

160 pages of unusual fiction

# Weird Tales

## THE SWINE OF AEAEA

*the story of a modern Circe*

By **CLIFFORD BALL**

## THE RETURN OF HASTUR

*a tale of the Ancient Ones*

By **AUGUST W. DERLETH**

**SEABURY QUINN**

**H. P. LOVECRAFT**

**EDMOND HAMILTON**

and others.



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# Weird Tales

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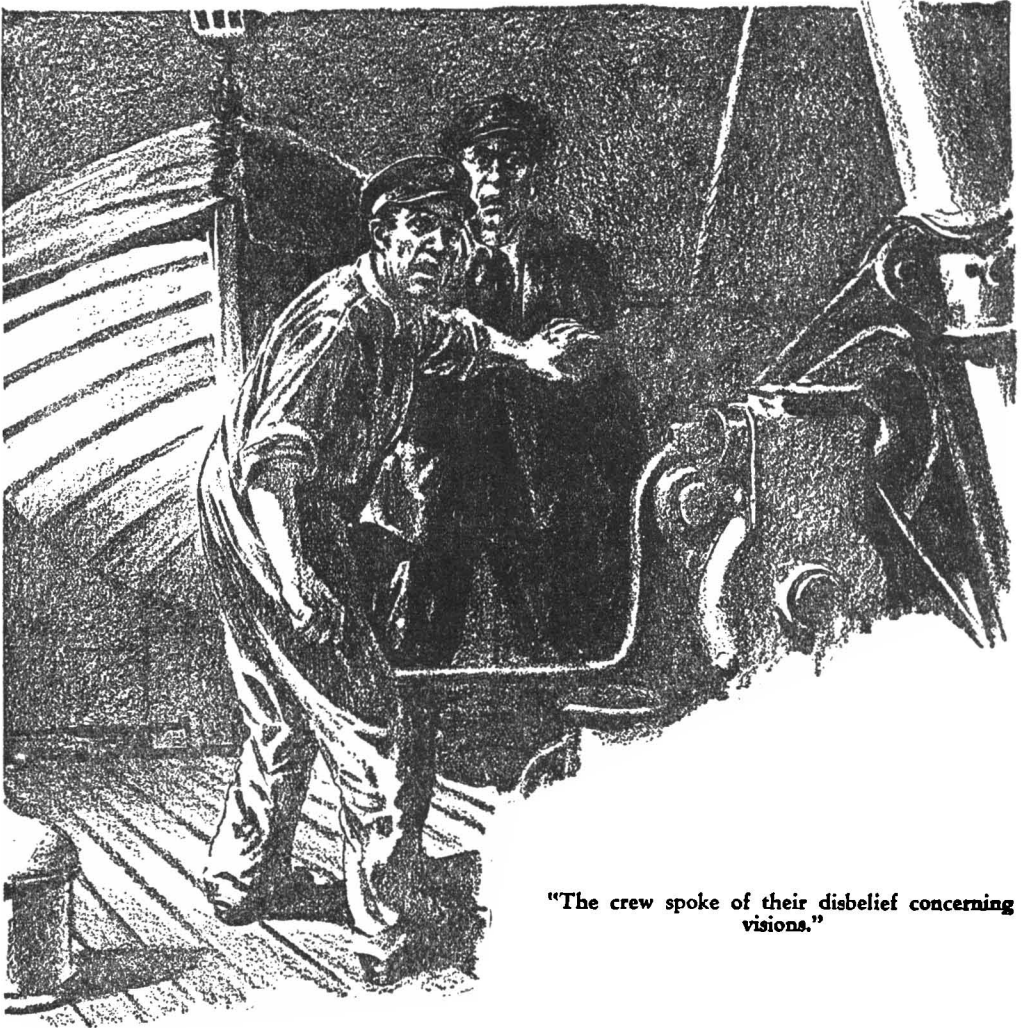
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**WEIRD TALES ISSUED 1st OF EACH MONTH**



"The crew spoke of their disbelief concerning visions."

# The Swine of Aeaea

By CLIFFORD BALL

*A bizarre and fantastic sea-tale about an island that was not charted on any map, and the strange doom that befell the sailors who landed there*

THE waterfront dive was murky with layers of smoke and the vileness of its liquor was exceeded only by the language of the customers, a motley throng of sailors, bar-flies, and driftwood wreckage spewed from a hundred seaports. In Portuguese Joey's joint the color line

was no barrier to trade; here swarthy lascars rubbed shoulders with saffron-tinted, pantalooned yellow men, and I watched a gigantic Negro surreptitiously fingering the haft of his concealed knife as he contemplated slitting the throat of a bearded racial prodigy wearing rings in his ears. It was not exactly a place where you could sit down to a quiet game of checkers. Portuguese Joey, the proprietor, was already half drunk but still able to keep a speculative eye wandering over his staff of burly bartenders.

It was no fiesta, no gala occasion, but merely the ordinary evening one experiences at Joey's. The Portuguese did a good business with these wanderers of the seven seas, and sometimes they unwittingly aided in substantially increasing my own income, which I can assure you is meager enough. I am a writer; not a good one, but nevertheless one whose local description goes unquestioned even when I am depicting scenes in far-off wastes of lands or waters which I have never seen or expect to visit. I gather a chance word uttered over the cracked mahogany of Joey's bar, a few sentences exchanged with a stupefied sailor or inebriated wanderer of the deserts, and thus I may garner the nucleus of a plot which, by afterward consulting a thumbed encyclopedia, can be developed into a remunerative article or story. Many of the tales I hear are lies, of course, constructed during the bacchanalian revelry to impress a lady of the evening, but sometimes I encounter a leather-faced adventurer whose words bear the ring of truth; and though my mind may rebel at times as I listen, I must perforce acknowledge in my heart that I believe I am hearing actual occurrences which have not been born from the fumes of the grape. More civilized

persons read these things later and laugh—when they have been set into the convenient sanity of printed type. They are temporarily amused by a crackpot writer and his opium-laden imagination. So they laugh. They are entertained; my publishers pay me.

I wonder if they would laugh so heartily if they could see, as I have, the clenched hands, the beaded brows above those world-ravaged faces, the wild eyes of a man whose mind is torn from the security of infrequent pleasures to dwell on some distant scene of stark horror. . . .

I believe one man in every thousand walking the earth today really believes there is a basis, a faint seed of truth, in every one of those old myths historians have handed down to us in their quaintly fashioned hieroglyphics, legends told from mouth to ear when the world was young and records were not so well kept. Crudely as we may interpret their meanings, fantastic as they may appear to the polished cosmopolite, I venture to accept or acknowledge a grain of truthfulness in most of the mythological legends. In the face of the fact that so many generations implicitly believed in the Minotaur, Medusa, and Jason of the Golden Fleece, I contend that they or their counterparts actually existed in some form or other during past ages.

I WAS cogitating in this manner as I lounged against the bar of the Portuguese's tavern, perhaps because some inner sense was questioning my integrity as a writer or perhaps because the whirling, smoke-laden atmosphere and the foul whisky I was sipping (to maintain character) was affecting my wits, when the Creole, returning from a brief rendezvous held in the upper regions of Joey's establishment,

touched my elbow and brought me back to consciousness of immediate surroundings.

"Drink?" she inquired, flashing white teeth in what was intended to be a provocative smile.

"No. Go 'way!" I did not have to hear her story; I have heard like ones a thousand times. Her descent into the inferno was written in her face.

Someone stumbled heavily into my short ribs from the left.

"Heigh!" exclaimed a husky voice. "You look like a likely lad, sailor! How about buying an old-timer a slug before he courses homeward? Just one, matey. I'm broke."

After the first glance I could perceive the truth of his statement. He was obviously penniless. His clothes, if but momentarily scrutinized, gave visible proof of his assertion; he probably possessed no home to set forth toward, for the cloth of his threadbare suit was grimy with the soot of alleys and the sandy earth of parkways. It begrimed his entire five feet and a half of height up to his ragged collar, and unless I was mistaken, extended onto the skin of his scrawny neck. A dilapidated and crumpled sailor's cap, its vizor torn and its form sadly askew, perched disconsolately on the peak of his gaunt, whisky-seamed, weather-beaten face. His bushy eyebrows almost met above a predatory, beaked nose evidently inflamed by liberal libations. A heavy lock of coal-black hair dangled between his eyes like a turned-about scalp-knot. It was his eyes, however, that assured me he was not yet entirely drunk; they were steady, undimmed, holding the alert intelligence expressed in the orbs of an animal.

"What about it, Mister?" he inquired, anxiously. "Just one?"

He had not imbibed too much to keep him from seeing, after his second glance, that in spite of my attire I was not really a sailor. His beady eyes dwelt on my fingernails, which were not split by the harsh toil of the open sea, and I saw that not even the grime I had so carefully smudged into their tips could deceive him. The "mister" warned me, too. I hesitated.

"*Cochon!* Sprite of the Devil!" It was mustached François, the burliest of Joey's gigantic waiters. From the opposite side of the bar he flicked a dirty, beer-sodden towel at my companion. "Get off! *Val!* Do not annoy the patrons, peeg!"

With a movement so swiftly executed that even I, probably the only sober person within a dozen feet, was too slow to halt it, my solicitor launched the upper part of his body across the bar, poised a tattered shoe on the slippery and precarious surface of its rail, and presented a wicked pocket-knife before François' Adam's apple.

Accustomed as he was to quick action, the Frenchman remained paralyzed by the suddenness of the man's motions.

The little man's voice was husky with the dregs of drink, but somehow it managed to take on a ringing resonance which had been manifestly absent in his begging.

"Ape! Apologize at once; d'ye hear? Call me 'dog' if you wish—but unless you can give me a suitable excuse for naming me a pig I'll slit your gullet from lee to starboard!"

The nearest individuals became suddenly aware of the tableau and turned to gape. François had been recognized as a strong and dangerous man; it was surmised among the throng habitually gathered before Joey's bar that he had

once been an Apache who had slain his share of victims. The sight of a scrawny, five-foot-five tramp seriously threatening the Frenchman's muscular frame astounded them. His attitude proclaimed that his intentions were sincere and the deadliness of his attack was obviously recorded by the concentrated stare François held upon the bright blade in such close proximity to his neck—so close, indeed, that the waiter's strained efforts to gaze upon its dangerous point caused him to appear cross-eyed.

Still, the man could not apologize. If he did so he would lose "face"—and probably his position as Joey's foremost settler of trouble between customers.

I decided to interfere.

"Buddy," I said, "climb down and forget it. We'll have a drink—a couple of 'em. And don't hack up this garçon. François is my friend, and a most efficient server of the wine" (the last in stumbling French).

François beamed above the glittering blade. His "face" was preserved. I think his life was saved also.

"*Certainement!*" he cried. "I am desolated, *monsieur!* To mistake a friend of yours for one of the—the other sort! A thousand pardons! I bow my head; it is most—most—ten thousand——"

"A thousand will do, frog," said the little man. He slid nimbly back to the floor and his knife magically disappeared into some recess in the rent garments. But I noticed he kept a vigilant eye on François, doubtlessly alert for the possible appearance of a dirk or bungstarter.

"A bottle of the red at a table," I ordered hastily. I had no wish to become involved in a physical dispute in Joey's, not only because of the dan-

gerous aftermath but also because a fight might close to me forever this source of material which I so greatly relished. A minute later my new friend and I sat at a corner table where the sociable confusion of the center bar was noticeably diminished in our ears. He was grinning, companionableness written on his seamed face, across the scarred table-top.

"Name's Sam Mercer," he announced, quickly pouring a second glass of bubbles in the wake of the one he had downed before I had more than sipped at mine. "From Norfolk . . . but a long time ago. Lots of wind has spread my sails since then."

THE wine brightened him almost at once. His eyes took on a cunning gleam and he surveyed me more carefully.

"What's the racket, Mister? I can tell you don't belong here; I've eyes, I have!"

"They call me 'Brighty' here," I told him, desperately. "I come here often."

"What for?"

"Perhaps for the same reason as yours. You're trying to talk like a waterfront bum, but I'll bet that if you tried you could talk decent English!"

His eyes narrowed. "What makes you think that, Mister?"

"An instance. If you were really a type, you would have pronounced 'for' just now as either 'fur' or 'fer'. You forget yourself. That's only one."

I had to trust him, to take the chance of throwing myself upon his shrewd mercy; for to have the disreputable patrons of Joey's recognize me as an uptowner "on the slum" would have precipitated a catastrophe, perhaps bodily harm as well as the loss of my privileges of conversation with choice characters. I had never been detected

in my chosen rôle before and I was rather at a loss to find that such an apparently discredited personage as Mercer could unmask me. So I temporized.

"Listen," I said, in what I trusted was a confidential tone. "Keep your tones down and I'll buy you all the wine you want—or liquor."

He smacked his cracked lips and suggestively emptied the remainder of the bottle into his glass.

"You a dick?"

"No; a writer. Now be decent, will you, and keep it under your hat?"

"What d'ye want in a joint like this?"

"I find story material here."

"A pen-pusher, eh? Well, you're not a bad sort, at that, Mister. You don't have the dumb looks some of those pinch-nosed bags-o'-bones have, either. If you've the sense to keep your trap shut while I'm gassing and the pocket provisions to keep the wine flowing, I'll tell you a story that will raise your hair—it did mine. What d'ye say?"

"I would be interested, except that——"

"I don't tell it often because folks get to thinking maybe I'm a little touched. Maybe I am, come to think of it, and maybe you would be too if you had seen what I did. I hate to think of getting sober after the telling of it, too, for although it happened ten years or more ago I sometimes see that damned island as plain as if it were today! Want to hear?"

"As long as it's not the old Spanish prisoner gag or the 'come-on' gold-mine-pearls-or maharajah's rubies stuff. Go ahead."

"None of that. And you don't have to invest any dough beyond the price of the wine—unless it's worth the price of a night in the flop-house to you. I could spin a lot of tall yarns; I've heard

plenty and made up a few of my own. But this is the truth, Mister; I saw it with my own eyes and I wish to God I hadn't. My memory is too good. . . .

WE WERE beating it down the coast from Athens [said Mercer] in a rusty tramp steamer with the usual crew of waterfront bums you find on those gipsy ships. You know, I guess, what a "tramp" is; sometimes she don't touch her home dock for five years or more—mostly more—because she will take on whatever cargo she can get at any forsaken port or hole in the river's bank and carry it to whatever other miserable spot she's paid to reach. When she gets too rusty the owners or the captain sink her for the insurance. Her name, if you are interested, was the *Maid of London* when I joined, but it wasn't for long; because at Athens, while we were unloading wind-mill machinery one of the cases broke open and dumped a sweet assortment of sub-Thompson machine guns right under the noses of the port authorities. We paid the grafters plenty to get clear. Out at sea we painted the letters blank and changed her name to the *Belle of Orleans*, under the orders of Captain Lewell. Then we beat it down the coast again before the grease-balls should change their minds and decide to bring us back.

Captain Lewell was a limey; one of the smartest Englishmen I ever knew, and a swell smuggler. He was almost able to convince the customs inspectors that an elephant was a weathered balloon bag. But he had an awful temper, and he beat up a couple of the boys the first day out because he was sore about losing the fighting-irons and having to pay through the nose for them besides. He was an old-time bucko. . . .

When the cook found the stowaway

hiding behind the canned goods he got mad first because the fellow had eaten some of the supplies, but he wasn't as sore as Captain Lewell. I was one of the men who took the fellow up to the captain's quarters, and I know.

I give the fellow credit; he wasn't scared. He didn't fight us, although we shoved him around pretty roughly, for at first we thought he might be a spy posted at our last port and up to no good. He wasn't Greek, but we wasn't sure what any man might decide to lend himself to in those days. The boys in France had been turned loose and three-quarters of them hadn't any jobs any more. The job they had been told was saving the world for democracy was over and quite a number of them didn't know what to take up next. Odd jobs were in line, even if it meant working for grease-balls. They had had a taste of excitement and were still hungry.

This guy had big, broad shoulders and a pair of knotty hands I took care to stay away from in case he did get mad. His skin was fair as a baby's and his long yellow hair blew all over his face as we were hustling him across the deck. He must have stood six-feet-five and he weighed accordingly. He dwarfed us all. Every pound of him was solid and he could have dragged that waterfront crew of beer-bellies around for a while before they mussed him up, but he laughed at us and came along without raising a fuss.

Old Lew, who limped and had only one finger left on his right hand but was fast enough to poke a man's eye out with it before the man could move, was in the lead and staring over his shoulder at the prisoner. I saw Lew was looking kind of funny, but then he was funny in the head at times, you know, and very superstitious. Pretty

soon he dropped back to me and whispered out of the corner of his mouth.

"Sam," he said, "he's a Jonah! I wish we hadn't found him! He's bad luck, Sam!"

"Shark-bait, you mean, after the captain's seen him," I told him.

Old Lew shrugged. "Go look at his eyes," he said.

To humor the old fool I skipped ahead to where I could see the fellow's face.

The prisoner noticed me and grinned. "Hello, shrimp," he said.

I didn't answer, because I was seeing what Old Lew had intended me to see. One of the stowaway's eyes were a deep blue color, and the other, the left one, was brown! By the grace of the sea's unwritten log-book the old man was right! A man with two-colored eyes was bad luck. We don't laugh at these beliefs. I know they may sound funny to a landsman, but some of us old-timers have seen them come true too often to laugh any more.

THE captain was in an ugly mood, as I've said before, and when we knocked I think we interrupted his hourly whisky-and-soda, which was bad for all concerned. I heard glass rattling and a desk-drawer slam before he bellowed: "Yeah, what in thunder is it now?" We knew that now we could go in.

The captain didn't always talk like that. In port he used the common speech of an ordinary A. B. because he was always sober then and knew what he was saying. He had to know, meeting the tricky monkeys we dealt with, but once or twice when we were well at sea and he could afford to let down the barriers (something most captains can't, when at sea) he spied off some mighty fine language, talking to him-



self in the manner some people use when they think they're alone and no one else less than a thousand miles away—or maybe like some of the derelict bums I've heard reciting poetry over a glass of some alcoholic beverage.

"A damned stowaway, eh!" he swore, after we had explained. He glared at the big blond fellow with bloodshot eyes and his tobacco-stained mustache bristled like a worn comb. I could see he was a little drunk. "Well, he can work in the cook's quarters or jump the rail—and I don't care which he chooses! Here's something to break him in."

With that, the captain lurched forward and, drunk as he was, swung one of those uppercuts for which he was famous. The stowaway moved his head an inch, so that the blow just glanced off his chin, but I knew his jaw would ache anyhow. Once I hadn't been fast enough to duck. . . .

"My name," said the blond fellow as calmly as if nothing had happened, "is Charles Brighton."

Just like that, as if he wasn't in a jam on one of the toughest tramps it has ever been my fortune to sail upon and before a whisky-mad limey ready to work out a grudge. He was a man, all right, this baby-face with the different-colored eyes, and my heart warmed for him, Jonah or no.

"What's in a name?" asked the captain, lurching back against his desk. Old Lew and I looked sideward at each other, for somehow the captain's voice had changed and become rather dignified, just as it always did when he talked to himself. I looked at the fellow who called himself Brighton and I saw that his eyes had narrowed; the smile was gone and he was staring at the captain sort of eagerly, like a man looking at a

half-filled bottle he has just discovered he hadn't finished the night before.

"What's in a name?" repeated the captain.

Without any warning at all, this Brighton began to talk just like Captain Lewell, in the same queer singsong way. Here's what he said, Mister. I don't know why I remembered it, for I can't understand all it means, but it sounded beautiful then, like the temple bells at Canton. We were clinging to him, arm and arm, when he began:

"But man, proud man,  
Drest in a little brief authority,  
Most ignorant of what he's most assured,  
His glassy essence, like an angry ape,  
Plays such fantastic tricks before high heaven  
As makes the angels weep."

Don't that sound swell, Mister? He even taught me how to pronounce those words. Like "fantastic." I watched him pretty close but I never caught him laughing at me. He seemed to enjoy showing me, in fact. He said it was Shakespeare.

But Captain Lewell, when he heard that, almost slid off his desk to the floor. He grabbed at the wall and his face was as white as death. When he spoke again he sort of choked and stammered.

"You—you're no bum!" he said to the stowaway. "You've been among decent people. You've been to——"

"Harvard," said Brighton.

"My God!" said the captain. "Sit down, will you? Sit here. Have a whisky-and-soda? Have a cigar—best Havanas, they are! Hey—you bilge rats! Get out of here! Get out!"

We got, not knowing what to say. Old Lew limped off muttering: "Jonah—as sure as you live!"

About fifteen minutes later the captain roared down from the upper deck:

"Mercer, you shrimp, get that weasel-faced rat that calls himself a cook to dish up a meal for Mr. Brighton. As fit a one as he can, d'ye hear?"

"Aye, sir!" I answered, stumbling toward the galley and wondering why, in the name of Buddha, a stowaway deserved the captain's food, liquor and cigars just because he could talk some outlandish poetry that made no sense. I took the meal up myself; I was as curious as an old maid.

THE captain had both elbows planted on the table he had dragged into the center of the room, the one he kept the old, shrieking phonograph on, and I saw the machine itself lying where he had thrown it in the corner of the room. Thrown it, mind you! And one day he had kicked Old Lew down a companionway just for reaching out to touch it! The captain had a big smile on his face. He had washed it, too. His hair (what was left) was combed. I could see he was sobering. He waved his hand for me to put the food Cooky had sworn over on the table. As soon as I did he pushed it in front of the stowaway with the air of a Continental waiter. His eyes never turned in my direction; they were fixed on the fellow Brighton as a dying sailor's are on Heaven.

"The best I have, Mr. Brighton," he said. "My apologies, but it's the best I have!"

"Mister" to a stowaway!

I lingered as long as I dared so as to hear what story the fellow would have to tell, wondering if he was going to protest honesty and bad luck, watching him sprawled there in the best chair the cabin afforded, and in spite of my prejudices I couldn't help but like his smile and the queer pair of eyes that seemed to go with it.

He said: "Thank you, Captain Lewell, I appreciate all of this no end, y'know! Most hospitable, you are, to treat a common, sneaking stowaway in this fashion!"

"Common? Ffft!" exclaimed the captain. "It's twenty years since I talked to a gentleman, Mr. Brighton. Imagine—twenty years!"

I never saw the captain looking sad before; he had a poker-face that only changed when he got mad. Then he wanted to fight and I didn't dare look. But now he had a face like an heir whose uncle had forgotten to leave a will.

"As I was saying, Captain," said Brighton, flashing the smile, "I'm on a quest — perhaps an indefinite quest, y'know. But then I think sometimes the power of the mind can be utilized as a compass."

If "utilized" meant what I thought it did, then Brighton was plain crazy, I figured.

"Yes?" inquired Captain Lewell, encouragingly.

"This may sound strange to you," said the blond-head, "even idiotic. I'm searching for the Isle of Ææa."

"Ææa? Ææa?" repeated the other, wrinkling his forehead. "Never heard —no, that is . . . Look here, Mr. Brighton! You can't mean the mythical isle mentioned in the *Odyssey*? Not Ulysses' Island of Enchantment? Not the goddess——"

"And Circe, the enchantress!" finished the stowaway.

"Are you pulling my leg?" inquired the captain, grinning. "I have not set my course for Ithaca, you see."

He certainly was standing for a lot of bosh, I thought.

"No, honestly, I'm not, Captain," said the fellow. "Here's the truth. I always was fascinated by Homer and

his contemporary writers, even in early childhood. I never had to work, as my friends did; the pater had too much to allow me. And things were bore-some, y'know. Last year I got fed up with the old homestead, y'see, and I said to the governor: 'I'm off on a little trip.' He was so busy devising extra laws for a kingdom already overburdened with them that he paid little attention to me. Besides, I'm twenty-seven and I've always done as I pleased. He said: 'Right-O, take the yacht and some friends and enough chaperones. The last, at least, so you don't ruin my political career! Where are you bound?' I hadn't decided yet, so I told him: 'Maybe I'll search for the Holy Grail or form a new Crusade or discover the Isles of Enchantment.' He replied, laughingly, that perhaps I did not sustain enough morality to prolong a quest for the Holy Relic, but with a sufficient amount of bad luck I might discover a Circe."

HERE I, the chronicler, interrupted. "Look here, Mercer! Why is it that sometimes you speak a jargon, a combination of Limehouse and Bowery slang, and then with so little difficulty manage to produce an Etonian accent! You had to be taught to pronounce 'fantastic', yet terms such as the 'Crusades' or 'the Holy Grail' are no strangers to your tongue and slide so readily off of it. You didn't memorize everything Charles Brighton said, did you?"

"I told you, Mister, I have an awful good memory. I can remember back almost to the day I was born. A lot of those words meant nothing to me but I sort of remembered how they sounded, that's all. This wine isn't bad, is it?"

His was once more the last portion remaining in the bottle; because of the

delicate intimation I hastily beckoned a waiter.

THEN [continued my narrator] the captain began to laugh. He laughed until his mustache bristled, slapped his palms on the table until the dishes danced a cachinnation, and even smiled at me.

"Ha! Ha!" he roared. "A good one, Mr. Brighton! Almost, for the moment, you had me believing you were crazy!"

Brighton kept on smiling. "I ditched the yacht, because y'see Circe might be somewhat astonished if I invaded her ancient premises with an engine-room full of Diesel machinery and a crew of sophisticates who would want to examine her gowns or compare her with Garbo, and grabbed a job, incognito, as an ordinary steward in the Green Line. If I would go into details it would surprise you—what I've seen. For instance: I saw your guns crashing out before those surprised blockheads back there on the dock. So I deserted my present ship and boarded yours dressed as a vagabond sailor while you were still arguing with the port officials. You looked interesting, and I have the money to pay for my passage. I can keep a still tongue in my head—you need have no worry——"

"Please, please, Mr. Brighton!" said the captain. "No mention of money between gentlemen! You are my guest."

I gasped, hearing *him* refuse money!

"After all, I have attained the latitudes of Circe and her barnyard swarms!" laughed this crazy blond-head, this vagabond adventurer.

"Practically among the swine on this ship—with the exception of their mistress!" snapped Captain Lewell. I realized he was glaring at me. Ab-

sorbed, he had not noticed my aimless pottering about as I listened to the conversation, but now I had in some way attracted his attention and I felt like a mouse seeking the safety of its private knothole as I fled toward the door. My exit was conspicuous; I'm afraid, because of the extreme necessity for flight.

"MR. MERCER [I interposed] the goodness of the wine apparently accentuates your eloquence. You *are* improving! I suggest that if you should drink enough you would become able to articulate with a fluency which might overwhelm multitudes!"

"Wine," said Sam Mercer, "is a wonderful achievement the gods must have invented prior to the birth of mankind. But you have reversed the deduction, my friend; it is the wine, not eloquence, which moves the multitude. Nevertheless, I shall not allow it to move me until I have concluded my contract with you."

I did not argue further; I was already more interested than Sheherazade's king.

FOR the next ten days we slid along like the Ancient Mariner wearing the albatross around his neck [said my newly acquired friend] and most of the time of Charles Brighton was spent in the captain's cabin, from which loud roars of appreciative mirth proclaimed the latter's enjoyment of the vagabond's wit. No doubt he was describing the "details" of his adventurous wanderings.

Brighton spent very little time in associating with the men, but during the few hours he did mingle with them he made remarkable progress with the riff-raff gathered from the seven seas, at it was represented on the *Belle of*

*Orleans*. Because of his sojourns in the cabin they named him "the captain's pet." But the first day following his discovery as a stowaway he licked the muscular brigand we knew as "Big Turk," and the men began to comprehend that he was anything but a pet. Turk had been the bully of the fore-castle. The second day he filched a bottle from the captain's own cabinet and shared it with all, including the Turk. After that the Turk announced he would, personally, tear limb from limb any man who chanced to defame his shipmate's name.

I have never, before or since those peaceful days, observed such a harmonious crew as the men sailing the *Belle of Orleans*, nor known of a man capable of mingling with both officers and seamen, and still retaining his friendliness with all classes, as Charles Brighton. He had the advantage of a brilliant flow of rhetoric which he was able to switch, at a moment's notice, into the polyglot slang of a dozen nations. And a careless, swashbuckling manner which his physique suggested was not entirely a pose.

The men rapidly cemented friendship. Only Old Lew hung aloof, refusing to share his wine and continually muttering of a Jonah. But then—Lew was touched.

So passed the next ten days. On the early dawn of the eleventh, one day out from our next destination, where we had intended discharging the remainder of our smuggled guns—the ones not discovered by the authorities—one of the watch cried out: "Breakers off the port bow!"

It's an alarming cry to hear at sea, Mister. It was especially amazing to us at the time, for we thought ourselves to be well out at sea and clear of any coast. The captain tumbled out

in his long underwear, swore, and insisted we were all madmen and there was no land for eighty miles except that straight down. But the faint sound of crashing waves coming across the waters hushed him. In the gray dawn of the approaching day we could barely distinguish a dark bulk that could mean only a rising shore, ringed by the inevitable white circles that denoted the presence of ragged breakers. Charts or no charts, latitudes to the contrary, we were very close to land.

When we dropped the anchor it fell into a short seven fathoms before it rested. The captain went back to swear at his charts. Anxiously we waited for more daylight. To me, the air appeared to carry a damp, offensive flavor, and I felt a weird tightening of my heartstrings. Call it what you will, premonition or instinct or the sixth sense so frequently experienced by the man accustomed to a dangerous existence, but the fact is that I guessed something was wrong with that island. It threatened my sub-conscious nerves. Once I thought I saw a giant, fan-shaped, white light rising from the center of that dark blotch on the ocean, like a searchlight aimed at Heaven, but when I excitedly pointed, it had already vanished and the crew spoke of their individual disbeliefs concerning "visions."

We had no way of determining our position or choosing a course. We were utterly, hopelessly lost on a strange shore! To move at all might mean colliding with a hidden reef or sinking our prow into a sandbank lying scant inches below the surface of the water. So we awaited light.

**D**AY came with a leaden sky, behind which the rising sun was totally invisible, and there was a light drizzle

of discouraging rain. Fog drifted about us in ghostly layers which appeared to extend clutching fingers at the rail as if their concealing mists hid the corporeal bodies of lost souls seeking a fleshly habitation.

But as the sky brightened we were able to see the island. I can see it now, in spite of the whisky and the wine and the lapse of years, as plainly as I saw it on that accursed morn. It was unforgettable. By pure chance we had anchored directly off a narrow entrance in the surrounding reef through which, with luck, a boat would be able to pass; to the left and right extended an unbroken line of jagged rocks. The island itself, presumably about a mile or less in diameter, was unprepossessing. Heavy foliage, mostly undergrowth, grew almost to the ocean's edge, and there was but a few scant feet of sandy beach. The thickets were jungle-like in their density; even from a distance we could plainly see the interlaced boughs of stunted trees and the twisted tendrils of serpentine vines. Toward the center of this unusually flat island rose a slight elevation encircled by either a heavy clump of trees or what was perhaps much taller brush. The whole place exhibited not the least sign of a presence either animal or human, and the eery dark-green coloring was depressing to one's nerves.

The crew were superstitious, as all seamen are more or less, and several of them exclaimed about the noticeable absence of bird-life. One man said, paradoxically: "That blimey green color gives me the blues!"

I have heard of the different effects of color on the human nervous system; how red excites madness and blue produces despondency. I can't recall what green is supposed to do. But I tell you that solid quarter-mile of dark emerald

wall, rising like a silent but sentient oceanic creature above the leaden waters of the fog-wreathed sea, surpassed all the horrors described by Dante or hinted at by Doré. It held the threat of the unknown, of some bizarre evilness, and sometimes that is worse than actuality. If there had been one splash of some brighter tinge, one tiny patch of the rainbow-colored tropical flowers, to lessen the effect of the interminable sameness, perhaps the illusion we experienced would have been dispelled. There was not. Nothing was there except a great green blot, where, by all the findings of traveled seamen and nautical instruments, should have been only water.

I know Captain Lewell is sorry to this day for the orders he gave on that morning ten years ago. Perhaps his men are even sorrier because they obeyed. But you see, as I have already said, Hugh Lewell was a tyrant while at sea and they had a habit of fulfilling his commands.

"Lew," he said, "and—let's see—you, Turk, will go ashore and fill the water tanks. There must be water on an island as green as this one."

The two chosen did not object, although the utter silence of their shipmates was by the very fact of absolute quietness an unspoken argument against the captain's judgment. Those seamen were brave, tried men; vicious and unlawful in their deeds, perhaps, but nevertheless seasoned with the spice of danger, and so, cautious. They sensed danger on the island. Premonition, or whatever you call it, is an actual and acknowledged fact to the roving adventurer.

"Mr. Mate," continued Captain Lewell, "take the key to our arsenal from the second right-hand drawer of my desk and let Lew and Turk have a

rifle apiece—revolvers also, if they want them. I doubt if firearms are necessary, for I can detect no signs of savages or wild beasts; however, we will remain on the safe side."

"Begging your pardon, Captain," said Old Lew. "They'll be no need for guns on that shore. Whatever lives on that piece of Hell won't be harmed by common lead!"

"You've been day-dreaming again, Lew," growled the captain. "Imagination getting you—or the fog. Don't be silly! Hop to it before I split your ears!"

"Aye, sir," said Old Lew.

But his face didn't change. I looked away. It's not nice to see a man you knew had nerve suddenly go to pieces before your eyes, and I thought Lew was on the verge of hysteria. He covered it, hiding the evidence of his glazed eyes and trembling hands as well as he could, and I had to admire him. Turk was too stupid to understand emotions.

Supplied with rifles, ammunition and the containers required for the transportation of water, Lew and the Turk rowed off through the fog wreaths; Lew with his mouth a grim, compressed line and Turk patently attempting to fold his beer-fattened features into a carefree expression. Both of those men were scared, but you could have cut the hearts out of either before they would have admitted it.

The island remained as silent, as brooding, as ever; I tried not to look at it but I might as well have attempted to ignore a tiger stalking me through the jungles of Cambodia. I had to watch those two puny figures (they did seem small from the distance as they beached their boat and pressed on toward the line of brush—even the Turk) and I could not help but think

that I, and I alone, was responsible for sending their souls into jeopardy, into the midst of the miasmatic evil exuding from that place.

“ONE moment, Mr. Mercer [I interrupted again]. “Do I understand you to say that *you* sent them? I thought you said Captain Lewell gave them their orders.”

“Error of speech, Mister,” replied Mercer. “I must be befuddled by the wine. And very good wine it is, too. Shall we have another bottle?”

“Your phraseology seems to have improved on account of it,” I told him. “Of course we shall have another bottle. By all means. Perhaps, after I have had a glass or two, I may comprehend your dual personality.”

“Is it your wish that I continue?” His tone was arrogant and I could see he was becoming drunk. “Do you care to hear the rest of my tale?”

“Naturally!” I was subdued.

OLD LEW and the Turk never came back [said my companion]. We waited for an hour, for two, for three, and still the green veil never stirred to reveal two men lugging water containers. The sun became faintly visible through dispelling fog. The men were whispering among themselves, and even the mate was tapping nervous fingertips on the rail. I was getting the jitters, myself, but I could not exhibit them, you see.

Brighton was standing very quietly by the rail and intent, I believe, on trying to pierce the fog with his assorted eyes. He offered no remarks to supplement those made by the overwrought sailors. He was, you understand, a gentleman, and although he tried hard to mingle in a friendly fashion with the men, his instincts interfered and he was

unable to suppress inbred rules of conduct ordained by ancestors who had not been marauders. He might have been an adventurer but he never could have been a successful thief; it was a trait he could not repress any more than I can help raising this glass of wine.

Knowing him as I did, remembering his story of his family background, makes me raise another. . . .

Some of the crew began to cast evil glances in the direction of the patient Captain Lewell, who still stood immobile upon the bridge. It was not because they thought of blaming him for any misfortune which might have happened to Lew or Turk, but just an example of the inexplicable reasoning stupidity follows when in doubt or stress. They desired to place the blame of any mischance upon the broader shoulders of a superior. The captain detected their mutinous air and promptly asserted his authority. He was a man who could kill with his bare hands, a cruel leader of thieves, but it never has been said of him that he would send even the lowest member of his command where he would hesitate to go himself.

“Lower the second boat,” he said. “I’ll see what is wrong here. Another issue of weapons, please, Mr. Mate. Do you wish to accompany me, Mercer? You are at full liberty to decline, you know.”

He was not drunk, so something must have stirred him to make him so polite.

“Aye, sir,” I said. The captain’s nerves were tense and I didn’t dare to refuse.

Suddenly Charles Brighton was in front of us all, his blond hair waving with the beginning of an off-shore wind. “If you please, Captain, I would like to go also,” he said. “I volunteer.”

Captain Lewell laughed. When there was trouble at hand he became the searover and forgot the gentlemanly manner. "Charles, you may wander the wide world over but I doubt if you'll find your Circe on an island such as this one."

"Well," said Brighton, "I'll look."

After we had easily surmounted the final wave leading into the opening of the reef we were able to beach gently enough. Brighton sprang carelessly into knee-deep water to pull the boat onto the sand. The boat used by Old Lew and the Turk was alongside and we could see the footprints they had made before entering the brush. Before we entered the labyrinth of the foliage I paused to look back at the *Belle of Orleans*. I could not help it; perhaps my companions thought I was showing weakness, but the fact is that I felt as if I was deserting a safe anchorage to drift upon a threatening coral reef. And I still remember the distant white blots that were the faces of the crew as they hung over the rail to watch our progress.

Brighton said: "That's queer shrubbery for these parts, isn't it?"

It was. I never saw such strangely shaped trees, with limbs that twisted like writhing snakes, or such oddly formed, three-cornered leaves as those growing on this island. Now that we were closer, things did not appear to be entirely green; there was a red network through some of the leaves, a patter of tiny lurid veins running wild at strange angles. No two of them seemed alike. The influence of the jungle odors which we now encountered must have affected me; for the thought came into my mind that the colors of the brush were continually changing, like some lizards I had seen that were readily able to merge their outlines and colora-

tion with their surroundings. It gave me the creeps, I tell you.

Lew's and the Turk's footprints led us to a break in the green barrier. Brighton plunged ahead on a narrow path, and the captain and I could do nothing else but follow. The trail was narrow, barely a foot and a half in width, hedged by projecting limbs and trailing vines and covered above by the interlaced thickets so that it practically became a tunnel before we had advanced a dozen feet. The ground underfoot was soft and mushy, and the air curiously warm. Only at intervals did we sight the open sky. We saw sunlight now and then and knew the fog was gone.

"Look!" exclaimed Brighton, pointing at a spot some inches before him. "There are some kind of animals here!"

Something had previously crossed the trail, passing from one green wall to the other. It had left imprints on the marshy pathway, small footprints that might have belonged to a member of the cat family or maybe a fawn. On account of the ooze we could not tell definitely just what type of animal the spoor described, but I think all of us were secretly delighted to discover evidence of natural life on the weird island. I wonder still if the others felt like myself. It seemed to me I was traversing a pathway leading into some unknown land of the fourth dimension wherein the omnipotent powers granted to mankind would be unrecognized by whatever invisible shape happened to be the ruler.

I assure you, Mister, I am a very practical member of the *homo sapiens*, and this illusive sensation I experienced was not the result or after-effects of either drugs or drinks but the atmos-



phere of that damned island. And when I say "damned island" I am not swearing; that bit of rock and underbrush was damned in the sight of man and God.

The trail twisted and wound a devious pathway through rows of trees and hosts of sprawled vines. We walked through a dim twilight for what seemed an interminable length, considering the size of the island, before we reached a clearing. Perspiration stood out on our foreheads, and drops of sweat trickled into our eyes.

Just before we arrived at the spot where twilight once more became daylight and the tendrils and red-veined leaves reluctantly gave way to open space and fresher air, a small animal, perhaps a foot and a half in height, ran squealing across our path. It dived into the brush on the opposite side of the trail from which it had emerged and immediately became invisible. It was an ordinary pig of the razor-back type, dirty and covered with slime from its wallowings in the marsh's puddles and wild with fear because of its unusual encounter with strangers.

"I told you there would be life on this island!" exclaimed Brighton, triumphantly. "Somebody even keeps pigs. Or else they are wild ones. Did you see it?"

The question was silly. Of course we had seen it. Keyed up as we were, would we have missed seeing anything?

"Funny," I said, not meaning anything was funny at all. What I meant was that something was strange.

"What's funny?" inquired Brighton.

"That the pig should limp like Old Lew," I told him.

The three of us stared at the tracks left by the hog crossing the path. The left hind foot had been held high as

the animal ran; we could see that only at intervals had it so much as scraped the ooze. I found myself remembering the wild stare it had given us.

"Are we crazy?" asked Brighton, thrusting out his double-barreled chin.

"I hope not," I said. "Time will tell."

I THINK all of us sighted the stone walls of the castle at the same instant. For the second time we stood transfixed with amazement. Erected there in the center of that muddy clearing, the Devil alone knows how long ago, on a remote isle which had no nautical authority to exist, the very act of discovering its grim and ancient battlements made one feel as the Connecticut Yankee must have felt when he saw King Arthur's court. My first impression was that the walls were very high, but they could not have been so tall, for then the trees would not conceal them and we could have seen their gray outlines from the deck of the ship.

I admit I retain but a hazy recollection of those stone ramparts. Remember, I was worried about the fate of Old Lew and the Turk, about the identity of the island which had appeared so mysteriously from the sea, and quite confused regarding the strange flora and fauna of the eery place.

As I have told you, the walls were gray with age and erosion. I am no geologist and I could not determine the composition of the rock. Perhaps at one time, in some forgotten era, the blocks of the castle had been black; I detected dark streaks here and there on surfaces less exposed to weather than others. A few withered and yellowed tendrils clung to their rugged sides, but the majority of the vines growing in the vicinity of the building had chosen

to creep toward the edge of the brush for possible support. The stones of the castle seemed to repel them. Brush ceased to grow on the ground surrounding the walls, although the dirt floor of the island distributed there appeared to be no different from that upon which we stood. A lowered, mediæval draw-bridge crossed a narrow moat filled with slimy, greenish water, and the huge gates at the other end of its rusty length were swung wide open. The battlements above us were cracked and beyond hope of repair. We could not detect any signs of human occupancy behind the narrow apertures which extended along the wall.

I took a few steps in the direction of the castle, with a wary eye on the silent menace of that lowered draw-bridge corroded with the moisture of centuries. Its chains were so rusted I doubt if it could have been raised. The water in the moat was fetid and obnoxious to the eye as well as the nostrils.

"See here," I said; "something happened to my two men to prevent them from returning or they would have done so by now; we all know that. Whatever occurred was probably connected with this lonely place, for it appears to be the only habitation on the island. Physically, the Turk would be difficult to overcome, and Old Lew is no babe in arms; so whatever ill luck they encountered must have been strong enough to conquer them before they could shout one 'hello' for rescue. I suggest you two remain at the edge of this brush, where one of you can retreat to summon help if anything happens, while I reconnoiter."

"YOUR two men?" I broke into his smooth flow of words again. "Had Captain Lewell placed you in charge?"

"All right, all right!" ejaculated my thirsty companion.

He poured another glass—for himself.

"I'm not Sam Mercer. I have tried to depict the scenes of this story through Mercer's eyes, but his dialect fails me. When I am sober I remember and become ashamed, for once I was Captain Hugh Lewell, in the service of His Royal Majesty, the King of England. I think you have guessed, and now I am drunk enough not to care if you know. Mercer was the third member of our party. I've taken his name in vain. Objectionable?"

I hastily reassured him.

THEY objected to my plans [said the man whom I had forced to reveal himself as Captain Lewell]. They argued that, while I was beyond a doubt in supreme command while on board the *Belle of Orleans*, I automatically lost my privileges when I set my feet on shore and therefore could expect no obedience. Therefore they would enter the castle with me. I retorted that I considered this expedition a landing-party over which any officer of the deck could assert the rights of leadership, and their attitudes constituted mutiny. Our bickering must have sounded ludicrous to any possible eavesdropper. We ignored the unseen danger which had swallowed Lew and the Turk to chatter at each other like a trio of African monkeys. There was something in the air of that accursed island that made fools out of men. I began to think of knocking Mercer down, although my heart told me he was just trying to be loyal, but somehow or other he appeared particularly annoying there in the dimness of the jungle path. I remember I thought of pushing his face

into the mud of the clearing, and I recall how the oppressive silence boiled in my veins and caused my heart to thump with the mad impulse of murder.

I fear I lost all official dignity. Hatred generated in that unholy air like cholera spreading on a plague ship. I saw hate in Brighton's eyes, and he was the best friend I had in two thousand miles.

When I decided to resume my lost authority by boldly walking into the silent castle doors alone and ignoring the petty argument, I found Mercer striding determinedly on my left and Brighton keeping in step on the right. We were parading, like silly school-boys, in full range of any death-dealing weapon the invisible dwellers in that grim castle might have chosen to sight against us. Fools—all of us!

It was Mercer who saw her first and grabbed at my arm, almost throwing me off balance with the strength of his surprise.

"Look!" he growled. "In the name of—look!"

I saw the object of his startled surprise instantly, for I was on the alert. I cannot understand how he saw her first. She stood, or rather, leaned, against a stone of the giant doorway at the opposite end of the drawbridge. Her hands were empty and hung harmlessly at her sides, and she wore an air of mingled surprise and ingratiating welcome; evidently visitors were few and she was glad to receive us. Yet three grown men became immobile, wooden images when they saw her. For to see a woman, a beautiful woman such as she, costumed as she was—a white woman, mind you—on that remote island seemed incredible.

As if her arrival had summoned it, the sun broke through the fog and be-

gan to concentrate its fiery energy upon the already steaming jungle.

She was wearing a long blue gown that in some countries might have been mistaken for a nightdress. It was fastened about her slender waist with some kind of twisted cord, and tasseled loops hung on her left side down to her knee. The cloth descended to her ankles, which were invisible unless she walked. One could see her tiny toes protruding from beneath the immaculate gown, for they were encased in open-work sandals such as I have seen in Biblical pictures. To say her figure was perfect would be an imperfect description. It was superb. The smooth outlines of her slim thighs and the mounting curvatures of her full breasts beneath the clinging cloth were almost as plainly visible as if she had been nude. Not that I mean to emphasize her voluptuousness. I have seen many women, belonging to all races, colors and creeds, who could exhibit the same physical charms. But never in all my wandering over the surface of this globe, not even in the Latin countries, have I discovered a woman with such inner, smoldering fire as this one possessed.

Today I know why. It was her eyes. They burned with a submerged fire that might have been stolen from Vulcan after he pilfered it from Olympus. I can't tell you what color they were; they must have taken on all the tints of the rainbow, for one minute I thought them to be blue and the next I decided they were either gray or green. Another look, and I was prepared to swear her eyes were as yellow as a panther's. You can't describe the color of flame-tips; they keep changing too rapidly. The next best thing is to discover the source and look at the fuel. It was her eyes, not her features,



"The impressive silence boiled in his veins." that registered the "here-I-am" invitation, yet the woman, or girl, owned an

aura of virginal sweetness, and an observer would have decided she was a maiden who had never known a lover. To sum up my impression of her eyes I will say they suggested slumbering fires and cool, running waters. And that is a paradox, is it not?

**H**ER hair was long, perhaps three or more feet in length, which was not customary at that time. She had arranged it to drape its strands over her shapely shoulders so that, at the first glance, it might appear to be carelessly hung. A thin circlet of some kind of white metal restrained the locks from dropping into her luminous eyes.

She was a picture of beauty an artist would rave over, I tell you. Perfect. Her cheeks were alabaster, her nose a Grecian perfection, her brow of intellectual height. I have seen throats like hers built on the stone columns of goddesses molded by the best sculptors this world has ever produced. Her lips parted as she watched us, and I saw the white evenness of perfectly formed teeth.

"Greetings," she said in a low voice. "You speak the English?"

Her accent was strange. I had never heard that peculiar intonation before. Brighton answered for us.

"Yes, of course. My name is Charles Brighton. This is Captain Lewell, who is in command of the ship *Belle of Orleans* which is anchored off-shore. And Samuel Mercer, one of the crew. Please don't be frightened; we are a peaceful lot."

She smiled, and I was aware of a tingling sensation at the nape of my neck.

"I am not frightened," she said, her tongue lingering over the syllables. "You are looking for—something?"

I looked at her and thought of

Buddha and the Sphinx and the careful carvings I once saw on a temple wall in Tibet. She impressed me that way—too much like a goddess to be of mortal flesh.

"Two of our crew came ashore in search of fresh water," explained Brighton. "They didn't come back. We found their footprints but we can't find *them*. Could you tell us if they reached here?"

The woman smiled. I thought her expression was mocking, but after I glanced at the features of my companions I decided to remain silent. You can't tell a worshipping sailor who has spent many days at sea that a woman who smiles at him is treacherous. It's an impossibility. You can't always guess at a woman's welcome, either. She may be happily receiving you or she may be a succuba; the more of them you meet the less you are certain. What I mean to say is that I was very much in doubt as to the intentions of this strangely attired woman.

"You haven't told us your name or the name of the island," said Brighton, employing a light manner and his most attractive smile. I could see he was enamored.

"The island," said the dream in white, still smiling, "is called Ææa."

I saw Brighton straighten as if he had received an electric shock.

"Ææa?" he repeated. "The Isle of the Enchantress? Perhaps then you would be—Circe?"

"Yes. You know of me?"

Charles Brighton stood there with his mouth hanging open.

"Don't be a fool, Brighton," I told him; then to the woman: "Madam, we are looking for water. Perhaps you can direct us to a spring? It may be that we shall find our missing men there."

"The only spring on the place is the



Circe, the enchantress.

one in my central courtyard," she replied. "It is quite a way back. The

walls were practically built around it. Will you come in?"

Again I noticed the peculiar, halting manner with which she pronounced her words. One would have thought she had just learned the English language, although she did not exactly lisp her words in the manner of most foreigners or native women. I nudged Brighton with an elbow movement I hoped was unnoticed, but which I fear was not, for the face he turned to mine was a frowning one. You see, he did not possess the sixth sense owned by the wanderers of the seas and he did not feel the premonition of danger which I had become conscious of down to the marrow of my bones. Something was wrong, awfully wrong, on that island, and I knew it as well as I knew my mother's name.

"Don't you be a fool, Captain!" growled my stowaway. "Come on."

Mercer touched my arm, hesitatingly. "Captain," he said, "maybe I'd better go back for the water casks and tell the boys."

I was irritated by my own doubts, and because I comprehended the man's desire to return to the material safety of the ship his request angered me unreasonably. I grew sarcastic.

"Allow Mr. Brighton and myself to remain the fools of this party, Mercer!" I told him. "You can accompany us and imagine yourself a guardian angel."

Poor Sam Mercer never argued with me. His fate is heavy on the balance sheet of my soul. . . .

**T**HE woman turned without speaking again, confident that her summons would be obeyed. We had a brief glimpse of an exquisitely shaped back as she floated before us into the shadows of the interior. She actually seemed

to float. The lightness of her graceful carriage was uncanny. Brighton breathed deeply, like a spent swimmer, and placed his right foot on the threshold. When he saw Mercer and me by his side he entered. We followed.

The inside of the hallway made one feel as if he had suddenly stepped into another dimension; the gray shadows felt cool and soothing to skin scorched by the hot winds outside, and sunlight seemed to be a distant thing, half forgotten and associated with some experience of long ago—of very long ago. At intervals one could see spreading damp spots where the seepage of water issuing from behind the bare walls had, following natural gravitation, descended to the rocky floor of the twisting corridor. As we proceeded we passed several openings evidently leading into other passages extending at right angles from the one we were traversing. They appeared dark and forbidding, gruesome. Perhaps I owned too much imagination; I was younger then, you see, than I am now.

Brighton touched my forearm once and I saw his features were wrinkled by indecision. "Maybe it's true!" he muttered. "My God, Lewell—maybe it's true!"

"Maybe what's true?" I asked him rather savagely. I was still annoyed enough to provoke an argument at a time when I should have been using my senses.

"The legend of Circe!" he whispered. "The Isle of Ææa! The—the swine!"

"It's true that we are fools and you are our chief representative," I told him. "Has it been so long since you have looked upon a woman that she seems to be a myth when you see her? As an enchantress? Well, then efface yourself! When I see you again I may

be in the company of a Cyclops or a Scylla or a Charybdis. Or possibly I may return with my two missing men!"

"Captain," said Sam Mercer, "Captain, I don't think we'll ever see Old Lew or Turk again. Let's get out of here. Let's go, Captain!"

"Shut up, imbecile!" I commanded.

He said no more, but he continued to whimper deep in his throat. The man was afraid. Therefore I could not show fear myself; to do so would have endangered my rights as a leader. So I laughed aloud. Perhaps the secret doubts in my heart conveyed those discordant notes in my mirthless laughter which echoed and resounded through the narrow passageways, or maybe the maze of interlacing tunnels was accountable for the ghoulish reverberations flung back into our ears; but there was certainly no humor in their sounds, and I drew a deep breath to expel panic from my system. Men will not follow another man who is showing fear.

"Captain Lewell is amused at my poor abode," said the woman, without turning her head. "Please do not judge my home by its entrance. These are old passages built a very long time ago. I have more luxurious quarters which I reserve for my visitors. I will show them to you after we have seen if your men are at my spring. They may have entered the patio without attracting my notice. We will go there first—if you wish."

"Of course, Madam," I answered. "And I was not laughing at you, but at one of my men. Tell me—do you live here alone? Aren't you afraid of wandering sailors landing at your gates? Sometimes they can be—well, rude, to say the least. Don't they ever frighten you?"

I could not see her face, only the

mass of lustrous hair hanging from the back of her regally held head as she drifted so lightly before us, but it seemed to me that she was smiling. I may have read it in some slight motion of her body; I can't say how I knew it, but I was certain she was amused at my questions.

"No, Captain," she replied, "I never become frightened. I find that the sailors always respect me. And I am glad to meet visitors, for they arrive so rarely. But then, I am not entirely—alone."

As she was speaking, a small pig darted from the depths of one of the adjacent passages and snorted its way through our group. It lurched against my leg, brushing filth across my trouser leg, and I kicked at it. It stopped and raised a belligerent snout at me, baring its teeth. For a minute I thought it was going to attack my shins as an angry dog might have done, for its eyes were eloquent with red rage such as I never before had observed in the optics of a stupid animal of its type.

"Geez!" exclaimed Mercer. "It acts as tough as the Turk! Must be a wild one."

I KEPT my eye on the beast but was aware the woman had turned and was looking at it, too. The next instant it was rambling crazily over the stones behind us toward some distant sty.

"You have queer household pets, Madam," I observed.

"As you may have noticed, Captain," she said, resuming her gliding progress, "there is very little wild life on my island. I make the best of what companionship I have—and sometimes the pigs seem almost human."

I heard Brighton draw a deep breath.

"Indeed!" I replied. "Yes, one ob-



"The worn images were laughing and gesticulating with queer movements."

serves curious resemblances to certain characteristics of man in even the lowest shapes of life. Would you happen to know, Madam, if one of your island pets—limps?"

"It may have injured a foot among the briars, poor thing!" she said. "Did you see it very far from the castle? I must look to it. You see, strange as they may seem to you, Captain, as my only companions I hold each and every one of them very—dear."

Wanderer of the earth's highways

that I am, I have often visited ruins of many lands, such well-known sites as those upon which have been preserved the historic monuments of Spain, Italy, Greece and many others. I have looked upon Inca ruins and the lost temples of Africa about whose original builders no man can be certain. But when I attempt to describe the interior of the courtyard we three vagabonds entered on that woman's island, words fail me. The best I can do is to refer you to the tumbled obelisks of Stonehenge or the





poised images of Easter Island; for while looking at them I felt the same wondering chill enter my heart that I had experienced before the mysterious antiquity of those puzzles handed down by long-lost races to our day and age.

The whole floor of the inner courtyard was strewn with projecting rock formations which might once have been statues, but were now worn so smooth by the hands of Time and changing climates that they had lost all bold outlines a sculptor may have executed

upon them. Chunks of shapeless stone, some formed groups oddly suggestive of women gossiping in the market place, or leaned toward one another as men engaged in desperate struggle. I selected one piece, in particular, which resembled a crucified man with his head thrown backward as he stared in hopeless pleading toward a silent sky. All were so worn that any carven facial contours some ancient artist may once have been proud of had been erased forever, and perhaps my impression

of lines defining corded muscles and rounded limbs was a fantasy of the brain alone. Placed as they were, in confused groups here, one lone pillar there, over the entire area of the flagging in the courtyard, they startled a man beholding them unexpectedly. Jason must have felt as we did, when he hurled the dragon's teeth onto the soil that sprouted armed men.

In the very center of this queer mixture of statuary a small fountain bubbled, offsetting the weirdness of the place by its enticing, gurgling, liquid noises. It was quite shallow and its depth extended to only a few inches below the level of the flagging; I imagined it was fed by some underground spring. The water was pellucid and obviously fresh, and even the blank features of the little, worn, stone girl whose form arose from the center of the pool did not impair my delight. Here, I thought, was a pure and fresh supply for the ship.

"How is it, Madam," I inquired, "that this island should have such a fair wealth in water and still remain unmarked on nautical charts? It's amazing!"

The woman stood on the other side of the fountain. She was, I remember, still exhibiting her enigmatical smile and burning the three of us with her fiery eyes. Her reply was not a direct answer to my query.

She said: "The water *is* amazing. Do you care to drink of it?"

I think it was just at this time that I realized although we were supposedly standing in an open courtyard I could see none of the sun's burning rays, none of the fiery gleams we had escaped after entering the castle. I looked upward into a gray atmosphere resembling fog, an inchoate wraith, a sentiency that hid the heavens from the

puny forms of mankind. Like a blanket, it covered the ceiling of the courtyard as far as I could see, bridging their summits from lip to lip. I knew a storm when I saw one, with or without a barometer, and a typhoon also—and this was neither. I knew I was looking through, or at, a gateway leading into another sphere—a fourth dimension.

That is why I did not really drink. I merely pretended, placing my lips on the surface of the curiously bubbling liquid of the pool, without swallowing any of it. Mercer and Brighton were on each side, kneeling, and I could see their throats contracting and the little surface ripples about their mouths that testified to the extremity of their thirsts. But although my throat was dry and my tongue thick I did not drink. I got back on my feet, touching a hand to my barely moistened lips as if I had quaffed deeply.

**S**UDDENLY I was aware of a scent permeating the air, a fetid odor apparently rising from the water of the pool; it reminded me of the sulfur springs of Georgia, and the stench of it was offensive to my lungs, nostrils and eyes. I felt them streaming water—my eyes, I mean. An urge came upon me to sink down on the stones and slumber; a heavy lassitude was dwelling on my brain and my body. It could not have been the water, I thought drowsily, for I had hardly touched it. Could we all have been drugged by some clever ruse?

I felt myself swaying as though I was hanging to the plunging bridge of a ship in the midst of a hurricane. I tried to peer through closing eyes for my companions, but I could not see them, and the black mist was billowing down from the unholy roof above. It seemed to me that the tiny, girlish fig-

ure in the center of the fountain had altered; in my dimmed sight it had transformed itself into a merry, laughing, mocking nymph of classical beauty. I thought, during this strange interlude in time and sense, that it giggled and grimaced. But I could not concentrate my faculties entirely upon her restoration, for I had become startlingly aware of movement behind me. Dazed, I saw through the swirling mist that the statues on the other side of the pool were moving. The worn images seemed to have recovered whatever original forms they had once enjoyed; they, too, were laughing and gesticulating with queer movements. The whole courtyard was a fantastic scene, such as may have been drawn by imaginative artists depicting lost souls in Hell; for weaving appendages and leering features were flashing so rapidly before my eyes that only momentarily could I distinguish any individual form. And through all the maelstrom, the frenzied dancing, I saw the blazing eyes of the woman who called herself Circe. The fire hitherto slumbering in their depths had become a flaring volcano which penetrated the swirling fog; now I saw only her eyes and nothing of her beautifully shaped body.

I stuck out a hand into the gathering darkness, trying to reach Brighton. He had been beside me—but now he was gone! Through an engulfing blackness I pitched headlong onto the damp flags, never feeling the impact. I lost consciousness while falling. My last thought was that I must be drunk. But there was a small voice in my brain telling me I should not be intoxicated because I had breathed over a bubbling spring. Then came total blackness.

A tiny shaft of light touched my optic nerves and I opened my eyes to see from where it came. My first impres-

sion was that the murky clouds roofing the courtyard had entirely departed, before I saw they had but faded into a light, though surging and restless, gray. Next, I turned my head far enough to look toward the eroded images. My head was clearing, and I could see they were not wheeling or dancing in the mad orgy I had imagined, but as motionless as when I had first gazed upon them, weighted immobile by the crushing power of untold centuries.

A voice said: "Captain?" I sat up in spite of the devils hammering at my skull.

"You seem to have fainted because of the terrible heat, Captain," said the woman from some spot behind me. "Perhaps you would be relieved if you drank some water."

"Brighton! Mercer!" I called.

There was no answer except a snuffle I recognized as a grunt from one of her pets.

"They went back to the ship for aid," she said. "They said they would bring a stretcher, so as to move you comfortably."

I turned my head so that I could see her. The effort caused torture to my aching head; my neck, also, was very stiff. I saw her at once, poised as erect and looking as beautiful as ever, quite unlike the monstrous thing I had imagined while in my stupor. Her white robe was billowing about her body, swayed by some wandering draft; her lips were smiling, and I could not help but admire her wealth of curly hair. The crimson of her mouth revealed even, perfect teeth. The fire I thought to find in her eyes was but a sparkling, vivacious, cerulean blueness which enhanced her perfections.

"Why don't you drink, Captain?" she entreated me in a low, persuasive

tone. "You will feel better afterward."

I bent over the pool. Something else made a sound, like a snort or a grunt. With a supreme effort I was able to turn my shoulders far enough to see the source of this noise, straining my stiff neck tendons as I did so; I saw two of the bristled swine that were her pets, one at each of her sandaled feet, just duplicates of those I had encountered in the brush and in the corridor. One of them was nuzzling the hem of her gown, affectionately, and as I looked at it, it raised its snout and gazed directly at me.

The men on my ship were, naturally, watching for us. They tell me that I broke through the brush screaming, mad with fear and running as if head-hunters were pursuing me; that I did not emerge from the broken path but came running through the brush, half naked from the jagged briars. My face was terribly scratched. They tell me I did not even stop for the boat, but plunged into the water and began to swim toward the ship, still screaming, whereupon they set out to rescue me; that when they dragged my shuddering body aboard I was delirious, crying in the name of God and the Holy Mother that they leave the island at once. When they asked me about Old Lew, Turk, Mercer and Brighton, I replied that there were no men on the island—only beasts. I raved, they said, for days, lying in bed and drinking whisky. I shouted unintelligible descriptions of ghost islands, enchantress, black fogs, sulfur waters and swine.

They deserted the ship at our next port, every last mother's son of them. They told me I was stark crazy—and I guess they were right. I sold the *Belle of Orleans* for a song and drifted about on my own, sane once more, but afraid

to sleep too deeply on account of the dreams. . . .

"THE bottle is empty, my friend," announced my companion, interrupting himself.

"So is my pocket," I told him. "And you get no credit at Portuguese Joey's. But I think you owe me a bit of an explanation. Your tale is, I grant you, interesting. But I can't understand just why you fled from the woman and her curious island in such unseemly haste. You awoke, you said, and saw her standing there, smiling. The fantastic hallucinations had departed from your sun-struck brain, she had sent your men back to the ship for medical, or other, assistance, and she tried to get you to drink water to clear your head. She did everything a lone woman could do to aid you. What else did you imagine to make you go insane, to tear through the brush, passing your men, and swim to the ship? Had you a second attack, another spell of unconsciousness? You know you left four men marooned on that isolated isle, don't you?"

"No! I left no men, I tell you!" swore the now thoroughly drunken man. His fist swept the wine-bottle to the floor as his shoulders sank to the smeared table-top. He relaxed into what was the beginning of a stupor. "I left no men!" he mumbled, less fiercely. "There were no men to leave. No men! I left only the swine!"

"What do you mean?" I insisted.

"Swine . . . all swine!" His eyes closed; he had almost forgotten my presence. "The pigs . . . at her skirts. Remember? Fawning like dogs. And one . . . looked at me and grunted. A gentleman pig, my friend! It's right eye was blue and its left was brown!"

Captain Hugh Lewell began to snore.