

THE MAGAZINE OF

# Fantasy and Science Fiction

VOLUME 7, No. 2

AUGUST

---

- Fondly Fahrenheit (*short novelet*) by ALFRED BESTER 3
- The Devil and Simon Flagg by ARTHUR PORGES 22
- Gilead (*novelet*) by ZENNA HENDERSON 28
- Frustrated Frankenstein: Alfonso Herrera and  
His Colpoids (*article*) by MIRIAM ALLEN DEFORD 55
- The Invisible Wall by RICHARD BROOKBANK 61
- Command Performance by KAY ROGERS 70
- Recommended Reading (*a department*) by THE EDITORS 77
- Two-Bit Oracle by DORIS P. BUCK 81
- The Sexual Behavior of the Extra-Sensory  
Perceptor (*verse*) by HERMAN MUDGETT 92
- The Quadriopticon (*short novelet*) by CHARLES BEAUMONT 93
- The Little Black Train by MANLY WADE WELLMAN 114
- Cover by Mel Hunter  
(*exploring a green star system*)
- 

*The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction, Volume 7, No. 2, Whole No. 39, August, 1954. Published monthly by Fantasy House, Inc., at 35¢ a copy. Annual subscription, \$4.00 in U. S. and Possessions; \$5.00 in all other countries. Publication office, Concord, N. H. General offices, 570 Lexington Avenue, New York 22, N. Y. Editorial office, 2643 Dana St., Berkeley 4, Calif. Entered as second class matter at the Post Office at Concord, N. H., under the Act of March 3, 1879. Printed in U. S. A. Copyright, 1954, by Fantasy House, Inc. All rights, including translation into other languages, reserved. Submissions must be accompanied by stamped, self-addressed envelopes; the Publisher assumes no responsibility for return of unsolicited manuscripts.*

Joseph W. Ferman, PUBLISHER

Anthony Boucher & J. Francis McComas, EDITORS

Robert P. Mills, MANAGING EDITOR; George Salter, ART DIRECTOR; Howard K. Pruyn, PRODUCTION MANAGER; Charles Angoff, ADVISORY EDITOR; Gloria Levitas, ASSISTANT EDITOR; Constance Di Rienzo, EDITORIAL

SECRETARY; Mildred Barish, EDITORIAL ASSISTANT

*We've brought you earlier some brief pieces by Doris P. Buck; now, with this longer story, we should tell you something about her. Mrs. Buck is a housewife (in Alexandria, Va.), a "semi-professional" actress, and a writer of more varied professionalism than any other of our contributors save Miriam Allen deFord. "I take in writing," she tells us, "as some women take in wash"; and she has hand-laundered — in addition to fantasy stories — pieces for trade papers, fillers for the New Yorker, juveniles, one-act plays, radio scripts, and a number of factual articles for travel journals and women's magazines, with improbable titles ranging from America's Pocket Dolomites to Has Your House Circulation Trouble? It may be this background of fact-writing that enables her to be so detailedly convincing in this study of tanktown prophecy . . . and the terrors that can attend even the most hardheadedly fraudulent attempts to scry into the future.*

## *Two-Bit Oracle*

*by* DORIS P. BUCK

LIFE IS HARD in this Thracian temple. If you think that as a soothsayer you would be better fed than in the village, that under our roof you would be dryer than under thatch, you are right. But that is only part of the story.

My last assistant left for Delphi after I had done all an oracle-priest could do to train him. I would not want you to leave after I have worked with you for about a year. Better to understand the disadvantages now. They are many, my young friend, many. The head priestess, Amasara, and I are the only professionals in this oracle. For the rest, we work with villagers.

Do you know what that means? It means you will have to be quick to cover up the inevitable mistakes. You will need the patience that built the Pyramids. Above all, you will need a heart that won't break from discouragement if you deal with a girl like Rhodis.

I had had no trouble getting her — a wretched little orphan — to come here. She must be about fifteen, though she does not know exactly. At first I thought she was glad to change her rags for embroidery — but it was more than that.

She would grind up colored stones and smear them on herself, looking

old as a sibyl or rosy-fingered as dawn. She put on purple, bound sandals on her feet — and in her mind became Queen Hecuba. Sometimes she was a terrified sacrifice, dragged to the altar. Or Eurydice, down in hell, wailing for Orpheus. I could not have stopped Rhodis from this play if I had wanted to. And of course I encouraged her.

Most village girls deliver an oracle as if they had just learned it by heart — which of course they have. Rhodis had more possibilities. Give her an idea and she would put it into her own words. With a girl like that, I decided to take a risk. The first day that she ever sat on the tripod-throne, I gave her one of the biggest cases we ever handled — a king. He had made journeys to Delphi and Dodona. I could not expect him to listen to a wooden-faced amateur. So that morning I coached Rhodis in what, as the voice of the god, she would be expected to say. It was a great honor, as you can see. She disappointed me by becoming almost hysterical.

I rather pride myself on the way I manage hysteria. There is a good deal of it here, even with our most stolid girls. I ignored everything Rhodis said, and when she found no one noticed her, of course she became a great deal calmer. Then I told her that she was to handle a couple of other cases after the king. I made up my mind about those on the spur of the moment. You see I knew, from considerable experience, that one can capitalize on hysteria. The girl's excitement, her tension, carry over to the people who hear her.

But when I stood in the darkness of the temple chamber with a young assistant, I had a bad moment. I knew the king was kneeling before the steps of the throne, and in the darkness I thought of everything that could go wrong, from Rhodis's forgetting completely what she must say to her laughing instead of groaning when thunder rumbled. I was taking a great chance.

I heard our cymbals clash. Then three notes sounded from the deep-toned gong. A shaft of cold white light fell upon Rhodis, who was pale as the light itself. Her hand went to her throat as if she were afraid the muscles in it would not work. I stood there in the darkness beside the young priest, hoping — hoping —

Rhodis found her tongue suddenly. She intoned: "I am the voice of the God, the God-who-dwells-in-darkness. I am his voice. You may question."

She was wonderful. Even I could almost believe in a god, the way she said it.

The shaft of light grew wider till I could see the king too, in his purple and gold. Most of the girls here would have gawked at him, but Rhodis looked quietly over his head. We heard him tell her that barbarians had fallen upon his people, overwhelming his archers by sheer numbers. Now

they were beneath the walls of his city. Though his voice was deep and clear, I knew he was afraid. Rhodis's tense white face had done that.

"Will the God be merciful?" he asked. "Will he turn back the invaders before the city gates?"

Rhodis only said, "The God is angry."

"Angry?" he questioned, while I gave the signal for a low rumble of thunder. He began to tell what a good king he had been, how justly he had ruled, how he opened the royal granary in famines and gave his people wheat and barley.

Rhodis repeated, "The God is angry." The king started to speak, but she interrupted. "I see a ruler of the people. He lies bleeding in a little room. A secret room. I see —"

Her voice broke, and I wondered if after that splendid beginning she would not be able to finish. I helped her with a clap of thunder that sounded like the end of the world. Then there was stillness. It seemed unending. It became something a man could hardly stand. Certainly the king could not stand it. He mumbled that his brother had died after one single stab; he had not given him a slow painful death.

Rhodis came in quickly. She had not lost her voice at all; she had been building up her effect. "But the stench of blood is in the God's nostrils. Therefore the God punishes with war. In his time he will send pestilence." She paused. Though her eyes were apparently not on the king, I could tell that she noticed a big blue vein throb by his temple. She watched him rest his hand on the ground, where no one could tell whether or not it trembled. She said in a voice that was almost kind, "Perhaps, perhaps even now the God might be merciful."

I let thunder rumble again, faintly.

The king muttered, "What would the God ask of me?"

She told him simply, as I had suggested, "The God-who-dwells-in-darkness has looked upon his temple. Rains pour in where the roof has fallen. But if he saw a roof of Cyprian bronze above his image, enduring bronze where the shingles rot —"

"Not bronze." The king was practical. "Cedar."

Beyond him in the darkness I chanted with my assistant, "A roof of bronze, of Cyprian bronze."

"Perhaps," Rhodis whispered, "the God might be merciful. Perhaps —" She let the whisper die. Her head sank on her breast. Her hands hung lax. She hardly moved her lips when she said, "The God has spoken."

Nobody heard the two light taps I gave — nobody but the worker I had hidden. It seemed a miracle when the hall began to fill with light. We drew aside the curtains. The king paced out.

I waited a full minute. Then did we bustle! My assistant rolled up the carpet on which royalty knelt; underneath was a simple rush mat for the next poor fool. I quickly readjusted the curtains; if we had more metal rings for them, I would not have to work so hard at these times.

Rhodis stayed in her place, of course. But she opened one eye and whispered, "Did I do it right?"

I nodded.

"Oh," she gasped, "I was so frightened."

I should have remembered her hysteria earlier in the day. I ought to have concentrated on the girl, not on details like curtains. But I was in a hurry. When she asked, "Suppose the king hadn't believed me?" I said, "People believe anything," and went on with my work.

"And," my assistant added, "we have the dirt in our files; who killed who and all the scandals."

That lad was always dropping into waterfront slang, taking away the dignity of the oracle. He came here — like me — from an Ionian seaport he had left in something of a hurry.

Rhodis ignored his crude expression. She asked, "What will happen to the king?"

"Depends on what Amasara can get from him," said my young priest. "If it's enough, our revered High Priestess will have you scare the living daylights out of those barbarians and send them home. Their chieftains are in the court now. The king knows. He'll be reasonable about the roof. But while he and Amasara haggle, you might as well do something for a farmer's wife who's been waiting two hours."

"You know the one," I explained. "The mother of a crippled boy. Tell her he'll be all right."

Rhodis drooped at that. "Could I — Could I skip the next one?"

I shook my head. "Now, now, now, suppose we all wanted to handle only big cases — a king, a delegation of barbarians. How'd we keep the pot boiling?" I gave her knee a fatherly pat. "Remember," I slipped into waterfront argot myself, "we're a little two-bit oracle trying to keep out of the red. A king doesn't consult us every day. We can't pass up a thing."

My assistant snorted that she must think she was good, holding out for a bigger cut. And her first day too!

"No!" she cried. "No! It's not that."

Naturally we looked puzzled.

Rhodis said in a shaky voice, "The boy won't ever walk, will he?"

We admitted he would not, but pointed out an important fact she overlooked: We got a drachma every so often for keeping up the mother's spirits.

She planted her little sandaled feet and shut her lips firmly.

Now was the moment to give her a glimpse of my philosophy. "See here, aren't you doing that farmer's wife a favor, making her happier? People think they love truth. They really love a comforting pack of lies. Tell them what they want to hear."

"I can't lie to her," said Rhodis.

"And you can't go temperamental, not on a day like this." My assistant was sharp.

Rhodis looked at her gold-shod feet. She avoided our eyes. "I can't," she whispered.

"Why not?"

She pleated the silk of her robe and hung her head.

"Because I'm —"

"You're what?"

"Afraid." We could hardly hear her.

My man exploded. In fact he made quite a speech about girls with stage fright.

"That isn't what I'm — afraid of."

We were so surprised we stood stock still and looked at her. "No? Then what is it?"

She had gone white again. She hugged herself in her thin silk and looked hardly bigger than a child as she whispered, "The God."

We roared with laughter.

"Who makes the thunder?" I asked.

"You do. You do."

"And the darkness?" I even added. "You know about the cymbals and the gongs and the light effects?"

"Yes," she admitted.

"Look," I said reasonably, sensing the next attack of hysterics on its way, "nobody who works here has believed in a god for over a hundred years. Besides, if a god could kill, I would have died long ago."

"It's different for you," she insisted. "You never believed. But I did — in my village. I shall be punished as a priestess was once — with visions too terrible for a mortal to bear. I shall die mad."

"Can't argue with that type." My assistant (Birdbrain I called him) caught her wrist to twist it. I stopped that.

"She's tired," I explained. "She has a right to be. Look at the way she played up to the king. No false starts. No backtracking. Dearie," I even forgot to talk like a soothsayer, "you've got that certain something. If we'd had you when Alexander came here, we'd be on the map now. Just you forget about that mad priestess. She was nutty to start with."

Birdbrain made some silly remarks about arm-twisting.

I ignored him. It was natural for her to be jumpy, I said, especially as it was her first time. Did she want a rest?

She nodded.

I advised her to lean back, breathe deeply, and take a few minutes to pull herself together. I almost had to push Birdbrain to get him out. He scowled but he went with me. At the curtains I paused. "Forget that farmer's wife till we go to the grove and back. But be yourself when we get in again —"

"— or else," said Birdbrain before he too slipped through the curtains.

I suspected what would happen while we were supposed to be in the grove. Of course we hadn't really gone; we both had our eyes at peepholes. I must say I've seldom enjoyed myself more.

At first the girl sat rigid. Then she ran across the hall, flung the drapery aside, and disappeared. In a couple of minutes she returned, pulling the waiting country woman into the room.

"They never did it like this before," the farmer's wife said. She frowned so hard at Rhodis there were deep lines between her eyes.

Rhodis did not notice. She laid a finger on her own lips. "Hush! We have only a minute."

"I had music the other time," the woman complained.

"Listen —"

The farmer's wife felt for a stray lock and tucked it under her new fillet of wool. "You're making me look a sight, yanking me in like this. You needn't think you can whisper the oracle to me because I'm a woman who sells eggs and honey. I paid my drachma, same as anybody else —"

"Yes. Yes. But hear me."

"— and I'm going to have my message with all the trimmings: music and a vision and everything. I've got rights same as other people."

"But my prophecies, they're all —"

"Look, young woman." The mother stood, arms akimbo, and let her voice rise. "I didn't come for no nonsense. I don't put up with no nonsense. I've been saving egg money close on two months. I know what Amasara gives for a drachma and I mean to have it. You start this oracle all over." She turned and stalked angrily away.

"Listen, only listen —" Rhodis caught her by the shoulder.

The farmer's wife squealed, "You keep your hands to yourself. Some folks say it makes a woman crazy if a priestess sets a finger on her. You keep away from me or I'll complain to Amasara, I will." She gave Rhodis a nasty look, then bolted like a rabbit.

The girl faced the three-legged seat. She shivered a little as we came in. I

hadn't prevented my young assistant from returning with a whip in his hand. He gestured to her to sit down. She looked toward me, but I was busy picking bits of lint off my tunic. Birdbrain gestured again — with the whip. The girl went to her place slowly, but she went. Her shoulders sagged with discouragement.

My young priest hid his lash. I removed a brazier (no use wasting incense) and replaced it with jars of water and fresh herbs. I crushed a little sweet marjoram, and afterward I gestured. Flute music sounded faintly, then grew louder.

“Ready?” Birdbrain spoke to Rhodis out of the side of his mouth as he went toward the curtained wall. His eyes stopped where his whip was hidden. “Ready?” he muttered again. Rhodis and I nodded. Then with a slow, stately movement I drew the curtains aside.

The farmer's wife walked in, tossing her head a little. The priestess had risen; her eyes looked beyond the woman.

“I see a child, a man child, walking.” Her tone was glad yet somehow solemn too. “I see a woman binding fennel and sweet herbs upon his ankles. He dances. He runs.” She caught her breath. “Oh the swift runner! He races the boys in the meadow. Quick, child! Quick, or you will not beat them!” She moved her eyes as if they followed someone skimming past.

Then she looked down, noticing for the first time the woman at her feet. “But this — this is the woman of my vision.” She raised her hands to her forehead. “The very woman,” she murmured. “Do I wake? Do I sleep?”

“Your son will be cured of his affliction.” I moved toward the farmer's wife. “Only bind sweet herbs and fennel upon his feet.” I smiled like an old man looking at his favorite daughter. The flute music was loud as twenty birds.

The farmer's wife lumbered to her feet. “That's what I paid for,” she announced. She sniffed, partly to enjoy the sweet marjoram, partly to express her opinion of Rhodis. She took her time walking out of the room while Birdbrain and I held back the heavy linens hanging between the columns.

“We shall rest a minute,” I said to Rhodis after the curtains fell into place. “Then the barbarians. Then you're through for the day.”

My assistant fixed his eyes on the girl. “And no monkey business about ‘I can't. I won't. I'm scared.’ You're good, but not good enough to get away with that.”

She had not noticed my man moving toward the hidden whip, but it was in his hand.

“I won't — again. Not even — if you —” Rhodis gasped. She cried to me, “It's coming—closer. My terror.”



Her hands caught at her throat. I have seen animals in traps. Her eyes had that look.

"Can you *act!* But when you feel this," Birdbrain raised his lash and she saw it was knotted, "the yell you let out won't be phony." I was afraid his language would completely upset a girl sensitive as Rhodis — perhaps even more than his whip.

As a matter of fact, the whip was all she noticed. She gaped silently, unable to move her lips. Then before anyone so much as touched her, she fainted.

That was something to handle carefully. When Rhodis came to herself, Birdbrain was not there; only I, patting her hand, holding something under her nostrils. I told her gently not to worry, fondled her hand, and said over and over that another girl could be the god's voice for our important cases. I thought she would straighten up and object. But no, she only looked grateful. I kept on saying it.

At last she did speak. "Yes. Yes. Take anyone — anyone else. I'm running away. Back to my village."

Now I rather like acting myself. I sat on the step below her carved chair and looked sad. My voice got confidential. "And I thought I was helping you when I brought you here, when we fed you. How often does anyone in your village eat a full meal? Or leave anything over for you? No hut for you, was there? Dirtiest rags in the place." I fingered her robe. "Remember?"

She nodded.

"You liked it here at first," I went on. "And did you wolf your food!" I paused a long while. "Forgotten what it's like to be hungry?"

"No." Rhodis gave a faint miserable sigh.

"You know when you're well off. We'll hold the barbarians till you're ready. I was only joking when I talked about using a different girl. You're the best we have. Then tomorrow —"

"No!" She looked frightened. "No! I'll go — now."

"I suppose it doesn't matter if they beat me because of a runaway priestess."

"But you're important. Nobody'd — They couldn't hurt *you*."

"Couldn't they!" I laughed — hard, hollow laughter.

"But — But — You're Amasara's right hand. You know how everything's done."

"Yes, and showed everything to you." I watched her eyes get wide with horror. I stroked her again. "But don't think about me. If you want to go, go. You'll find a way; if not now then some dark night. And I'm an old man. I can face what comes my way. Even — death."

She shuddered.

"I'm not complaining." I wish you could have heard me quaver. "I thought — oh, never mind —" I held her shaking little hand against my cheek. "I had a daughter once. I saw you and — well — Remember how happy I was when those thin cheeks of yours got so pretty, when you began to smile as you woke up instead of thinking, 'Another day. Another day?' No, don't remember that." I spoke quickly; timing meant a lot in this crisis. "I was nothing to you. I fooled myself. All you liked was a full plate." I laughed again in an ugly way. Her eyes grew moist. "Don't ever think of this place again — of me," I sniffed, "the old man who gave you real love."

I walked away from her, my head down. A big sob tore out of her throat. She ran to me, throwing her arms round my neck. How she cried, right on this shoulder! I knew I had won even before she breathed, "I'll stay. I'll stay."

I led her back to the seat with carved arms and settled her among the cushions.

"And all this while the god hasn't done a thing, not one thing. Come on," I slipped into waterfront talk again, "just one grade-A vision for those characters with a lingo like baa-baa-beh. Then you're through. Then there's wine, wine with honey, waiting. Why, you'll laugh yourself sick at the idea of being scared. *Who was scared? Scared of what?* you'll say. Come on, sweetheart. Give. First thing the old man ever asked. You're not letting him down. He knows that." I watched while she straightened herself. I adjusted the thongs of her sandal. "A few tears look good. Pretty, shiny eyes."

She only stared past me the way she had stared past the king, the farmer's wife. She hardly seemed to know what was happening around her.

My assistant slipped in again. He signaled for me to start, whispering, "All settled about the roof."

"What'd we get?" I whispered back. "Cedar? Bronze?"

"Tile. That split the difference. Now Amasara wants us to send the barbarians back where they came from — fast. They're lousing up the whole shrine." He gestured toward the priestess with his thumb. "She ready?"

She was ready. She was magnificent. Her face looked as if she were having a vision of all the horror that could be crowded into one mortal's life. That face by itself could start the barbarians running to their forests. You know they're even stupider than most of the people who come here.

Then I heard thunder come up with a low rumble and end crashing. Flames poured down like forked violet rivers. Between flashes I felt the darkness would smother me. I wanted to run out but I was so sick and dizzy I could only lean against a pillar.

Each time lightning blazed, I remembered my mother's stories about the gods and their revenges. I remembered people who turned to stone or became blind. I believed like a child. I heard the young soothsayer groan; he felt what I did.

By the flashes, we could see Rhodis groping — and even with the thunder, I sometimes caught what she said. "Shoes." I could see her lips make the word even when the crashes drowned her voice. Then she cursed war. She wept. She was crying, I think, over the dead bodies of her sisters, but even while she cried, she was saying, "I can't go barefoot." She tore something from the dead feet of the children in her vision.

"I've got to. I've got to," we heard her say. "The house is rubble. I haven't a pair." She sobbed and shook as she tried to force her feet into what they had worn. I thought she must have been a princess or a great lord's daughter, but in her vision all the children went about shod till the war came. It sounded strange, but I could make nothing else out of her babblings.

After she put the shoes on, she hunted through ruins, looking for food. I could tell by her gestures that she did not find it. She moaned, "I've had nothing since morning." All the while she spoke of this and that thing, for in the land of her vision they had many, many strange foods. She talked of chests, even rooms, piled full of meats and fruits that would not spoil. But after a long search she said wearily, "People will know real hunger now. I'll know it."

Then she began to shiver and cry again. I could not follow all she said; I caught the word *destruction*. The girl was wild with fear, and screamed about something that travelled faster than the sound it made. Frightened as I was, I knew nothing could do that. I looked at Birdbrain, who was shaking his head now.

Then what do you think she wailed? "I'm hurt — cut — badly. I didn't even know it — first." That sounded right. I've seen soldiers in battle, bleeding and not realizing they were wounded till afterward. I felt my flesh chill. At least I shivered until she sobbed, "I must have — have been cut by flying glass — when — the windows shattered."

Imagine: glass windows! We had one little glass vase here. You could look through the sides, almost like looking through air. One day a priestess broke it, and a smooth piece cut her as if it had been a knife. See how Rhodis's mind worked? That glass window made me realize I was dealing with a girl and her make-believe, not with any god. For minutes, though, I felt as if that war were something real, happening somewhere; as if Rhodis had been swept into it by a pure miracle.

Then suddenly darkness was gone. The last thunderclap rumbled and

quiet came. (I never did find out how Rhodis learned the thunder signal. I'm supposed to be the only one who gives it.) I thought clearly for the first time in half an hour — and I saw that Rhodis had put on such a performance she'd made a hard-boiled professional like me accept it. Remember what I told you about hysteria and how it creeps into an audience? Birdbrain and I had been spellbound, spellbound by a girl we'd seen practicing a hundred times. Busy as I was that afternoon, my mind raced off into a golden future. I planned a new oracle, for Rhodis and me —

There's no need to go into that. For then came the strangest part of all. Rhodis acted as if she were still seeing her vision. She talked in a hopeless tone of a Second World War (whatever that might be), of food doled out to a people who had had plenty, and of the good life — the good life for everyone which their wise men had almost brought into their reach. She said, "We were mad to destroy this. Mad to let it be destroyed. Mad. Mad. Mad."

The child had worked herself into such a state that she believed — actually believed — in everything she'd made up, from all the food to glass windows. I can't blame anyone but myself for her state of mind. It came from my attending to those curtains after the king went out, instead of making Rhodis roll up the rug and do a dozen little active things that would have kept her steady, so that she wouldn't be wailing now, "Then God has punished me. I have been one with a future people who broke their world into pieces. I cannot forget it."

"Look," I said in my kindest voice, for I had to get her in shape for the barbarians, "I can prove that you never saw any kind of future. Then you won't go mad, not over — nothing!"

She only stared.

"I know something about fools, having spent my life around an oracle."

My assistant broke in, "You know the saying: Fools, damn fools, and people who go to oracles."

I argued, "Even a god couldn't dream up the kind of fools you saw. If they had half the things you talked about, there'd be enough for everybody in the world." I did not mention the incredible, like windows; just simple things that could almost have been real. "Think again of shoes for everybody, not just the king. Why, fellows like Birdbrain here could get all your food dealt out and then everybody'd be happy. Even barbarians don't go to war unless they're hungry. Stop shuddering a minute. What you've been saying doesn't make any sense, does it?"

She kept crying, "It was a true vision, I tell you. I shall go mad."

I was stern at that. "A priestess would go mad much faster if she left us than if she stayed and worked here. Why did you think we let you talk to

the farmer's wife? So you could see for yourself how people feel. Remember she wouldn't let you touch her? Suppose you ran away. Nobody in the village would give you water; nobody'd give you bread."

"There are other villages."

My young soothsayer licked his lips as he remarked, "We have influence right to the Thracian border."

"Let me go. I'll live in the forest."

"One girl tried that," I remarked.

My young friend added, "They found her bones later."

"Gnawed clean," I finished.

I let that sink in. Finally I said, very gently, "Ready to see those hairy fellows in wolf skins?"

"What else can I do?" She went back to her place. This time *I* gave the light signal.

The barbarians filed in. Rhodis scared them into going home, not that she was half as good as she had been when only Birdbrain and I saw her, but she was good enough.

After that, though, she lost her fire. You'd like to see her? Why, you did. That girl in the courtyard, staring with a faraway look at nothing. And I once believed she had possibilities!

Now to get back to business: If you can stand working under conditions like ours, I'll be glad to take you on as my assistant.

---