"I certainly do understand that."

"And do you see that the direction opposite to the centrifugal force always signifies upward to us?"

"Yes, that's clear."

"Well, then! The station, looked at from the living quarters, is always above. But just look at the star! You'll see at once that the living quarters at all times rotate around the station."

In truth, the sparkling army of stars was passing at an even, quick pace up behind the disk across the black sky. They were densely crowded, a sea of unwinding points of bright light. The well-known constellations had vanished in the myriads of less brilliant stars which are invisible from the earth on account of the dense atmosphere.

Suddenly Burns gasped. His wide-open eyes stared up into infinite space. A silvery half-disk was rising and spreading like a giant across the firmament. It was the earth! In the parade of the stars, it passed majestically through the zenith and disappeared like the rest behind the edge of the window.

"The sun is in an exactly horizontal direction to the side of us," Korf went on in his explanations. "It doesn't move, since the axis of our rotating system is pointed exactly toward it. So the sun plays for us a similar rôle to that of the north star for the earth, which remains approximately over the north pole of our native planet. But enough of this! First a hearty lunch, and then to bed. You need both badly!"

The Englishman did in fact present a pitiful appearance. He tottered as though he could keep on his legs only with the greatest effort, and his face had lost every trace of color.

"You're right, Mr. Korf!" he said, wearily. "But the most important thing of all to me is Tuxtia. Where is she? Where is Tuxtia?" he repeated as if clear consciousness had just returned to him.

"She's been waiting for you a long time!" said Dr. Finkle. "A few minutes more won't matter."

Burns looked mistrustfully at the wrinkled face of the physician. "Don't hide anything from me!" he said harshly. "In what danger is she?"

Finkle looked somewhat puzzled. "I don't know of any danger. The lady is in good health and has got over her harrowing adventure very well. But there's no point in your visiting her in your present exhausted condition!"

"But the telegram said—" began Burns, who was far from calmed.

Then Korf interrupted with a laugh: "My dear friend, we've been anxious without cause. Here's the complete light-message! Of course I asked about it up at the station." And he passed the Englishman a piece of paper.

"In the collision with the steamer *Bojador* there was taken on board the tank rocket *Vesuvius* a woman named Tuxtia, in extreme danger to her life. . . ."

CHAPTER XVII

One to Ten Thousand

BELOW the shaded pole of the disk extended a dome of strong transparent glass, the main observatory of Astropol. An immense telescope projected from the roof of the great room, with the tube hung oblique to the circular dome. Outside was black night. At the side the immense crescent of the earth, overshadowing all else, was moving in a circle and casting a dull silvery light on the shiny instruments.

Isabella de la Cosa sat motionless on one of the screwed-down chairs. Clasp around her feet and arms held her in her place in spite of the absence of gravity. Her glance was fixed on her distant home, the radiant earth, which was floating in space like a moon. The contours of the continents stood out sharply above the darker seas. The rotation of the planet was visible to the naked eye, as new and still newer stretches of land slowly appeared over the edge of the lighted half-disk.

Burns broke the silence. "What are you thinking of, Miss Isabella?" he asked softly.

Isabella looked up as though waking from a dream. "Of Queen Huitaca!" she whispered. "It seems to me as though I were Queen Huitaca—"

"Who as punishment for her evil deeds was cast up to the sky!" added the Englishman. "How could you have merited such a punishment, Miss Isabella?"

The girl passed her brown hand over her eyes. "Punishment?" she repeated thoughtfully. "Was it really a punishment, Sir William?"

August Korf appeared in the doorway and greeted his guests heartily. Then he adjusted the eye-piece of the telescope.

"Since Astropol circles above the shadow-line of the earth, we always see our planet from here as a half-disk," he began his promised explanations. "At present we are above the northern hemisphere, which is now inclined toward the sun and on which it is summer. The pole is always in the light. If you move a bit from the centre of the straight edge toward the interior of the semicircle, you will find the brilliant snow-fields of the north pole. Just a moment!"

He pushed a button. The circular floor of the observatory began to revolve in the opposite direction to that of the rotation of the disk. The apparent motion of the stars outside became slower and slower and entirely ceased, when the revolutions of the room had become the same as those of Astropol and counterbalanced them.

The 'pendulum' of the living quarters, however, which had hitherto hung apparently motionless in space, now began to swing around again.

The earth now floated motionless in the sky, and the telescope could be pointed with exactness. Burns was the first to look through the eye-piece.

He adjusted the control-screw of the telescope. The Norwegian coast moved into the field of vision, followed by the whole bizarre shape of the Scandinavian peninsula. Then came dull grey patches. Heavy clouds hung over central Europe. The Alps towered up in dark stripes above the surging sea of mist, while beyond shimmered the sunny coasts of the Mediterranean.

Strongly foreshortened, the contours of Spain, Italy, and North Africa were floating at the extreme tip of the crescent of light. Over the central wide part spread out the continent of North America, while the other tip was filled by the Pacific.

"Splendid!" cried Burns in ecstasy, as he gave his place to Tustla.

Meanwhile Korf was adjusting a smaller instrument which was mounted on a very complicated stand.

"The enlargement with which you are looking at the earth is only two hundred, and permits only a general survey. What point on earth would you like to see more exactly? This feeble telescope reduces the distance to a ten-thousandth, and—"

"It's news to me that there can be a telescope without a tube," interrupted Burns in astonishment.

"Only out here in empty space! Do you see the faintly shining point out there? That's the objective—a concave mirror seven meters tall, which is held out from the station by long steel hands. It reflects the image of the object sighted across into the dome and into the eye-piece. In this way we get enlargements which reduce the ninety-five thousand kilometers to the earth to just ten kilometers, and we view the surface of the earth just as we would from the summit of Mount Everest. Of course this combination shows only relatively small sections of the earth, and you must decide what points you want me to focus for you."

"In England possible—"

"England is a large order. Let's rather say London!"

London From Afar

THE focusing took a few minutes. From the objective thin wires ran into the dome. Electric currents regulated the mirror and made it follow the rotation of the earth automatically.

"Of course it's foggy!" murmured Korf, without taking his eye from the eye-piece. "But luckily the fog isn't dense and is irregularly spread out. You can plainly make out the Thames and Trafalgar Square, if I'm not mistaken—"

Burns shook his head in doubt. "What, you claim you can recognise individual places at a distance of more than one hundred thousand kilometers?"

Korf laughed. "One to ten thousand, my dear Sir William! Objects three meters long can be barely recognised at that. See for yourself!"

Burns gazed eagerly through the glass. At first all he could see was a grey expanse. It was only slowly that his eye became accustomed to the dim images. Patches of mist passed by, massed themselves together, and broke up. Dark spots appeared—a swarm of dots. London lay before his eyes like the plan of a city on a very minute scale, pleasing him greatly. It was foreshortened and viewed obliquely, as though from a distant airplane. The wide stream of the Thames passed through the

middle, with tiny little lines on it, the Thames boats. On both sides was a confusion of lines and rectangles filling up the entire field of vision—the sea of houses in the giant city. High towers and striking buildings contrasted with monotonously built-up sections of the city.

"This is uncanny!" exclaimed Burns. He looked to see if he could find Lord Kingsley's house. "Buddy!" he thought. "If she guessed that I was looking down from here—"

Isabella's melodious voice rang through the room. "Mr. Korf, can one also look at Venus with this instrument?"

"Surely, Miss de la Cosa! Venus is at present floating toward us from beyond the sun and appears as a broad and very bright crescent. Laterally from the earth—yes, you must look over here."

Korf slipped behind the girl and directed her glance at the brilliant star of Aphrodite, which was just visible far below the horizon at the lowest edge of the dome.

"If Mr. Burns has looked long enough at his native city, I'll point the telescope at Venus for you."

Burns turned around, full of interest. With a mixture of wonder and hesitation he looked at the Mexican girl.

"Can we also see the little satellite you recently discovered?" he asked quickly.

"Then you know—"

"I've heard of your discovery, and this tiny moon interests me extraordinarily. Will you make the adjustments?"

For a while all was silent in the dome. Burns snaped his long fingers nervously. Isabella looked fixedly at the shining point in the sky which represented the morning star. Her face remained quite expressionless. The deep brown was shading a bit into yellowish, probably in consequence of the adventures and physical exhaustion she had gone through so recently.

Korf turned wheels and levers. The electric regulating currents swung the mirror around. With a little adjustment of the eye-piece, Venus appeared in the field of vision of the telescope.

"Will you please look, Miss Isabella?"

Isabella placed her eye to the glass.

"What do you see?" asked Korf.

"A shining, yellowish surface, rather pale—"

The words came hesitantly from the lips of the girl.

"Is that all?"

"Yes! Excuse me—wait!—bright spots and darker ones—a lot of lines in between—there's something like a thick fog over snow—the lines vanish and reappear—"

Korf smiled. "On the star of the goddess of love there is probably nothing but snow and ice. As for this morning to the side, I am responsible for that. I made the telescope pass very slowly across Venus, so that you might gradually—"

"Stop!" cried Isabella, all of a sudden. "I see the edge of Venus! How magnificent it is! A gigantic arc, standing out brilliantly against the black velvet of the sky! I see something indistinct at the edge—those which mist clouds again! They're bubbling up and rushing into the inside of the disk—like wild horses of the pampas. Everywhere I see motion—illumination—flashing—the star is steaming—boiling over—"

The Mists Are Rising

KORF'S hand touched the adjusting device. The objective mirror turned a little further, almost imperceptibly. "What do you see now?"

"Down at the left I still see a little bit of the shining edge of the morning star, sending out some more boiling vapors. Nothing else! Only dark night!"

"Nothing else? Look closely, Miss de la Cosa!"

"Oh, yes! Now I see a star shining up at the right—just as one might see it with the naked eye."

"It's one of the infinitely distant fixed stars," agreed Korf, "which even our strongest telescopes can't bring any clearer! But just look closely at the space between this star and the edge of Venus! Don't you see—"

"Yes, yes, now I see it! A very faint shining point—as pale as a meteor—its floating like a snowflake above the mists on the edge of the crescent. The mists look as if they were reaching out for it, as if they were trying to catch a ball—"

Korf nodded. "That's the new satellite of Venus, which we recognized for the first time two months ago. It's so small that even in this very powerful enlargement it only looks like a dot of light—a tiny splinter beside the giant mass of Venus!"

Isabella silently regarded the spark of light out in space. Burns had risen. Tensely he watched the play of expression on the Mexican girl's countenance, as though expecting something inexplicable and terrible. It seemed to him as if Tuxtila's smooth face must bring the solution of the cosmic puzzle—more surely than the best of telescopes. Unconsciously he grasped the stone from the moon, which he always carried in his pocket.

Korf had noticed the excitement of the Englishman. "Don't you want to look at the splinter, too, Mr. Burns?"

Burns declined. His eyes were fixed on the girl.

"Excuse me—Tuxtila!—he exclaimed.

The engineer could not understand the strange behavior of the Englishman. Shaking his head, he went back to the instrument. But what was that? Isabella was no longer looking through the glass. Her head lay back, the blood had left her cheeks, and her skin shone yellowish against the background of her black hair. Her eyes were wide open—staring—and the pupils could not be seen.

"For Heaven's sake, Miss Isabella, what's the matter?" cried Korf in amazement. He reached for the telephone.

"Quiet!" whispered the Englishman. "Be still and listen!"

Surprise and confusion filled Korf. He had a dull premonition—a feeling that in this moment something was happening which was not of this world.

Isabella's breast rose and fell quickly. Her breath whistled through her violet lips. She uttered a deep sigh and then—Korf started in horror. A shrill cry rang through the hall.

"Quick! Quick!"

Korf had clearly seen that the girl's lips had not moved. He looked inquiringly at the Englishman. "What is this, Sir William? What shall we do?"

"Nothing! Nothing at all! Wait! Just be quiet!" He grasped the engineer's arm.

Isabella rose up. Her face was distorted as though in frightful anxiety. Then she spoke again—or rather, she screamed: "The mists—they're rising—getting nearer and nearer! The vapors are reaching out for us—their hands they want to clutch us—to pull us into the depths! Quick! For God's sake be quick!"

Burns had turned pale. He bent over the girl and gently stroked her brown hands. "Tuxtila!" he called. At his touch she started. The fear left her face. Her voice was soft again.

"Past?" Her words came hesitatingly. "The misty hands are sinking back—but they are lurking in the depths—they will return! . . ." She uttered a low moan, and then all was still—very still.

"Tuxtila!" Burns repeated the Mayan name almost insiduously.

Korf meantime had been glancing through the telescope. In excitement he fingered the scales. He seemed to be making a measurement and calculating something. He worked his slide-rule frantically. Again he glanced through the eyepiece.

"Mr. Burns!" The voice of the usually calm and untroubled traveler of space was trembling.

"What is it?"

"The satellite has—" Korf took a deep breath. "It has again considerably lessened its distance from the surface of Venus!"

Burns shut his eyes. Like a flash Mr. Nielsen's explanations came to his mind.

"Is it falling?" he almost shouted.

"No, no, not yet! But its orbit is no longer constant. It is changing and approaching Venus!"

"For Heaven's sake—it's touching the atmosphere of Venus! The misty hands! How long can it hold its own in this struggle? Oh, let's hurry, August Korf! Your space ship is ready! Noe to Mars, no! To Venus—at once—before the catastrophe occurs! Hasten, hasten, August Korf! You can! You must!"

"Why, do you think I could prevent the crash?"

"No, I realize that no one can change the course of the stars—not even you! But we must see and investigate it—this satellite—before it crashes! There's a riddle surrounding it and we must solve it—the greatest riddle of all time! Set out, August Korf! I'll go with you! His hand pointed to the shining star. "I—see, Tuxtila!"

"Tuxtila! Miss Isabella!" repeated Korf with a doubtful look at the peacefully sleeping girl. "Why a woman, who only—you underestimate the danger!"

"This woman must come with us!" Burns said definitely, as though any refusal were impossible. "This woman is the only one who can reveal the mystery to us—more surely than telescopes and microscopes! Don't ask, Mr. Korf! I implore you, hurry! Every hour is precious—the misty hands are lurking in the depths—"

Korf stood motionless. His thoughts were confused. He was trying to resist the appeal of this uncanny, this incomprehensible, affair.

Isabella stirred and opened her eyes. The first glance of her soft eyes met Korf—with a pleading, imploring look.

As though in a dream Korf took up the telephone and got a connection with Berger.

CHAPTER XVIII

Buddy

"I beg your pardon, sir!"

Silently the boy slipped up to the old grey-bearded gentleman, who was sitting in an immense armchair hidden behind a mountain of pamphlets and papers. The splendid reading room of the Claridge Hotel was almost empty at this hour.

The old man did not immediately reply. His mind, off in distant fields, seemed to be slow in returning to his corporeal surroundings. At last he turned his head. "A lady desires to speak with you, sir."

"A lady? He looked at the clock. It was almost nine. "Who is it?"

"Miss Kingsley, sir!"
The old man looked up in astonishment. "Miss Kingsley? All right, please conduct the lady to my parlor."

"Very well, sir!" The boy vanished like a shadow. Shaking his head the old gentleman assembled his papers, reached for his stout cane, which was his constant companion everywhere, and strode heavily through the hall to the elevator. A moment later he opened the door of his parlor.

"Good evening, dear Mr. Nielson?" came a greeting in a sweet, girlish voice. "How are you? Are you vexed at my disturbing you so late in the evening?"

With both hands the old man grasped the slim hand of the tall, beautiful girl. Above the collar of her half-open jacket loose strands of her blood hair strayed out.

"How could you ever disturb me, dear Miss Buddy? I'm always happy to see you. How lovely you are!"

With laughing eyes Buddy looked into his kindly old face. Then she turned.

"I've brought someone else with me," she said, with a gesture of introduction. "This is Mr. Patson from Queenstown. He just recently returned from the forests of Mexico. You know—he was with Sir William Burns in his expedition."

Nielson now for the first time noticed the young man, who hitherto had remained aside in the dark corner and now stepped closer. The Irishman's chubby face beamed cheerfully.

"Even if we never met before, Mr. Patson," said the astronomer, cordially, "we've long been well acquainted, haven't we? Miss Kingsley has given me much pleasure by bringing to me the helper of Sir William."

Patson bowed silently. Buddy sat down. When the fall light of the lamp fell on her youthful face, it did not escape Nielson's notice that there was deep sorrow in her blue eyes.

"Well, dear child," said he, after the formalities were over, "what brings Mr. Patson and yourself to me?"

"Tomorrow afternoon you are returning to California, Mr. Nielson. You will first make your official farewell visit to Lord Kingsley, and I shall be there, but I shall have to keep silent. Yes—Buddy lowered her eyes in embarrassment—"I have so many questions to ask you, Mr. Nielson. I've been looking for you a long time. But you were always busy with meetings or in seclusion at Greenwich. This evening is my last chance! Excuse me for venturing to visit you here in the hotel before you leave!"

"I have been very busy, it's true, but I should always have found time for you, dear Buddy. I'm very curious to know the nature of these important questions."

"I suppose you already know what they are, Mr. Nielson. This uncertainty is terrible! Please tell me, where is Sir William?" A tear shone in her long lashes.

Nielson thoughtfully folded his hands and looked seriously at them. "How should I know, dear Buddy?" he replied after a while. "Of course, when he started out into space with August Koef, he wrote to the Institute himself before leaving, and it was in all the papers. I know nothing since then. I'm very much surprised that he succeeded in going at all."

"You know more than all the others, sir! What you don't know, you can figure out. Please speak, sir!"

Nielson could not suppress a smile. "You have too

high an opinion of the power of mathematics. Calculation alone won't serve to solve all the riddles of the world."

Buddy did not give in. "But you have ideas, sir. Your hypotheses are always correct. Why did Sir William go with Koef? Off into these worlds I can't even imagine—where death lurks all around?"

"He is inspired by a dream which thousands have. He is the first technical archaeologist to go with Koef. Burns can and will afford great services to science. He will conduct the excavations in the lunar ice and—"

"And will not return!" sighed Buddy despairingly.

"Don't be faint-hearted, child! The dangers which he will encounter are no greater than those which surrounded him in the tropical forest. I have great confidence in Koef's skill. Sir William will return, and a certain faint-hearted girl will then be proud to stand at the altar with one of the most famous scientists of the world—" He said no more.

Some Possibilities

BUDDY'S head had sunk down. The long-restrained tears were running down her pale cheeks. Her voice trembled as she said to Patson, "You tell him, Mr. Patson!"

The Irishman looked confused and embarrassed. In comfortless sorrow his face twisted into his eternal smile.

"I tell you, you're wrong, Miss Kingsley! I wish I'd never said a word about it! I assumed Mr. Burns had already told you about it. He forgot to do so. It's incomprehensible! I don't understand it myself. Think of it, dear Miss Kingsley—Sir William, the British peer, and the Indian girl! Quite unthinkable! I—oh, that cursed stone from the moon is to blame for everything—it's nothing else!"

Gradually Buddy became calm, and Patson managed to tell a connected story. Beginning with the meeting in the sunken city in the primeval forest, he told of Señora Isabella de la Cosa, of Tuxtla's flight, of the puzzling capsule of bone, and of the events on the Atlantic.

"A mad story, God knows!" he exclaimed. "But the most interesting point is that Mr. Burns guessed just right! As you know from the last news from Friedrichshafen, the Mexican girl was actually picked up by the space ship *Plover*. Doubtless she has already met with Sir William somewhere in space."

Patson ceased speaking, and for a while there was silence in the room.

"What do you say to that, sir?" asked Buddy in a dull tone. "What does it all mean? I've seen the strange stone from the moon. It was all terrible. Williams was so disturbed, I hardly recognized him. He is possessed—by this witch! Sir, I came to you because my father is so reserved—a person cannot speak freely to him. Mr. Nielson, help me!"

For a long time Nielson stroked his beard. Then he said, calmly, "There are signs and wonders—even to-day in the fourth decade of the twentieth century. My old head can no longer take them all in. But I do know one thing—Sir William is a man of honor, and you know that too, and that should be enough for you."

Buddy gave him a thankful look.

"It seems to me," Nielson went on, "that this—this—"

"Tuxtla!" said Patson.

"That this Tuxtla is one of those rare beings who,

without knowing it, possesses capabilities transcending our ordinary powers to perceive. I may remind you of the mysterious lore of that Russian woman, Madame Blavatsky, who decades ago excited equal wonder and mirth. There must be something to it. When she was in trance she repeatedly told of long-forgotten times and conditions, which on rigid scientific examination proved to be accurate accounts. We have, as yet, no scientific explanation for this kind of power. Anyone that believes in the Indic teachings might regard it as upholding the theory of reincarnation, and say that there may be persons who in an unconscious state can occasionally recall their former conditions of life."

"But in that case all people would have to experience such recollections more or less strongly."

Nielson smiled slyly. "Years ago I was talking with a jester about these things. He claimed that somewhere there was a great jar in which souls were kept—a world reservoir of souls, so to speak. The souls returning from earthly bodies that had just died all went back to this jar and were all mixed up with the other souls. When a new being saw the light of day, then a spoonful (as it were) of soul-material was taken from the jar for its corporeal representative on earth. As a rule this spoonful of soul-material contained the most varied constituents of previous souls, and none of these parts was strong enough to impress itself on the person's consciousness. But in very rare cases it happened that so great a portion of one previous soul fell to the lot of one individual that it could make headway against the other parts. Hence historical second-sight."

Buddy could not help laughing, in spite of her grief.

"That's a very clever jape, Mr. Nielson!" she said.

"I have often had occasion to think of this joke—especially two years ago, when the Swedish medium, Christa Orloff, made the most startling revelations about old Vineta. She related everything just as though she had herself been present at the downfall of that city of sea-rovers. The diving operations then commenced have confirmed her statements most surprisingly."

"This Tuxtla, in her spells, seems to look back into the earliest primal times. Perhaps the stone from the moon is the talisman which causes or favors these strange conditions. Almost all noted mediums possessed such objects, which by their mere presence greatly increased their powers of second-sight."

"The stone had a very strange effect on me," said Buddy, shuddering slightly. "It seemed as though something strange and uncanny had entered the room—as though a cold breath from a sepulchre were striking me. Father too was startled. He hid his confusion by making loud jokes."

"Now you may well believe, Miss Buddy, that an investigator of archaeology like Sir William would show the greatest interest, if he met such a person and had this power demonstrated."

"But why did he say nothing, when—?"

"He wasn't yet certain of the matter. A serious man doesn't like to speak of things that are still apparently uncertain and puzzling to himself. Besides, broaching such a subject to Lord Kingsley! You know yourself that our dear Sir William could not possibly venture to do it!"

To the Morning Star

NEW hope shone from Buddy's eyes as she said, calmly and contentedly, "You are clever and good,

Mr. Nielson. I do thank you. I knew you could solve any problem."

She grasped the trembling wrinkled hand of the old man.

Nielson stroked her blond hair. "How young you are, Buddy!" he said. And suddenly Buddy looked up, while new uneasiness flashed into her eyes.

"But why doesn't Sir William come back? The expedition was to be for only a fortnight. There has been no news for weeks. Where can he be? What do you think, sir?"

Nielson shrugged his shoulders. "For the time being there is no work being done on the moon. The site of excavation is now in darkness. The lunar night lasts two weeks. Either Sir William is spending this time in the stationary space ship, circling around the earth—in which case he would have been able to send-word via Friedrichshafen—"

"Or else?"

"Or else he's gone on a new voyage of discovery with Korf."

"A new voyage! Where?"

"I can only give you my guess. Listen!" Nielson leaned back, half-closed his eyes, and spoke slowly, as though addressing a great audience. "Since the congress I have watched the stationary space ship day after day—or, to put it better, night after night. About three weeks ago I noticed near it the dot of light of what seemed a fairly large rocket. It impressed me on account of its brightness, and I made a few observations of position."

"The first calculations did not give a clear result. Certainly the thing was moving, much faster than previously observed space ships, in the plane of the ecliptic and in fact exactly opposite to the motion of the earth. It was apparently propelled by tremendous power. Not until the observations of the following nights could I get a perfect Kepler gravitational curve*, a fact which proved that the ship was now freely subject to the cosmic forces, with no propulsion of its own. The Lick Observatory and the Michigan Observatory took observations that confirm my own. The last observation was sent from Cape Town and this too agreed with my calculations. The flight curve of the space ship is determined."

"Now it is far beyond the range of our terrestrial optical aids. Nobody on earth can follow the course of the dot of light."

Breathlessly Buddy and Patson gazed at the speaker.

"And this voyage is going to—?"

Nielson wiped his brow. "It is Korf's first flight into the depths of the solar system—far, far from the earth and the moon—the true flight into infinity. The calculation of the path shows an extended ellipse, the point closest to the sun being between the orbits of Mercury and Venus. Without doubt this flight is to the morning star."

Buddy sat still in horror. She found words only slowly. And William is in that ship!" she said in repressed anguish.

Patson scratched his head. "I'd give a lot to be there! Damn!"

"I recall again," went on Buddy softly, "how William said to me: 'It seems to me as if this sacred sym-

* Nielson referred here to Kepler's Law which postulated that the areas of the sectors of revolution of any body moving in an elliptical orbit were in the ratio of the cubes of the distance from the third body. By dividing the period of revolution of Jupiter around the sun by the cube of the distance from the sun to Jupiter, the result would be the same as if the body were moving in a closed orbit or was approaching or receding from the earth. In the present case by calculating on the motion of Jupiter he discovered that it is not moving in an orbit about our earth.

bol, which signifies the tree of life and the sign of Venus, were pointing out into space? The frightful power of the stone from the moon has taken possession of him!"

She covered her face with her hands. "Mr. Nielson—how long—?"

"Many months!"

"Months!" groaned Buddy. "God keep him and—her!"

CHAPTER XIX

Ellipses in the Solar System

THE revolving floor of the observation dome of Astropol was humming softly. The vast throng of stars was motionless, as was the immense disk of the earth hanging in the black sky.

Berger did not heed these things. He was already too well accustomed to the impressive sight. With his right hand he was adjusting the great telescope, while his left hand held to his ear the receiver of a telephone.

Electric currents carried the pointing of the instrument over to the solar reflector floating far off to the side of the station and directed its rays parallel to the line of vision of the telescope. One more turn of the fine adjuster, and a tiny gleaming dot stood motionless and without twinkling at the cross-wires of the eyepiece.

"All ready?" called Berger into the telephone.

"All ready!" was the reply.

"Give the word!"

The great solar mirror began to operate. Its countless facets turned in the network, casting thousands of flashes of light out into the infinite distance, where they united at one point.

Berger did not take his eye from the glass. "To-day we can already use more than a hundred hectares of mirror surface!" he remarked contentedly to Dr. Finkle, who was watching the experiment with interest.

"And will they be able to see this signal?"

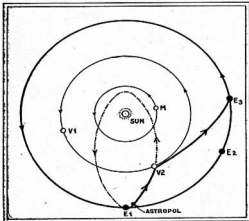
"I hope so. Korf will keep a sharp watch on us. The time is exact. -Of course we can't keep up this light communication much longer. The speed of the *Jarus* is constantly increasing, and its distance from us is increasing also day by day so that we can't keep up in our increasing of the range of the reflector. Probably Korf with his relatively small telescopes will be unable after a few days to see even our most powerful signals. Oh—Oh!—they are answering!"

There was a weak flickering of the dot of light in the eye-piece. Its brightness changed in an almost imperceptible degree. Berger noted down the dots and dashes, and Sam painfully translated according to the international code of terrestrial stations.

"Understood—everything all right!" This sentence was repeated three times.

Again the facets of the giant mirror of Astropol vibrated. The sign-off flashed out to the speeding space ship.

"Hm!" said Sam. "But why was it unneeded! Quite against all the custom of the Korf Space Ship Company. Anyone possessing this code can simply read off the signals along with us!"



Illustrating the journey of the space traveler from Astropol to Venus. E1 shows the earth and V1 Venus at the beginning of the journey. Starting from Astropol, the *Jarus* goes in the direction of V2. This is the place in the orbit of Venus where that planet will meet the space flyer. The dotted lines represent the rest of the orbit of the space flyer around the sun if it continued on. Now, while the space flyer has been traveling to Venus, the earth has been moving in its orbit and when the flyer reaches Venus, the earth is at E2. By making calculations of the time required for the return trip the space flyer is sent along the curved path between V2 and E3 and will meet the earth at E3.

Berger laughed loudly. "To be sure, Doctor, if they see them. Depend upon it, no observatory on earth can now see either the *Icarus* or even its signals. The twenty million kilometers* which now separate Korf from the earth are the best protection against any spying."

"Then we are, so to speak, just among ourselves!" replied Sam with a grin.

Berger read from the scales the pointing of the telescope, calculated for a while, and then made entries on a curve plan.

"I hope the fuel doesn't give out on this fearfully long flight!" said Sam, struck by a feeling of anxiety.

Berger shook his head. "Since the starting maneuvers Korf has not fired a single directional shot. The *Icarus* is describing its calculated course like a lifeless heavenly body, without using any mechanical power, and on the fifteenth of August it will cross the orbit of Venus. So far the journey is going according to plan."

"Well, going to Venus, so close to the sun, is a bit different from the excursions to the moon or up here to Astropol. I don't know—I don't entirely trust this flying to the sun. I hope he doesn't burn his wings, like his eminent precursor, Icarus. Anyway, giving the ship the name *Icarus* is just like challenging the gods to do their worst!"

"My dear good Doctor, it seems to me you haven't yet quite comprehended the matter."

"I freely admit that I haven't!" said Sam honestly. "But that's much less important than the fact that Korf has perfectly understood everything."

"The trip to Venus is really just as much a matter of calculation as of engine power. One can't simply set out, headed for Venus. In a few days the star of Aphrodite would be Heaven knows where, and the strongest rocket motor wouldn't help."

Berger Explains

"DON'T you think that one could catch up by using very great speeds?"

"No, quite the contrary! Too much speed would actually be dangerous to the space ship. It would be forced into a course leading away from the sun, and one could calmly give up all hope of ever reaching the destination. If there's ever a point to the proverb 'blind zeal leads to trouble,' it's here in the solar system."

"But I'm still curious to know how a flight to Venus is actually possible!"

"First think—then calculate—then start! Woe to the cosmic navigator who relies on the power of his rocket motor alone! You know that the earth and its old and new satellites, along with all the rocket ships whizzing about, are going around the sun, travelling at the same time about thirty kilometers** a second."

Sam grunted, which Berger took to be a sign of assent.

"Just imagine that this speed of the earth," he went on, "should be decreased by some gigantic power."

"I am imagining it."

"Then our planet would leave its orbit and fall toward the sun or rather around the sun in an extended ellipse, the vertex of which moves nearer the sun, the more strongly the motion of the earth is braked. If one could bring the earth entirely to a standstill, this ellipse would shrink to a line; that is, the earth would simply plunge straight upon the sun. Do you understand that?"

"It's comforting to think that even Korf can't bring that to pass!"

Berger smiled. "No, he can't do that. But he can brake a small part of the earth, for example a space ship!"

"But listen, my dear Berger! The *Icarus* steamed away from here at a tremendous speed, and here you are talking about braking!"

"To be sure, it went more than ten kilometers* a second! But it was exactly opposite to the motion of the earth! And that's just the same as though he had braked the thirty kilometers** a second of the earth's motion down to twenty, isn't it? Therefore he was left behind by the speeding earth, and when he had escaped from its rather narrow field of attraction, he swung gradually by himself into the calculated new ellipse, through which he is now speeding with silent motors as an independent solar planet. Thus, just as our former rockets to the moon curve through the field of gravity of the earth and the moon, the *Icarus* is now pursuing its curved course in the field of the sun."

"And if it had no more fuel?"

"Then it would keep circling about the sun in its present orbit. Every two hundred and twenty days it would complete the circuit, which would bring it alternately within fifty million kilometers of the sun and then back again into the orbit of the earth three times as distant. This would keep on until it got within reach of some planet's power of attraction."

"What planet?"

"Mercury, Venus, or the Earth. The rest never come into these regions. The ellipse of the *Icarus* extends from the orbit of the earth to that of Mercury. But since the orbit of Venus lies between these two, the path of the *Icarus* has to cut that of Venus. It is so calculated that Venus and the *Icarus* come to this junction point at the same time and with the same speed. That's the whole secret of going to Venus. Korf will intentionally let himself be caught by Venus, and what else occurs will be determined by the conditions he finds there."

"And the return trip?"

"That takes place in exactly the same manner. Only then the speed of Venus must not be braked but increased, in order to force the space ship into a curve carrying it back again to the orbit of the earth. Of course, it's not enough to bring the *Icarus* simply back to the orbit of the earth. It must cut the orbit at the moment the earth is also at the junction point. But all that is no magic, merely a very pleasant calculation. Indeed, without logarithmic tables the *Icarus* would not come back again."

"But this increase in speed must require immense amounts of energy."

"No more than the braking at the start from Astropol. It's a matter of indifference whether one produces a certain speed or destroys by braking the same speed already existing. It's simply a question of direction. Korf merely starts from Venus in the same direction in which this planet is moving and then adds independently the speed of the space ship to that of Venus."

"On paper that all looks very fine, but—"

"The *Icarus* has gone on exactly the course reckoned on paper. This proves the accuracy of Korf's calculations, and we can calmly leave all the rest to him. Don't take your brother-in-law too lightly!"

"I can tell you, my dear Berger, the entire cosmos is already weighing on my neck, and I shall be happy when—"

"When you, day after tomorrow, are at last sitting once more in Mother Barbara's café in Friedrichshafen,

* About 1,000,000 miles.
** 10 miles.

* 10 miles.
** 10 miles.

protecting the various Rhine and Moselle wines from destruction, Doctor I put in Begerer with a laugh. "Well, you can. A tank ship is leaving tomorrow." Sam fiddled with the tobacco pipes in his pocket. "Heaven be thanked! If I'd suspected, back in Caldera, when you so kindly invited me to make a one-day trip to Astropol, that I should be kept a prisoner up here so long, then I should certainly have declined to take your noisy ship, and—"

"And you wouldn't have reached Lake Constance a bit sooner, Doctor I?"

CHAPTER XX

Close to the Goal

FOR weeks the squat cylindrical hull of the *Icarus* had been ploughing through the silent wastes of space. The vast, silently swinging station of Astropol had long since vanished from the sight of the voyagers of Venus. Even the silvery moon had shrunk to a dot beside the disk of the earth and had then disappeared in the incredible distance.

The very earth receded more and more, and gradually the disk changed into a gleaming point—only one star among the many; distinguishable from the rest merely because of its greater brightness.

The white-hot ball of the sun floated unchanged in the black infinity. No night came comfortingly over them, no day broke with new hopes. It was an eternal, senseless monotony! The chronometer recorded the hours and days and weeks, but nobody paid much attention. The idea of a day became a mere abstract quantity of time.

The start and powerful impressions of the first few days of the trip had kept the passengers in feverish excitement. But gradually the tension lessened, and the frightful loneliness weighed mountainously on the little group of human beings snatched away from the earth.

More and more frequently, burning eyes stared yearningly out of the round windows of the ship at the shining star which stood for the world—where there was night and day, rain and sunshine, where human beings lived, with all their cares and joys.

But all this lay far behind, with all communication broken off. No cry and no flash of light could now reach over to the infinitely distant home.

Horror crept on silent feet into the cabins of the *Icarus*.

Korf took great pains in providing distraction for his companions. In clear, vivid lectures he disclosed the cosmic connections of the world. He devised all sorts of new social games. He organized swimming contests in the air inside the weightless ship. But all this could not banish the slowly growing apathy.

The most delightful pleasure was taking flights out into space from the ship. In inflated rubber suits the occupants of the *Icarus* circled free from all weight about the lonely ship. But the necessity of being sparing with the air supply made it impossible for Korf to permit this excursion very often.

The worst thing was the lack of regular occupation. The space ship was speeding along its cosmic path with silent motors. There were no engines and no steering levers to tend. Even the watchman was superfluous. What could happen out in nothingness?

There came now being strife about the slight work in the electric kitchen. The sailors sought for it, in order to be able to have a regularly recurring activity. And

perhaps the fact that the preparation of the meals was given over exclusively to Isabella was the real reason why the Mexican girl stood the monotony of the sixty day voyage better than the rest.

Even Korf, the spatial navigator accustomed to flights in the infinity of space, often had to combat recurring attacks of complete indifference and depression. He breathed more easily when the laterally approaching and steadily increasing disk of Venus became large enough to warrant a real interest.

On the sixty-fifth day after the start the morning star was already so close that its disk was larger than that of the sun. With the naked eye they could see the wads of mist, which were moving from the sunny side of the planet to the dark side, passing along incessantly in close succession. It was but seldom that the shining white covering of clouds showed rifts and holes, through which they had an indistinct view of the solid ground.

"An inhospitable region, Miss Isabella!" said Burns to the Mexican girl, who hours at a time watched the disk which was almost perceptibly increasing in size.

Burns and Isabella always spoke English. Korf, when conversing with his guests, likewise made use of this language, out of regard for the mestiza's slight command of German. It suited him that the crew should not understand the conversations in the control room, and he also welcomed the chance to strengthen his own knowledge of English.

"These constantly swelling mist formations are so—so uncanny!" answered Isabella. "I don't know—why." "To be sure, they make it hard to observe the surface of Venus, and it would be a shame if we had to return without being able to settle the age-old controversy of scientists about the constitution of the morning star. That there are clouds on Venus is no secret to the terrestrial observer."

"Do you think these formations are ordinary clouds?" put in Korf.

"Aren't they?"

"I surmise that these wads don't consist of water vapor but of millions of tiny needles of ice—a sort of fine ice drift, produced on the sunlit side of Venus by the direct vaporization of ice. Under the pressure of the constantly increasing masses this ice-fog gradually moves to the shadow line and is again precipitated on the dark side by the action of gravity. If Venus were so tiny a star that it could not keep the ice clouds sufficiently to itself, they would be forced further out into space by the pressure of the sun's radiation, and Venus would then exhibit a tail just like a comet."

Isabella's Fears

ONE of the sailors appeared in the cabin door. "Miss de la Com, it's time to serve the second meal."

His voice had a harsh sound, like the barking of a dog. Isabella shuddered. With a shy glance at the man she whispered to Korf, "For the present I should like to give up my work and turn it over to the cook."

Korf was amazed. He gave the necessary orders, and when the man had disappeared, he asked, "Doesn't it please you any longer to care for our physical welfare, Miss Isabella?"

In embarrassment the Mexican girl looked at her yellowish finger-nails. "Oh yes, I was glad to do it. I was so happy about this little work. But I'm afraid of—"

A suspicion came to Korf's mind. He had long feared it.

"Two of the sailors have been eyeing me for some time in a suspicious manner!" went on Isabella unwillingly. "And to-day before breakfast—" she stopped speaking.

Korf's brow was wrinkled. "Were you bothered by anyone?" he asked sharply.

The girl nodded almost imperceptibly.

"By whom? I'll punish the scoundrel!"

Isabella made a gesture of negation. "Never mind, Mr. Korf! The people no longer know what they're doing. Henceforth I shall avoid the kitchen and remain near you or Sir William."

Burns watched her anxiously. He silently reproached himself for having practically forced the taking along of the girl.

Korf suppressed his wrath. "It's hazardous for a woman to be shut up this way for months with a crowd of men," he said in a concerned tone, "but I shall be able to protect you."

That they were quickly approaching the sun now became evident to the explorers. The rays of the glowing disk, now three times its usual apparent size, blazed through the windows of the *Jcarus*. All the occupants were dark glasses to protect their eyes from the excess of light. The strongly reflecting layer of white mist about Venus increased the brilliance noticeably.

After two days Venus hardly presented any longer the appearance of a star in the sky. Its masses spanned the firmament in a wide arc. If every sensation of up and down had not already been destroyed during the weightlessness of the free flight, there would have been the impression that the *Jcarus* was falling from an infinite height obliquely down to the solid ground.

The little satellite speeding around Venus had long since been recognized in the telescope. Korf had determined, to his anxiety, that its distance from the surface of Venus had again been reduced, so that it was barely one hundred and fifty kilometers away. Its orbit was quickly shrinking and had changed to a fine spiral, which was bringing the little body closer and closer to the planet.

The landing plans were settled. Landing was first to be made on the satellite of Venus. With the big *Jcarus*, which moreover was not built to withstand atmospheric resistance and had no wings, it would be impossible to descend close to the surface of Venus. It was to gravitate in a constant orbit about Venus, just as *Atropid* did about the earth.

For the actual expedition a small lunar rocket had been taken along as a "boat." This steel torpedo, eight meters long, was resting with folded wings in a side room of the *Jcarus*, especially built for the purpose and enclosed airtight. This room could be reached from the control room by a pneumatic door. A larger door of the room led straight out into the open.

This auxiliary rocket held only three persons. Korf of course wanted to undertake the flight himself, and he had settled on Burns as his companion. But who was to be the third man? This question had already been the subject of frequent stubborn arguments. Korf had definitely refused the request of the archaeologist that Isabella be allowed to go.

"This expedition is dangerous and demands real men! It's no undertaking for a woman!" he said, when the proximity of the goal made it necessary to decide.

"You underestimate a woman's energy!" replied Burns. Then he risked the final argument: "Shall I remain you of the deed of the boldest of all women—the deed of *Natalka*?"

Korf was silent. "*Natalka*!" he thought. "She paid

for her daring with her life—her young, blooming hopeful life!"

"No, no!" he said aloud. "I can't take such a responsibility upon myself."

Then a melodious voice came to his ear, like the soft cooing of a dove. "And can you take upon yourself the responsibility of leaving me defenceless among these lustful sailors?"

That settled the matter. Korf hesitated no longer.

The planet came closer and closer. From time to time Korf measured the visual angle of the crescent of Venus and calculated from it the distance. When the *Jcarus* had come within fifty thousand kilometers, the rocket exhausts were started, in order to brake the speed of falling and to force the space ship into an orbit about the planet.

The recoil, which had not been felt for weeks, threw everything down. The passengers suddenly felt the weight of their limbs again and groaned at the pressure. But after a few minutes the motors were again silent. The *Jcarus* was floating freely about the planet at a height of forty-five thousand kilometers. Venus had suddenly acquired a second satellite. Weightlessness had been restored. It was now the moonest to act.

Korf had no more instructions to give. Everything had been discussed to the minutest detail, and each one knew exactly what he had to do. The five sailors remained under the command of the eldest—to stay on board the *Jcarus*, under strict orders that they were under no circumstances to alter the gravitational path of the space ship.

The rocket was again given a careful inspection and was provided with food and food for five days. Then Korf, Burns, and Isabella crept through the port-hole at the point of the rocket.

After a last word of admonition to the temporary commander of the *Jcarus*, the double door of the port-hole was closed and fastened from within. The crew then securely fastened the door from the interior of the ship to the room where the rocket had been kept. A valve was turned at the outer door of the room, the air left the room with a whistling sound, the outer door opened, and slowly the slender torpedo left the body of the mother-ship.

For a while it remained beside the *Jcarus*, not far away. Since both ships were freely subjected to the effect of the neighboring planet, they floated, relatively to each other, motionless, and seemingly without any effect of gravity.

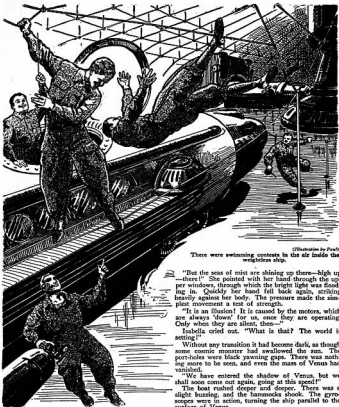
The wings of the rocket spread out to their full extent. In another moment the exhausts shot hot streams of gas out into space, and the boat shot away toward the solid ground, in an oblique course.

CHAPTER XXI

Ghosts

CLOSE together lay the three people in the humpbacks of the narrow, arched control room of the little rocket. The springs stretched and groaned under the pressure of the exhausts in action, and the weight of their own bodies was oppressive to the passengers so long used to weightlessness. Through the upper windows they saw the shining crescent of the planet spread out near-by. Apparently it was becoming longer and narrower.

"Up to the shining morning star! Up to heaven! It is splendid!" cried Isabella, trembling with excitement.



(Illustration by Paul)

There were swimming contests in the air inside the weightless ship.

"But the seas of mist are shining up there—high up—there!" She pointed with her hand through the upper windows, through which the bright light was flooding in. Quickly her hand fell back again, striking heavily against her body. The pressure made the simplest movement a test of strength.

"It is an illusion! It is caused by the motors, which are always 'down' for us, once they are operating. Only when they are silent, then—"

Isabella cried out. "What is that? The world is setting!"

Without any transition it had become dark, as though some cosmic monster had swallowed the sun. The port-holes were black yawning gaps. There was nothing more to be seen, and even the mass of Venus had vanished.

"We have entered the shadow of Venus, but we shall soon come out again, going at this speed!"

The boat rushed deeper and deeper. There was a slight buzzing, and the harnocks shook. The gyroscopes were in action, turning the ship parallel to the surface of Venus.

After half an hour the shadow was passed. For several minutes the passengers shut their eyes to the returning dazzling light.

The icy mist was now piled up at the side, like a

For an instant Korf's glance left the levers and scales. "You are mistaken, Miss Isabella. Not up—we are going down to solid ground—in an oblique fall!"

vertical wall which towered up to the sky from the infinite depths. It seemed as though the ship were shooting up this wall—ever onward—ever higher! Nothing but shining white mist, sinking downward, wherever the eye might look!

The gyroscopes hummed more and more often, and single impulses from the motors corrected the course. Now a powerful pressure weighed on their chests, and now the three persons floated weightless from their hammocks. Thus hours passed. Twice more the ship in its ever nearer course about Venus went into the shadow and came out again into light.

Isabella could no longer endure the sight of the icy mist rushing by. She closed her eyes.

The shining point floating before them over the sphere of Venus became larger.

"A strange thing!" said Burns, who was looking through the telescope. His voice shook with excitement. "It looks like—like a damaged dirigible. It is deeply dented in the middle. Certainly this little star has nothing in common with a revolving sphere. What do you think?"

He gave the glass to Korf.

"In fact," the latter agreed, "it looks like a double loaf of bread, as my good Uncle Sam would say. The loaf is completely solid over. Have you noticed that it keeps the same side turned toward the planet? And—it has rifts in it. There—I see perfectly. There is a great split yawning in the middle—on the side toward Venus there is a dark rounded spot, as though the planet had been broken off. That is right—a smaller bit is floating a little to the side. The disintegration has apparently begun. Sir William, I believe we are arriving at the last moment. We are just in time to witness the destruction of a heavenly body! To be sure, it is only a small one, but we shall nevertheless experience a spectacle such as human eyes have never before seen."

"But how can this formation simply break up that way?" asked Burns thoughtfully.

"Who knows for how many thousands of years this fragment has been rotating about Venus? It is extremely tiny and is therefore more subject to the resistance of the air than greater masses would be. Its orbit has decreased, coming nearer and nearer to the centre of attraction, in imperceptibly finer spirals—coming only a meter or so closer in perhaps scores of years. The attracting power of Venus, constantly pulling on it, has gradually distorted its form, pulled it out lengthwise, and stopped its axial rotation. That is just how it is with our moon. Now this satellite is close to the point at which its solidity is no longer enough to balance the constantly pulling forces. The centrifugal force of its orbital course presses outward, while the effect of the planet pulls inward: it is bursting asunder. The fate of a satellite! It is a question of that deep depression in the middle. The fragments may for a long time still rotate about each other in the original orbit, subdividing again, until—" He paused and looked at the indicator which showed the reading of the barometer outside. "See—the external pressure is a fifth of a millimeter! We are already brushing against the extreme edge of the atmosphere of Venus."

"Is that dangerous?"

"Not for us. But it is for that thing over there! The resistance of even the thinnest layers of air can so hasten the decreasing of the orbit that the satellite will quickly get into denser layers, and then there is no

more stopping it. I do not know how far things have gone already—I cannot make any exact measurements in these seas of ice and mist."

The Strange Satellite

THE rocket kept nearing the tiny satellite. The telescope was no longer necessary.

"Now it is time to get into the space suits. Be quick! Soon I must fire the braking shots, and then the pressure will return."

Pale but calm and eager, Isabella put on the shapeless covering of rubberized leather. Burns put on her head the massive helmet with the air-cartridges and the microphone, and screwed it to the metal collar. In another moment he himself was also dressed. Korf likewise got into a suit, in case of emergency, though it was his intention to remain in the rocket. The telephone cables were connected up and tested. There was now no other way for the passengers to speak with one another, once they had been sealed up in their airtight suits.

"All ready?" asked Korf.

The replica of Isabella and Sir William sounded in the receiver.

"Now," said Korf, "as soon as our speed is exactly that of the satellite, you will slip out. There is no danger. You will not fall. You will gravitate along side by side, free and weightless. I shall take care of the guiding of the rocket and shall at once attend to any variations in the speeds which might occur. Well! The little moon cannot be more than twenty meters long. We must brake our course! Otherwise we shall shoot by."

Get into the hammocks!" The exhaust was already pointed in the course of flight. Three and four times the bluish stream of gas shot forth. The mysterious satellite came very close—but its distance away decreased more and more slowly—and then it stood still, a few meters to the side of the rocket.

The exhausts were silent.

Burns and Isabella crept out through the double door. At the outside of the rocket the Englishman connected the stout cables, the ends of which were fastened to their belts, running from there to the speaking apparatus in the helmets.

The girl fought hard against dizziness. She was seized with an oppressive fear of the dreadful abyss separating the rocket from the satellite. Burns quickly grasped her leather-covered hand and sped with her away from the steel wall of the ship. The two shapeless figures floated freely across like inflated rubber balloons. The cables unswayed behind them like glittering snakes.

Korf's glances went back and forth between his companions and the indicators of the measuring instruments. He saw how Burns grasped the jagged edge of the central rift, crept into the split, and drew Isabella after him.

"The satellite is hollow!" murmured Korf to himself, and confused thoughts and speculations went through his mind.

The cables ran out. The investigators seemed to be moving ahead inside the uncanny body. What would they find?

Ice splintered under the Englishman's grip, wherever he placed his hand. It was a white before his eyes became accustomed to the semi-darkness. He saw shafts split off, partitions torn up, a wild confusion!

Everything was crusted with ice! His foot struck something, and walls crumbled away. He picked up a fragment and lifted it to the eye-piece of his helmet. It was wood—deep black ebony—with the fibres still recognisable.

His heart beat wildly. Wood, part of the vegetable kingdom! How did it get here? Human beings? Inhabitants of Venus? This was a puzzle beyond solution at present. He did no more thinking. His whole being was in his eyes. He wanted to see—to see and determine facts! After that he would put them together!

He looked for his companion. She had crept ahead. Far into the interior of the satellite of Venus. Forward!

He followed her, slipping through an irregular opening. Again bits of ice crumbled. Then it became brighter. At a glance he took in his surroundings. His heart stopped beating for a moment. Was he dreaming, or was all this a phantom of his excited imagination?

It was a long arched room—with crumbling walls—with rifts showing, through which the sun shone. The walls were covered with black—ebony! In between were shining yellow places—metal plates set in. Burns scratched off the ice. Pure gold flashed forth. Gold!

There was something shaped like an altar—on a red marble base—on it was a figure, likewise of gold! Ebony, marble, and gold! Treasures of immeasurable value, buried here in silent space!

Remnants of strange pieces of furniture floated up from the floor, startled from their eternal sleep by the touch of a human hand.

What did all this mean? Burns glided along as in a dream.

Then a dreadful shriek vibrated the diaphragm of the telephone. With chalk-white face, Burns paused in horror.

What the Satellite Revealed

WHAT is that, there in the corner, fastened by golden clasps to a narrow couch? A body! A dark yellow face, with the oblique almond eyes wide open as though in mad terror! A woman! Tuxtla! Cold sweat ran down Burns's back. His mind was in a whirl.

No—no—Tuxtla was still in the rubber suit. And this woman with the Mongolian face was dead, a corpse packed in ice! Could this be a human being, or was it a ghost?

Again the diaphragm vibrated. "Huizana!" It was not a human sound. It was the last cry of a departing soul, with a muffled sound as though from a sepulchre. Seized with horror, Burns stared about him. Where was Tuxtla? There—another body—another—four—five! Mummies coated in ice!

They moved slightly, as though protecting themselves against the intruders into their thousand-year-old grave in space. Everywhere almond eyes stared at Burns! All the bodies had long heads and dreadfully distorted faces! Everything danced about him, like spectres from hell!

Korf's voice sounded in the receiver. "Come back! At once! The air is becoming denser! A crash is threatened!"

"Tuxtla!" cried Burns in frightful excitement. "Do you hear? Come back! The misty hands—!" Mayan words replied, the calm melodious voice of the daughter of the Incas. "Who is calling?"

Burns saw her now. She was clinging to the wall,

close to the entrance. Her arms were about a projection, a casket set in the wall.

"Quick! Come back! Danger!" panted Burns, as he came up to the girl.

Tuxtla was staring fixedly at a golden plate above the casket. On it was crudely engraved the likeness of a man's head, with a long skull. On the brow was a sign. The Englishman bent forward. The sign was a symbol—a cross—on it a circle.

Burns muttered, "The sacred hieroglyphic—the symbol of the stone from the moon!"

Below the likeness were signs of some sort—strange characters, somewhat like phonetic symbols. Burns thought he recognized them. Like a flash recollection came to him. These crude scratches meant "King Botchika," nothing less!

Again Korf's voice sounded. "Come back—quickly, for God's sake! The orbit is disturbed! We are falling—plunging down! Not a second to lose!"

Tuxtla did not move. Burns put his arm about her to pull her away from the casket, which she was clasping with both arms. Then came half understandable Mayan words in a hissing voice: "Who dares to lift his hand against the Queen of Tula?"

Burns understood. Horror came over him. It was madness!

"Back, you dog! Into the dust before your queen! Huizana commands it!"

Burns did not answer. With force he pulled back the body of the girl. Tuxtla's strength seemed multiplied. She fought like a mad woman. The Englishman could find no hold. Everything he grasped crumbled and gave way.

There was a fearful silent struggle for life! The walls were becoming hot. A slight pressure from below was becoming evident. Weight was slowly returning.

Korf kept speaking into the microphone, hastily, in mad anxiety. The Swabian's iron nerves were shaken. "Come back! For Heaven's sake! It will be too late! It is too late! The satellite is falling—carrying the rocket with it—destruction!"

Burns let the girl go. It was no use without something as a hold. He could not get her loose. Were they all to perish, or she alone? What a frightful decision to make!

An idea! The cable! Back to the rocket! Pull it taut and then haul her in! He glided back as fast as he could.

Outside the air pressure forced him aside. But the atmosphere was still thin! The rocket was still floating close by. A leap, and Burns was standing between the double doors, madly pulling at the cable, on which Tuxtla was hanging.

Korf had his hand on the gas lever. The clouds were rising toward them from below. If he should start the rocket, the cable would break and Tuxtla would be lost. But in a few moments they would be in the denser layers of air, and all would be lost.

He pulled open the inner door. The air escaped from the space ship, but he paid no attention. Now everything depended on the space suits.

He pulled Burns inside and seized the cable. Both men pulled with all their might. The cable seemed to have caught in the rifts of the satellite. Already whitish mist was surrounding the ship. It was in the ice clouds. The steel walls of the rocket began to make a noise from the heat of friction.

Suddenly, over around the satellite, there was a

hissing sound. The ice crust was melting! It had cracked! The fragments had a bright glow! Steam rushed forth.

The cable yielded. At the end was Tuxtla, convulsively clutching the basket in her arms. In five seconds more the body of the girl was drawn in. The double door slammed. At the same moment Korf's hand shot to the gas lever. Full power!

Five streams of fire shot downward, bending under the air pressure like the tail of a comet. The free fall became slower and slower. Far below the glowing fragments of the satellite of Venus hissed and vanished. The little star was no more.

Down to Venus

WITH blazing eyes Korf looked downward. The surface of Venus was approaching at a tremendous rate. The ship continued to fall!

Was their height enough to bring the fall entirely to a stop and then rise again? The exhausts were doing their duty, but could they overcome the mad speed of the fall?

Korf's brain worked like lightning. Each second the speed was thirty meters less. The exhausts had been working for three minutes. That meant that the free fall had been checked by the amount of five kilometers per second already. But it was not enough.

He looked down again. Only a few thousand meters above the ground! Down below, white shimmering patches stretched out, crossed by dark lines. Directly below was a black spot with sharp edges. It was increasing in size at an incredible rate.

Was it a lake? Water? Hope gleamed in the engineer's steel blue eyes. He compressed his lips. If he dared try the last expedient!

For two seconds more he waited. Then he pulled the gas lever around to the last notch. The exhausts no longer crackled. They howled and shrieked. They thundered and shot cosmic forces down at the land below. The hammocks were torn by the frightful pressure. Their lungs could no longer lift the weight of their breasts. But it was successful!

The dreadful recoil braked the fall in the last second, bringing the rocket almost to a standstill just above the surface of the water. It gently sank the last meters, just like a falling leaf.

The fiery streams of the exhausts shot into the water. Immense clouds of steam arose. Then came a crash.

Nobody felt it. Unconscious, crushed by the monstrous pressure, the three travelers through space lay on the floor. Water washed high up on the windows, with the effect of drawing green curtains across the glass. The exhausts were extinguished by the water rushing in.

Outside there was a gentle rushing sound of the water boiling against the walls. The space ship again came up to the surface, became steady, and rocked for a while on the waves it had stirred up.

Then it became still all about—deadly still.

CHAPTER XXII

Ice

DIMLY, like the coming of dawn, consciousness returned to Sir William Burns. Fiery arabesques danced before his eyes, and a piercing pain was throbbing in his temples. He opened his eyes and raised his head a little.

There was a dull light all around. What time could it be? Was it time to get up? That scamp Rugby had again forgotten to wake him. That chap was too fond of going out at night; he needed a sharp watch kept on him.

Burns felt very thirsty. His throat was parched. He rose painfully and reached for the electric bell, to ring for his breakfast.

But what was all this confusion? Heavens, how this sleeping room did look! Above was an arched dark wall, like the inside of a barrel. There were round windows in it, through which a greenish light was entering. He stared about uncomprehendingly.

Damnation! How his head felt! What had gone wrong the evening before? And how still it was! No automobiles were rattling by, and no tramway was thundering along the rails.

He extended his arms and stretched his body. Then he took a couple of steps. He came near falling down. The floor was concave, and it had windows in it—seemingly of white glass. Behind was a vertical flat wall, but it was circular. The smaller front wall was as round as the cover of a tin can!

Thoughtlessly he looked out through one of the windows. There was a wide expanse of ice, with dark pools and lakes scattered about in it. Further in the background were flat, pale green hills—beaps of ice—with places between looking as though they had been strewn with flour.

Strange! Where could he be?

The sky was grey. The sun floated in the mist like a glowing ball, two hand-breadths above the horizon. It was large. The disk was strangely large, but it did not dazzle the eyes. Its rays could hardly penetrate the whitish mist above. Sometimes the sun shone brilliantly through, then again it paled out to a dull brassy disk.

There was a pale greenish light over the wastes of ice. But it was not twilight; on the contrary, it was very bright! What did all this mean? There was not a breath of air outside. Everywhere it was deadly still!

Burns began to think hard. It was difficult for him to do so. His head was buzzing atrociously. Very gradually memory returned to him. The *Ice-raw*—the strange satellite of Venus—falling—

He drew a deep breath. It had all been a dream—a devastating dream of fever—a terrible pressure—

Heaven be thanked that he was awake!

But this narrow room here? It was certainly the vertically-placed observation room of the little rocket! There—the levers—the hammocks—the torn springs tied together by cords! He started suddenly. Tuxtla!

In one of the hammocks lay the Mexican girl. Her breast rose and fell evenly. One arm was wrapped in bandages. Her black hair had fallen in confused strands over her face. But Heavens! The lovely dark face of the daughter of the Inca was yellow—as yellow as the faces of the ghostly mummies!

Burns's teeth chattered as though in a fever. Then it was not a dream! The horror was reality. At once complete, clear recollection came back to him.

He stepped up to the hammock. The girl was fast asleep. For a while he stood motionless, until he collected enough strength to endure the memories which were filling his mind.

This icy waste outside was Venus, then. It was the stier morning star, which had been the desire of the tender brown creature. And the earth was far away,



(Illustration by Paul)

**They were nearing the strange satellite of Venus. The outer door opened slowly
the slender torpedo left the body of the mother ship.**

infinitely far. A tiny dot in the leaden sky—that was home!

Again he looked through the port-hole. No human foot had trodden the ground outside! A shudder went through him. How had he got here? It was right—the fall! He remembered the dark spot in the depths below. "Water—a lake!" Korf had cried. That had saved them.

But where was the water? Far and wide there was nothing but ice, shiny ice in the deadly stillness. There were merely a few little pools in it. Korf must have been mistaken. No lake!

A horrible anxiety seized him. Was the rocket damaged? Were they imprisoned on this star, destined to slow death amid the world of ice? Would they never again see the earth and mankind?

He wavered. One single thought filled his mind—one single hope: Korf! Where was he? Dead? Then all was lost!

"Korf!" he screamed. Mortally afraid, he looked about. Korf was not in the rocket.

There was a noise outside. A shadow passed the forward port-hole. The double door opened, and a man in a diving suit entered. It was Korf!

For Burns it was a veritable salvation. Korf had barely removed his heavy helmet when the Englishman rushed up to him. His arms went about the strong man, and tears of joy shone in his eyes. "Korf! You are alive! Heaven be thanked!"

"I am a bit alive still!" cried the Swabian cheerfully, striking his arms together to warm himself. "You too, it seems to me! Indeed, it was a close shave. The grim reaper was never before so close to me! If we had not plunged right into the lake, it would have been all over with our glorious expedition!"

"Into the lake?" said Burns with a doubting look.

"I do not see any lake!"

"There was one! While we were sleeping off our adventures, it froze over. Too bad! It will be hard work to dig our ship out of the ice."

Korf stepped over to Tuxila and looked at her a while. "I think we need not worry," he said. "Except for the slight burns she appears to be uninjured."

"Burns?"

"They are really wounds from the cold. Somehow she scraped off part of the sleeve of her pneumatic suit. The chill of space got in through the thinned fabric. You know that extreme cold has the same effect on the skin as great heat. It is not bad. In a few days it will be all healed. Let us permit her to keep on sleeping."

Venus!

IT suddenly struck Burns that he had not been dressed in his diving suit when he awoke.

"Did you take off our helmets and suits, Mr. Korf? I mean, Tuxila's and mine," he asked with a grateful look at the blond giant.

"Of course! It was high time. Luckily I woke up before we all suffocated together. The oxygen cartridges in the helmets do not work forever. Likewise, the interior pressure in the rocket had sunk to three hundred millimeters. Now everything is all right again."

"I shall never forget this, August Korf. You have taken off our suits, repaired the hammocks, put us comfortably to bed, and—"

"Oh, do not speak of these trifles! The fact that

I came to myself five hours ahead of you is due to chance, for which I am not responsible."

"Then you have been working here for five hours?"

Korf nodded. "The wings had a bad time of it. They are half melted together. I forgot to take the things in during the fall. In starting from here we must rely chiefly on the exhausts. If Venus had as dense an atmosphere as the earth, not only the wings but also the walls would have melted like a candle at Christmas. Some of the intermediate ribs of the main exhaust are also destroyed. That was because of the sudden cooling. That can be repaired after a fashion. But one of the four auxiliary exhausts is entirely split. Well, we shall get up again with the others and the main exhaust.—But now I am as hungry as a wolf. How about you?"

In boundless admiration and gratitude Burns looked at the man who mastered all difficulties. All his cares vanished when Korf spoke. Waves of vital energy flowed from this man of action.

They opened a few tins of preserved food. While they were eating, Korf said, "Wouldn't you like to feel the ground of Venus under your feet?"

Since there was no reason to worry about Tuxila, Burns gladly consented. A few minutes later both men, with new air-cartridges in their helmets, were climbing down the outer wall of the rocket. Since the barometer indicated only one hundred and twenty millimeters, that is, a sixth of the terrestrial air pressure, remaining in the open without diving suits was dangerous. Probably it could be done only after years of systematic practice.

The two men were connected by a telephone wire, as usual. The boat stuck fast in the ice, one fourth of its volume being buried. The bent wings stood out on both sides barely a meter above the smooth surface. "How could the entire lake freeze so solid in this short time?" asked Burns thoughtfully. "At home it takes weeks of the extreme cold to cover a pond with ice thick enough to support people."

"I will show you right away," replied Korf. "Come." With long strides he hurried to one of the little pools. He stepped a few meters from it.

"Take care! Do not disturb it!" he said, while he crept to the edge of the water.

Then he took from his pocket a large condensing glass, held it toward the sun, and directed the brilliant focus of light on the motionless surface of the water. In a few seconds it steamed at the point of radiation, and in a flash the whole pool was boiling. Thick steam surrounded the two men. Involuntarily Burns stopped back.

"You can stand there in perfect safety!" said Korf with a laugh.

"But the water is boiling!"

"Of course! But just look at the thermometer!"

Korf held a little tube in the densest steam.

"See—eight and a half degrees centigrade. We will hardly get scalded! The water is boiling cold!"

Soon the steam passed off and vanished entirely. The pool was filled with ice. Burns could not understand.

"That is strange! The water boils and freezes at the same time!"

"Quite right! The explanation is very simple. In the low pressure of the thin atmosphere of Venus the water does not boil at one hundred degrees, as with us, but at a very low temperature—about eight degrees. Therefore the freezing point and the boiling point are fairly close together, and the water has only the small

space between zero and eight degrees available for its existence. That is why liquid water is a sensitive and unstable thing on Venus. Below zero it becomes ice, and above eight degrees it becomes vapor, while the vapor soon freezes again to fine needles of ice. It is no wonder that there is very little water found on the surface of this inhospitable planet. To say nothing of oceans! Very little water vapor, too! You see, the vaporization withdraws so much heat from the site of boiling that right beside the boiling freezing commences, and the vaporization is soon checked. Yes, it is a strange region!

"I wonder that the sun, which is much nearer to Venus than to the earth, is unable to melt these masses of ice. One would think that it would have to be hotter here than on the equator on earth."

"As you see, this is not so. Little heat penetrates the thick atmosphere, in fact not enough to melt the ice. The earth's thin atmosphere protects our planet but little from continual radiation of heat out into space. And conversely, do you know that on our earth the mean annual temperature would sink fully seventy degrees, if it suddenly lost its covering of air? Then there would be nothing on earth but ice, and it would be considerably colder than it is here. The radiation of the sun cannot do it all. A planet must profit by the talent lent it by the sun; that is, it must be able to keep the heat radiated to it. Our earth at present enjoys especially favorable conditions. It has dense air and great natural heat, while it is also close enough to the sun to receive sufficient heat from it. At the same time, it is sufficiently far away to suffer little from the spray of finely-divided ice which the sun sends into space in all directions by the force of its radiation. Be that as it may, the learned gentlemen will be able to concoct a flawless final theory on the basis of our observations."

For several hours the two men walked about in the neighborhood. Everywhere were masses of ice, broken places, mountainous piles of ice, little lakes and streams of water, which quickly changed into steam when the sun broke more strongly through the mists.

Nowhere was there a bit of solid earth, and there was not a trace of plant or animal life at all. A comforting sight!

The Riddle of the Universe

NOT a word was said at this time about the events on the satellite of Venus. There was too much that was new to see. On the long, tedious voyage back to the earth there would be ample time to discuss the strange adventures.

"The sun does not appear to set here!" said Burns, on the way back to the ship, as he looked dubiously at the giant ball of the sun, still floating in the mist a little above the horizon.

"Indeed, Venus seems to have no axial rotation now!" replied Korf thoughtfully. "That means that it always turns the same side to the sun, as our moon does to the earth. From the height of the sun, if we take the shadow line to be the equator, we are approximately on the thirtieth degree of latitude. It would interest me immensely to know how it looks at the solar pole. Probably one would find more water there, perhaps even—"

He stopped suddenly, shaded his eyes, and gazed intently toward the rocket. A cloud of white steam was

rising behind the boat. Flashes of fire appeared through it.

"Heavens, it's burning!" cried Burns, in intense horror.

Korf did not answer. In great bounds he was racing over the ice, as fast as the heavy diving-suit permitted. Burns followed on the instant, and both men ran toward the ship, panting—ran for their lives. For if the rocket were destroyed, they would be lost in the icy wastes of Venus.

The rocket was moving jerkily. It seemed as if it were tearing at the surrounding ice, pieces of which were broken off.

"The lower auxiliary exhaust is operating!" cried Korf. "At one-quarter power! Hurry, for Heaven's sake!"

A suspicion crossed the Englishman's mind. The bow reared high up. Korf ran on like a race-horse, but Burns stumbled and fell, and the connecting wire broke.

The steam became still denser. The rocket slid back upon the trembling ice. It reared up once more, its bow rising into the air. The exhaust shot forth fiery flames.

Korf seized the wing, swung himself up, and climbed like lightning to the port-hole. One leap, and he was inside. There was Tuxtla, nestling by the switchboard! Her slender fingers were caressing the shining lever, as though in playfulness. Korf struck her brown hand, and the gas lever flew back. The boat slid along the ice a few meters farther and stopped.

Tuxtla's eyes gleamed wildly. She drew back, clenching her teeth. Two minutes later Burns stood before Korf, breathing hard as he pulled off his helmet.

"The gas lever!" gasped Korf. "A finger's breadth farther, and the boat would have shot away into space!"

"And the riddle would have remained unsolved forever!" said Burns with a shudder.

"What riddle?"

"The riddle of the satellite of Venus—the mystery about Huitaca!"

A shrill laugh from the corner froze the blood of both men. Coming at this tense moment, it had a dreadful sound. Burns and Korf looked at each other, unable to speak.

"Do you recognise your queen, Huitaca?" Tuxtla raised her hand in an imperious gesture. "Down on your knees, you dogs, before the queen of the world!"

Korf sprang back. "What is that she's saying?"

"She is using the language of the Mayas—the last remnant of the Inca kingdom!" explained the archaeologist, in a low voice, and he translated the command of Tuxtla.

"This is insanity!" cried Korf, greatly shaken. "The poor creature! If only we had not taken her with us!"

"You call it insanity! What if it should be a revelation!"

"This madness is to—"

Burns nodded. "It will bring light into darkness! I shall attempt it!"

Korf turned away in silence. He reached for his helmet.

"Where are you going?"

"To investigate the exhausts. I think we are free. We have been spared the hard work of digging out of the ice!"

This was intended to sound humorous, but there was a note of horror in it.



Seized with horror they stared about them. There another body—another—another—
All mummies coated in ice. They moved over as slightly. . . .

Illustration by Paul

CHAPTER XXIII

Anxiety

"JOHN!"

The servant turned sharply and stepped toward his fair young mistress. "Yes, Miss Kingsley?"

"Were you at—?"

John nodded significantly. A red flush rose to Buddy's pretty face.

"Where is Lord Kingsley?"

"In the library, madam."

Buddy stepped closer to the trusted old servant. "I shall wait for you in my boudoir, John!" she whispered.

"At your service, madam!"

Ten minutes later John was standing in the pleasant boudoir.

"Sit down, John!" said Buddy, in evident excitement.

"That's not proper, madam. Please permit me to remain standing." There was a slight smile on the withered lips of the servant, who knew how to preserve his poise under any circumstances.

"Were you in Pledge Street?"

"Yes, madam. Yesterday, after lunch."

"Well?"

"I had a fairly long conversation with Rugby."

"What did Rugby say?"

"That is probably less to the point than what I saw with my own eyes."

"You saw Sir William in person?"

"Yes. I was permitted to take his lordship's invitation right into the workrooms and deliver it to Sir William himself."

"And what did you see? You must speak out!" Buddy stamped her little foot, impatiently.

Cautiously, weighing his words, old John began his story.

"When I entered, Sir William was leaning against the fireplace."

"How—how did he look?"

"Sir William seems to have done a great deal of work during the three weeks since he returned from Friedrichshafen. He gave me the impression of being exhausted and nervous."

"What did he say?"

"Nothing at all, at first. He made a sign to me to be silent, and I remained in the corner with his lordship's invitation."

"What was he doing?"

"He was making occasional notes in a little notebook."

For a second Buddy hesitated to ask the vital question. She was trying to hide her embarrassment and to appear indifferent.

Then: "Was he alone?" she asked.

Not a muscle moved in the stony face of John. "No!" he replied briefly.

Buddy pressed her hand to her beating heart. "Who was with him?"

"A woman dressed in a strange blue garment was lying on the sofa. Her skin was of a dark yellow color, and in her black hair she wore an ornament like a crown."

"What was she doing?"

"She was speaking to Sir William in a harsh-sounding language which I didn't understand."

"And Sir William?"

"He answered several times in the same language. It seemed to me he was trying to get her to talk. He listened closely to every word and wrote something in his notebook from time to time."

"What else did you notice?"

"On the desk there was a little black chest with strange decorations. If I'm not mistaken, the ornaments were of gold. Beside it lay a pile of thin metal plates. On the upper plate I noticed some incomprehensible marks and primitive drawings."

"How long did you stay in the room?"

"About three minutes, madam. Sir William was so absorbed in the conversation that for a long time he didn't pay any attention to me."

"Didn't anything else strike you, John? What did you think about at the time?"

"It's never a servant's place to think, madam!" he replied with dignity.

"Didn't the yellow woman do anything but speak? Didn't she do anything?"

The servant reflected for a moment. "At first nothing strange occurred."

"And then?"

"The foreign lady suddenly perceived my presence. She jumped up from the sofa and took a few steps toward me."

"What then?"

"She shouted some of the strange words and raised her hand as though to pledge me to something. It was very strange, madam!"

"What did Sir William do?"

"He took me by the arm and forced me to kneel down before the lady and to place my hand on the floor!"

"What did he do himself?" cried Buddy breathlessly.

"Sir William Burns did the same!"

Buddy buried her face in her hands and sank down on a chair. "Is he insane?" she whispered.

John shrugged his shoulders. "That is not for a servant to judge, madam!"

Save Him!

HALF an hour later Buddy slipped into the library. Lord Kingsley was sitting at a table with his back to her.

"Father!" said Buddy. She was deathly pale, and her voice trembled with concealed anguish.

"What is it, darling?"

"Again Sir William has not come to dinner?"

The peer turned slowly in his chair. "It was my final invitation. Now it's over! Finished!"

"Why doesn't he come, father?"

"How do I know? Each time, Rugby telephones and says that Sir William is sorry that he's too busy to come. Lord Kingsley is no longer going to run after Sir William Burns, and Miss Kingsley will not, either!"

"Father!" sobbed Buddy, and her blue eyes filled with tears.

"I know, darling! It's hard. But you must forget him. He's not worth grieving about."

To Lord Kingsley this outburst of feeling on the part of his daughter was very painful. He was not an emotional man.

"Something must be done to save him, father!" stammered Buddy. "The yellow witch has enchanted

him! William is not bad! But he has fallen a victim to the black arts of the Indian girl. Father, if you don't do something, he will come to a dreadful end! Perhaps there is still time to save him."

"Save him? Save him from what?"

"From insanity, father!" she replied softly. Then she hesitatingly told him what John had seen.

* * * * *

For a quarter of an hour Lord Kingsley's costly automobile had been standing before Sir William's little house in Fledge Street. The cold, damp December wind whistled through the leafless trees and stirred up the puddles in the suburban street. Wrapped in an automobile robe, Buddy sat back in the seat. Her eyes were fixed on the wrought-iron garden gate.

Would he come? The minutes lengthened out to eternities. Buddy expected much from Patson, who had come with them and had entered the house with Lord Kingsley. Sir William would be less likely to shut himself up against his faithful friend than against the rough, blustering peer.

At last voices sounded from the front steps. Pale and worn, Burns walked through the garden in front of the house, accompanied by Patson and Lord Kingsley. Buddy's heart beat faster.

"You may be sure, my dear William, that we are eager to hear something more about your discoveries than is reported in the newspapers!" said the peer jovially, slapping his young colleague on the shoulder. "It was unkind of you to leave us so long in the dark, waiting for a solemn deputation to fetch you out of your seclusion to the light of day."

Buddy breathed more easily. Things seemed to have gone well.

"Pardon me, Lord Kingsley?" said Sir William, in the voice of a sick man. "I could not make any report, so long as I myself was still groping in the dark. My work did not admit of any interruption. The least disturbance might have broken the connection, and—"

The gentlemen had reached the automobile. Burns stood rooted to the spot when he saw Buddy.

"Well, everything in its own time and place," chattered the peer. "In thinking of prehistoric times we must not wholly forget the present, which cannot altogether be dispensed with."

"Buddy—you here—Miss Kingsley?" said Burns in surprise, and a fleeting color came to his cheeks.

The girl found just enough strength to hold out her hand and to whisper the customary salutation. "How do you do, Sir William?"

In the great dining room of Lord Kingsley's house, the table lamp was casting its cheery light on the little company seated there. Dinner was over. Glowing cigars blew fragrant smoke rings in the air. The beach logs crackled in the fireplace, and outside the wind shook the shutters.

Sir William's Story

"YES, my dear young friend!" said Lord Kingsley, while the samovar was singing cheerfully. "You must now tell us all about it! Let us hear what wonders you've seen up there in the morning star—and over there in your hermitage!"

Buddy and Patson came closer. The archaeologist took a slip from his tuxedo and began his account—slowly and hesitatingly, at first, but soon more confidently and with the inspiration of certainty.

"You have already been informed by Korf's publi-

cations about the objective finds and discoveries of the expedition to Venus. I can therefore confine myself to indicating the inner connections, so far as I myself am able to survey and understand them. Much is still veiled in mystery, and much will probably remain hidden forever. The little which now seems to me certain I owe—we owe—to the poor creature who is wandering homeless between the worlds and cannot find her way back to the present.

"Probably Patson has told you how I found Tuxtla. That I had before me in the instance a person with so-called occult faculties, was soon evident to me. But only from the moment when I possessed the mysterious moon-stone from her mother's grave did I feel those inexplicable bonds between the girl and myself—bonds in no way physical, nothing like what the world always suspects behind the friendship of a man and a woman."

Buddy lowered her blond head, and she did not notice that the man she loved sent her an affectionate look.

"It was as though there were some spiritual bond between us, as though neither could have lived without the other. Tuxtla, who previously had been openly hostile to me, followed me thereafter like a faithful dog, and determined the course of my life. She directed it into those paths which led to the solving of the deepest puzzle of mankind. She was a part of my soul, the complement of my spiritual ego."

"Ifar?" said Lord Kingsley in a tone of slight irony.

"Yes, was! A phenomenon of nature on the return trip suddenly rent the bond and severed the contact. Since then Tuxtla has been to me a pitiable or perhaps an enviable creature, the object of my scientific studies."

"We had to come together, the daughter of the Incas and I. She without me or I without her—in that case the riddle of the satellite of Venus would have been forever veiled in mystery, and the falling moon would have buried its secret beneath its ruins. Fate! It is fulfilled."

"Tuxtla, in a continual and perhaps permanent insanity, thinks she is Queen Huilaca, the last queen of a vanished monarchy. Perhaps she really is, or at least was that—once! What do we intellectuals know about the life of the soul?"

Buddy thought of Mr. Nielsen and his story of the jar of souls. But she could no longer smile at this jest.

"She simply became insane!" said Lord Kingsley, harshly and almost brutally. "The adventure was too much for the nerves of a girl. You should never have taken Tuxtla with you. I can't help reproaching you, Sir William."

"You can never reproach me so much as I have reproached myself," said Burns with an expression of torment. "But perhaps it had to be so! Besides, Tuxtla did not go to Venus because of me—I went because of her!"

"Well, there's nothing that can be done about it now. But the girl must receive proper attention. I have in mind Dr. Bell's private sanitarium near Dover. She'll get splendid attention, a beautiful country, and fresh sea air there! To-day I've been speaking with Dr. Bell over the telephone. They will take her there in an automobile. She will lack nothing."

"You are right, sir! Tuxtla lives in a prehistoric past and must be protected against the hostilities of the present. In a few days more—"

"Well, my dear Sir William, that can hardly be! If I'm not mistaken, the girl is already en route."

Burns started up. "Sir, that is—"

"An intrusion, Sir William! Yes, I admit it. But you must see that it could not go on. All London is talking about the crazy archaeologist of Venus. What else is being said about you, I prefer not to repeat. Don't be angry, my young friend! It was done for your good. You must consider, if not yourself, at least the house of Kingsley—" He paused, as if he had said too much in his eagerness. "Besides, you can continue your studies at Bell's sanitarium."

Patson's eternally cheerful face bent over the table. "Where do these tablets come from, that I saw lying in your workroom? They remind me of the Maya manuscript in Dresden. I am very eager to know."

The good-natured Irishman had found the right means of averting the storm that had been brewing.

"They were in an ebony casket which Tuxtla saved from the falling satellite of Venus. To her alone belong the thanks of science. In that frightful moment all I thought of was our lives, and I left empty-handed a place that contained more wonders than all the graves

of the Pharaohs and the Incas put together.

"These tablets, which I have thus far been able to decipher only in part, my own observations in the crumbling satellite, and, last but not least, the revelations of Tuxtla's soul, which returned into dim primeval times—all these together furnished me with the foundation for the reconstruction of a monstrous cosmic event, a catastrophe visited upon the earth some thirteen thousand years ago, of such vastness that the imagination staggers before it.

"I shall try to sketch for you a picture of this tragedy of mankind, which no poet could represent more dramatically. Where all research on earth remained fragmentary, the silent, icy, vastnesses of space preserved the knowledge for us. These and the God-given second sight of a human being have saved for us the knowledge of the destruction of the sixth continent—ancient Atlantis."

CHAPTER XXIV

Huitaca

BURNS commenced his story:

"Where to-day the waves of the Atlantic sound their eternal song, there once was a great island

The rocket was moving jerkily. The bow reared up. Korf ran on like a race-horse followed by Burns.

(Illustration by Faust)





(Illustration by Fred)

Intensified six thousandfold the sunlight blazes down to earth, down to the bottom of the ocean!

kingdom stretching from the Azores to Central America.

"The largest of these islands, the storied isle of Poseidonis, lay to the west of the Canaries, by the tropic of Cancer. It was the original seat of the rulers of Atlantis, and in its hills was the capital city Thula, the 'City of the Golden Gate.'

"When, after the conflagration of the world, the lands of Atlantis came up from the retreating waves of the flood, a heavenly time began for mankind. The vertically placed axis of the earth caused eternal spring-tide. There was no perceptible difference in the seasons. No rude winter interrupted the budding and ripening of nature, and in luxuriant abundance there grew edible plants and fruits sufficient to satisfy the desires of all mankind.

"By day the sun shone warmly down upon the blessed land of Mu, and at night a sparkling starry sky was stretched above the peacefully sleeping people. Day and night were of equal length, and no moon brightened the darkness of the night.

"The people were far closer to the soil than is the

case to-day. They ruled the mysterious powers of the earth—not through their knowledge, nor even through science, but through the nature of their own being—just as the snake charms the mouse by its glance, or as the bee, without knowledge or reason, protects its community by the natural law of instinct. So did mankind do instinctively what is right. Thus thousands of years passed by in Paradise.

"But gradually man began to think; he used his command of life to subject animals and plants to his desires, and to procure for himself unnecessary pleasures. The snoring horse of the steppes was harrowed and made the servant of man. The woolly sheep of the mountains were caught and robbed of their freedom. The docile cat was humbled to be the plaything of haughty man. Wild plants and fruits no longer sufficed for man. They were altered and blended and crowded together in narrow spaces. Finally, from the luxuriant vines of sunny mountain slopes, man got the grape-vine, the ripe fruit of which afforded an intoxicating juice.

"More and more did the men of Mu recognize their power over animals and plants, till at length they did not hesitate to try to subjugate also their fellow men of other races less advanced than themselves.

"But the more the people learned to think, the more their natural capacities faded. They rejoiced in their intellectual cleverness, and did not realize that their former instinctive power was passing away.

"Only a few had preserved their control over nature, and in the deeds of these few the intellectual people now beheld strange wonders. With all their cleverness these intellectuals could not account for those very wonders which once they themselves had artlessly performed. But they sensed a lack in their own nature and so felt something like awe at the marvelous deeds of the 'illuminated ones,' deeds which they could no longer comprehend since they had become endowed with reasoning powers.

"Increasing understanding, however, impelled them to store up the fruits of the fields and the woods for hard times. Since intimate contact with the warp and woof of nature had been lost, reason had to create values and works that assured the continuance of mankind and the satisfaction of its needs, which kept increasing with the new creations of man's mind. But inasmuch as the powers of understanding developed unequally, the living conditions of individual persons also were unequal, and thus did private ownership arise.

"With private ownership there came among mankind envy, suspicion and disputes. Men no longer lived together in their natural condition, free from care and envy. It was necessary to preserve order artificially by laws which determined what might be allowed and what not, what was good and what evil. And thus arose morality.

"But since the force of the law always arouses a resistance, a central power was bound to arise to compel observance of the laws. And so from the priesthood came the king.

"Thus the increasing intellectual understanding of mankind on the one hand, and man's original power and control over nature on the other—waning, to be sure, but still effective in individual cases—came into a union. Combining with all the lavishness of nature in her springtide, they produced a culture which became the starting point of all the civilizations on earth.

"Atlantis!

"Last of the rulers in the gold-portal city in Poseidon's isle was the priest-king Botschika, wise in nature's lore.

"Pure in heart and free from vain desires, he had preserved the remnants of that early power over nature spirits. As a symbol of this power, he bore in all the business of state a sceptre of ebony and gold, ornamented at its tip with an obsidian, one of those glassy

stones which rained down upon the earth at the time of the conflagration, and which doubtless came from the nucleus of the disintegrated asteroid of our present-day moon.

"Engraved upon this obsidian on the sceptre of King Botschika was a symbol—a cross with a circle upon it—the sacred sign of life, the symbol of the daemonism of nature. . . .

Burns paused in his narrative. No one spoke. Each thought of the strange stone from the moon, which the archaeologist had held in his hand a few months before in this very room. And there was silence until he resumed the story.

The Stone from the Moon

"WHETHER this stone did actually have those mysterious powers is an open question. But the people of Atlantis saw in it a spirit of irresistible might, which must obey the owner of the stone.

"Relying on the power of this spirit, the mighty island folk undertook extensive plundering expeditions into the adjacent continents. The barbarians on the shores of the Mediterranean were subjugated. The militant arm of the haughty nation stretched farther and farther over the earth, and there arose a realm on which the sun never set. To the golden city of Thula flowed the wealth of all the world. Commerce flourished mightily, and the port of the island was filled with ships.

"In disgust, King Botschika had long since turned away from the activities of his subjects. He adjured the people to relinquish their vain dream and return to their pristine simplicity and contentment. But in vain! The intoxication of blood and gold had seized the ruling nation of Atlantis. No longer did the people heed the will of the king. They turned against the ancient ruling house. Under the leadership of the generals a revolt was plotted, and the most fanatical ally of the conspirators was the beautiful young Queen Huitaca, second wife of Botschika—the last queen of Atlantis.

"Botschika saw the catastrophe approaching. Whether he possessed astronomical knowledge, which enabled him to calculate the time of the cataclysm, or whether he sensed the inevitable because of his close touch with nature—who can say? Yet the warning voice of the priest-king remained unheard.

"Silently he went to work to preserve the civilization of Thula for the world. Everywhere he sent emissaries, peaceful bearers of the knowledge and power of Atlantis. His son Quetzalcoatl traveled westward to the lands of what is now Central America. As the white savior, he taught the red children of Zoos to build stone temples and houses. The king's daughter Batschuc went to the Nile. There, as Icim or Isis, she founded the realm of the Pharaohs. Emissaries of Botschika penetrated even to distant Mongolia, everywhere spreading knowledge and civilization like bright sons of God.

"Wherever there is civilization to-day, its first root was planted by the colonizers from Atlantis. We need no longer marvel that in the primeval forests of Mexico the same pyramids rise up to Heaven as on the Nile; that the fauna and flora of America and Africa are so strangely alike; that in both places the seedless banana grows, which can be propagated only by means of slips. The banana did not cross the ocean by way

of Atlantis: it came from Atlantis both to America and to Africa.

"What would the civilizations of the world have been like, had another ruler than the far-seeing Botschika been at the head of the robber state about to perish?"

"So time went on. The Mediterranean peoples had combined to free themselves from the yoke of Atlantis. Through long years of secret work they had equipped a gigantic fleet, which now passed out between the Pillars of Hercules and proceeded toward the island on which lay the golden city. The ships of the Pre-Helenees covered the ocean farther than the eye could see. The battle was at hand.

"The leaders of the army and the fleet of Atlantis urged King Botschika to use his mysterious powers to destroy the attacking fleet by hail and lightning. For a moment the king wavered. . . . Then he refused. He could not misuse the powers God had given him by destroying human beings.

"Then the revolution broke out, with beautiful Queen Huítaca at its head. In the stillness of the night she crept into the bedroom of her lord and king. From the scepter she broke the demonic stone from the moon, stealing it in a wild desire for power. She showed it to the people of Thula.

"Huítaca's eyes blazed in the mad intoxication of power. She raised the stone high above her head. In jubilation the crowds swarmed about the woman, raised her to the throne, and sank into the dust before the mistress of the world.

"'Death to the enemy!' A single cry rang through the streets of Thula, from every throat.

"The queen's pale lips were distorted, as with convulsive gestures she conjured up the spirits of nature.

"'Ye clouds, let lightning strike the hosts of the enemy! Let stones rain down upon them! Rise up, ye waves, before the ships of the enemy, and hurl them down to the bottom of the sea!

"The people of Thula shouted aloud. The sky grew black; dark cloud banks massed in the north; the storm burst with a roar and tore the clouds to shreds. Death to the enemy!

"Meanwhile, pale and distraught, Botschika stood on his observatory, at the top of a high pyramid rising at the edge of the city. The noise of the masses scarcely came up to him, the Seer, standing alone in his majesty.

"Had the fearful cosmic event, which he had long foreseen, actually arrived?"

"Night set in, and with it came horror. A brilliant star flamed up strangely in the sky, growing in size as the beholders gazed. The glowing disk became greater and greater as it approached. It was the planet Luna!

"For thousands of years its orbit about the sun had been decreasing, as it came ever closer to the less speedy Earth. And in this night Luna had become subject to the attraction of the Earth! Pulled from its orbit in the solar system, it was rushing madly toward Earth, drawn along by its mighty sister—imprisoned, lowered to the rank of a satellite!

"This Moon plunged out of space like a flaming dragon, in a long-drawn ellipse. It came very close, its red hot giant disk seeming to brush the Earth. Then it shot back into space—again came closer. . . . Thousands of years were to be required to round its orbit finally into that of the present Moon.

"But it was the first approach that brought the catastrophe. The surface of Luna burst under the force of

attraction of the Earth. Water welled out from under the icy covering, spread into space as steam, and stretched out behind the speeding body of the planet-like tail of a comet.

"The Earth also was distorted by the force of its new companion. The Moon pulled together the waters of the oceans and lashed them on in vast spring tides, from the poles toward the equator.

"And even as the people of Thula were listening in delight to the effects of Huítaca's magic, there arose in the north a frightful vertical wall of water. Thunderously it rolled along, crushing everything in its path. A raging hurricane swept before it, tearing down the houses of Thula, smashing all the trees like straws. The mountains trembled, the tortured earth broke open.

"Shrieking and horrified, the people tried to flee. Mad fear consumed them as they groped their way in panic among the ruins of Thula.

"White-faced, Huítaca had seen her punishment approaching. In the last hour she took refuge with a little band in the great royal ship, which was floating in the bay of Thula, and set out for the open sea.

"For a few seconds the storm paused. Then the wall of water plunged onward and reached the city. With a mighty crash, the last remnants of human work were wiped out under the force of the elements. Hissing and boiling, the sea rushed over the land. On swept the waters toward the south, to the equator!

The End of Atlantis

"MOUNTAINOUS waves and foam had taken the place of the once flourishing land of the Atlanteans!

"Huítaca's boat was carried swiftly along by the storm. Solidly built, not unlike a modern submarine, it stood fast. Not in the waves was the Queen of Thula to find a quick and merciful death. A more dreadful punishment was reserved for her.

"The bottom of the sea burst open under the mighty force of the Moon. Water entered the rifts and mingled, hissing, with the hot molten interior of the Earth, as it came welling out. The meeting of water and fire produced a gigantic submarine explosion, hurling land and water upward with incredible force, high into infinity. Huítaca's boat was carried along with it. Out into the distance it flew—out yonder, whence there was no return!

"The immense force of the explosion, surpassing all comprehension, had sent this fragment of the Earth out into space, with a velocity which carried it forever beyond the force of the attraction of the mother-planet.

"The queen's ship was caught by Venus, which was at that time relatively near the Earth in her course. It became the moon of the morning star.

"If the occupants survived the fearful explosion, it they did not burn up in the heat caused by friction with the atmosphere, or freeze in the icy chill of empty space, there remained for them a dreadful death by slow suffocation, or else the worst end possible for a human being: despair out in the desolation of space!

"Doubtless the air within the hull did not last long. It slowly seeped outward; the chill of space pressed in and clucked with greedy fingers at those sacrificed to it. It enshrouded the last of the Atlanteans—in icy armor, preserving their bodies as mummies—the last silent, but eloquent, witnesses of the great tragedy of humanity, the drama of guilt and atonement.

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The Stone From the Moon

(Continued from Page 359)

"For twelve thousand years Huitca encircled the morning star in her icy, dead ghost-ship. At last release came even for her. The final act of the drama I beheld with my own eyes. The curtain has fallen. "To-day the lovely waves of the Atlantic cover the spot where once splendor and glory surrounded the people of that prehistoric time."

BURNS was silent. He sat sunk in thought at the table, as though he had not been speaking to the others, but had been conversing alone with himself.

No one spoke. The startling drama of prehistoric times was still echoing in the hearts of the listeners. Finally Buddy broke the stillness.

"And the moon-stone from the capsule," she whispered, "how did it get to Yucatan, and where is it now?"

"How did it get there?" repeated the archaeologist thoughtfully. "I don't know. Perhaps Quetzalcoatl, the white savior, carried it to the land of the Toltecs. It may have been handed down from generation to generation, from mother to daughter, from family to family, through the ages, until its destiny also was fulfilled."

"You no longer have the stone, Sir William?" said Lord Kingsley. "That's too bad! The British Museum would have felt itself fortunate to have received this rare discovery."

Burns shook his head wearily. "The stone has returned to its original home—to space. It was on the return from Venus. Korf and I were discussing the peculiarities of the satellites of Venus, and I was showing Korf the stone. Then Tuxtla crept up. Her hair was disheveled and her eyes fiery. She saw the stone and snatched it from my hand. In fiendish delight she held the obelisk above her head. The sacred symbol suddenly shone like a portent on the blue of the water. Probably she had brushed the stone against her dress."

"Then she uttered enchantments, which were madness. 'Let stones rain down upon the ships of the enemy!' she said.

"Korf and I started back in horror, as there came a sheet, shrill, whistling sound, then a hard blow, and something whizzed past our heads. Korf rushed to the wall of the cabin. There was a hole there hardly as big as a dollar, as clean and round as the hole made by a rifle bullet! He cried to me that over on the other side there was a similar hole, where the missile had gone out! We quickly clapped small rubber plates over the openings, to keep the air in. The internal pressure held them tightly, and the danger of losing our air was thus averted.

"When we looked up, Tuxtla was swaying in the middle of the cabin, her face distorted and her eyes wide with terror! Her empty hand was bleeding from innumerable small scratches.

"The stone from the moon had vanished, struck and splintered to bits by its brother, the meteor, which had crashed through our 'scars'!

"It is not the first time," said Korf, whose words I remember perfectly, "that a space ship has been struck by meteors falling toward the sun. Once we even had a man killed by such a cosmic splinter. But this

blow from the meteor—it simply is—!" Korf did not finish the sentence.

"Probably he was thinking just what you are thinking now. And that is something that can't be expressed!"

CHAPTER XXV

Visions

IT is Astropol. The giant reflector is now considerably larger. Six hundred hectares of silvery white sheet sodium glitter and shimmer in the frames. The wire skeleton floats in space like a gigantic spider web, forming a circle almost two kilometers in diameter.

At the center of the system is a little dome, resembling a spider in its web. Two men sit in it, handling the levers which control the tens of thousands of facets.

The telephone speaks orders to them, and their hands work at the switchboard. The silvery facets tremble and turn toward the sun. A great pencil of light flashes down upon the earth.

A single man is sitting in the observatory of the disk of the station in space. It is August Korf. His eye is pressed to the eye-piece of the great telescope, while his fingers calmly turn the screw.

Water comes across the field of vision. The objective moves slowly sideways. Everywhere there is deep green water! It is the Atlantic. The surface is calm and mirror-like. Korf has long been awaiting this absolute calm down there. He calculates and reads the scales. One more tiny turn to the screw. . . .

"It must be here!" he murmurs. "By the Tropic of Cancer! Evening is just coming on down there."

He lifts the telephone and gives directions. There—the sea lights up! Concentrated sunlight lies blindingly bright on the smooth surface. The water is glassy clear. One can see far below the surface from this monstrous height.

The solitary man moves the screw. Automatically the reflector follows. The light rays converge a thousand meters deeper. The eye-piece shows a twilight green. Sheets of rising water pass by and veil the image.

"Nothing yet! Five hundred meters deeper!"

And still there is hardly anything to be recognized in the glass. Korf reflects. "Still higher concentration of light will make the water boil. No matter! The lower layers are cold, they are under a high pressure, the boiling point is high, and it may take several minutes!" Again he sends orders over the wire.

The six hundred hectares of mirror now unite their rays upon a thousand square meters. Intensified six thousandfold, the sunlight blazes down to the bottom of the ocean.

Korf breathes faster. He sees vague pictures—gentle hills overgrown by seaweed and deep-sea plants, a plain with rifts in it, almost filled with the mud of ages. . . . And there, rising like a sharp, regular cone, he views the pyramid and observatory of Botschka, with the muddy remnant of the walls! Does it not all gleam like gold through the green of the water?

The picture is past! The waters well up, seething and boiling under the heat of the concentrated solar energy.

"Thula!" whimpers Koef in a tone of awe. "It is the truth! I have seen it, and I shall see it again, better than to-day—that magic land of Atlantis, dreaming away the ages at the bottom of the sea!"

His brain sets to work to devise plans for the improvement of the telescope.

It is a sunny day in early summer near the Straits of Dover. Under the blooming fruit trees a gaily dressed couple is walking along the gravel path in the park of Dr. Bell's Sanitarium. On the left is the wide sea, greenish blue in its immensity.

The young woman breaks off a twig of white blossoms. The sun caresses her luxuriant blond hair, making it shine like gold against the wide sea.

With a tender look the man gazes at the sunny creature beside him. "Buddy!" he says.

Buddy requisitely turns her head and looks up from below. Then she starts and points her hand toward a group of acacias. "There, is that she?" she asks, softly, in sudden anxiety.

Burns nods his head seriously and sadly. "Yes, that is Tuxtla."

A slender woman in a flowing blue garment is standing under the acacia. She is looking out over the sea, which is foaming up on the cliffs. Her glance is lost in the infinite distance.

A little to one side stands a small pony-cart, with the seat decorated with tinsel to resemble a throne. Two of the attendants stand close by and do not let the invalid go out of their sight. Tuxtla raises her arm. There is dignity in her graceful movement. Her yellow head ornament gleams in the noon sun.

"Come hither, slaves! The carriage of the mistress of the world!" It is a voice deep but soft, as cooing as the love notes of the wild doves.

The cart rolls forward on rubber tires, almost noiselessly. The attendants spring up, throw themselves

to the ground, and let Tuxtla, with head erect, climb over their bodies into the royal cart. Huitaca, the queen of all-powerful Thula! The pony draws the cart along.

"William, this is dreadful!" says Buddy, holding fast to her husband's arm, as though seeking protection from a nightmare.

"Will she never, never be sane again?"

Burns shakes his head. "Dr. Bell has no hope of it!"

"Poor Tuxtla!" says Buddy softly.

"Are you sorry for a being who is happy?"

"Happy? An invalid happy?"

"She is Queen Huitaca, because she is treated as such. She has entered into her kingdom. She lives where she believes she lives. What matter that her world is illusion? Let her have her world!"

Buddy leans her head against her husband's shoulder. "You are right, William! To be in harmony with one's self and with the world outside—that is happiness!"

She looks up with an anxious questioning look. "William, have you too found this happiness?"

"I have found it in the present, as she has in a prehistoric past!" says Burns with a smile. "The charm of the stone from the moon has long been broken!"

Thoughtfully Buddy looks out over the sea. "Isn't it strange, William, that a stone, a dead thing, can produce such mysterious bonds—between persons, between souls? A talisman—that uncanny, inexplicable word!"

"Uncanny, Buddy?" There is a light in William's grey eyes. "Yes yourself have such an object, a dead thing, that binds two persons together with magic power! Forever!"

Clasping the girl's slim white hand, he raises it and kisses the finger on which shines a band of gold.

"See, Buddy; isn't this bit of metal our talisman, our stone from the moon?"

THE END