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## THE LAND OF TIME TO COME

An Amazing Full-Length Novel  
By HENRY KUTTNER

IN THIS ISSUE: EANDO BINDER • CLIFFORD D. SIMAK • MAURICE RENARD

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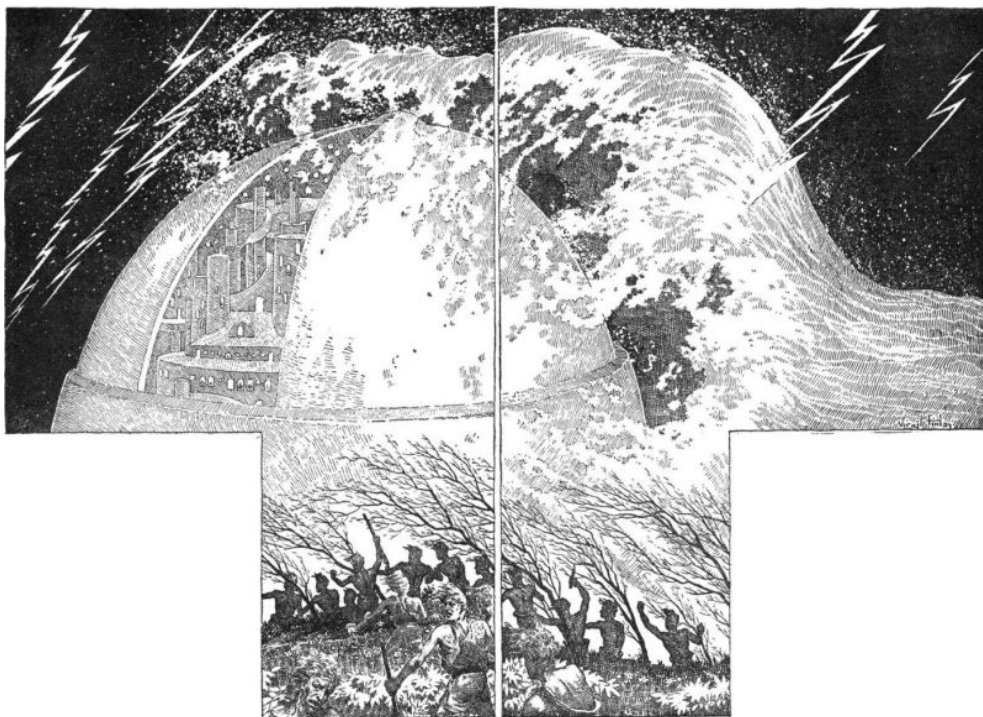
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The wall of water struck Center with shattering force. A black flood that blotted it out completely. The blackness was too intense for any light to penetrate (Chap. XIV)

# THE LAND OF TIME TO COME

By

HENRY KUTTNER

*Author of "When New York Vanished," "A Million Years to Conquer," etc.*

Illustrated by VIRGIL FINLAY

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*A Blight Blasts Memory from the Mind of Man—but Two Mortals Remember a World  
that Has Forgotten Its Own Rich Heritage of History!*

## CHAPTER I

### *Awake and Beware!*

Pain put a sudden period to the words that were slipping so easily through his mind. He lay quiet for a moment, all other awareness wiped out by the throbbing in his skull.

When the pain had ebbed a little, he felt a soft, cool substance between his hands. It felt like a throat, and the subconscious realization made his fingers tighten around it.

But that instinctive reaction was detached from his conscious mind, which strove to grasp some figurative rock above the maelstrom of his thoughts. The words came back.

In the nation that is not  
Nothing stands that stood before.  
There revenges are forgot,  
And the hater hates no more. . . .

Painfully he opened his eyes, focused them blearily. It was a man's throat between his hands. The man was dead.

"I've killed him," he thought dazedly. "Who was he? Who am I?"

All he could remember was the rhyme to which he had awakened, and some dim recollection of a girl's face in the sunlight, her lips moving a little as she followed the lines he had been speaking, when. . . .

"The nation that is not," he murmured to himself uncomprehendingly. "The hater hates no more."

It had no meaning. He looked down without belief at the dead man around whose throat his hands were still locked. This was a nightmare. If he could only remember!

"Woodley. Kent Woodley." The name swirled through the mists of his aching mind. That was himself. But there was nothing else he could remember.

Sick and giddy, Woodley dragged himself to his knees. Stiffly he unclenched his fingers from the throat. He stood up, swaying.

He was in a cellar. Daylight filtered grayly through cobwebbed, dusty panes high up in the cement walls. In several frames the glass was broken, but Woodley could see nothing outside. There was a rusty furnace in one corner, and a dust-covered mound in a bin near it. Coal, probably. But what was he doing in a cellar?

His mind was a blank as he dazedly examined the body at his feet. It was a man, but no man such as Woodley had ever seen before. Shaggy hair concealed most of the face, and the stocky, bronzed body wore only a filthy animal skin tied about the waist. In one hand was a blood-smeared, jagged stone.

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Woodley touched its forehead thoughtfully, wincing as he discovered an open cut there. Apparently he had been in a battle with this dead savage. Why?

Woodley found a clue nearby—the carcass of a small deer. He and the bearded man might have fought for possession of the animal. Yet that was scarcely plausible. Men did not eat raw meat in cellars.

Why was he so certain of this? Why was there a sudden flash of memory of cuddling the stock of a rifle against his cheek, peering through the sight at a great-antlered deer? A hunting

trip, he thought vaguely.

Again there was that inexplicable, heart-wrenching vision of a girl's face against a background of blue sky and sea, slim white hands. . . .

He shut his eyes and tried to remember. He seemed to see a tall room filled with glass cases. The word "Museum" flashed into his mind. He saw a huge boulder in its case and he was falling toward it, smashing the glass. That was the last thing he remembered before the curtain of darkness had descended upon him.

He opened his eyes once more and saw his hands. They were smeared with blood, calloused, filthy, with talonlike nails. A shock blew like a cold wind against the inside of his ribs. He was wearing a wolfskin, and his bare limbs were tanned almost black! The soles of his feet were hard as horn. His hair was unkempt.

"I need a shave," Woodley said aloud. His voice was strange to him. Nor could he understand how he knew that he was usually clean-shaven. "It's amnesia," he went on slowly. "Loss of memory. I've heard of such things."

Surely, though, this situation was utterly abnormal. Every fiber of his subconscious mind sensed strangeness in it. It was not right. If only he could remember a little! Again he examined the dead man, feeling repugnance as he did so.

"This must be new to me," he mused. "I don't think I've killed before, or made a habit of it, at least. Just what did happen?"

The cold, bearded face of the corpse aroused another of those brief flashes of memory. Suddenly Woodley remembered the fur-clad man rushing toward him, gripping the jagged stone menacingly. He had leaped away from the deer he'd killed and met the attack.

The memory ended. Nothing was left. Woodley felt alone and lost in a world he could not hope to understand. There was something more than amnesia that made him shrink from the thought of leaving the cellar. The sense of danger was connected somehow with the bearded dead man. Woodley felt that a real menace was still present, watchful and deadly.

There was a flight of steps leading up into gloom. Woodley mounted them, to emerge in a twilight room whose windows were black with grime. There were chairs and a table, the latter overturned. The shards of a vase were dust-covered on a moldy carpet. A square box that stood on a shelf in one wall drew Woodley toward it.

There were several dials and push-buttons studding its front. He wiped dust from a panel and saw odd markings that aroused a chord of memory, but he could not read or understand them.

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On an impulse, he turned the dials. Something should happen. Music should emerge from the box. The name "radio" leaped into his mind.

Shaking his shaggy head, he left it and crossed the rotting carpet toward a broken door, sagging on its hinges. Past the threshold he discovered another room, quite empty, but with a flood of sunlight shimmering through a smashed window. Beyond it he saw blue and green.

Going closer, Woodley recognized trees, and, beyond them, the sky, pellucid and cloudless. He put both hands on the window-frame and stared out, amazed.

Surely this was not right! He looked across a broad expanse of sloping ground, covered with weedy growths and underbrush, to a forested park that stretched to right and left as far as he could see. Leaves flickered in the blazing sunlight. A soft sighing drifted to Woodley's ears. The wind murmured gently through the trees, cooling the humid air. Beyond the forest towers rose.



Janet

“The topless towers of Ilium,” Woodley thought. “The face that—”

Janet!

Only the name, and it was gone like a sea-wave, back into the mental abyss from which it had been whirled. Woodley’s fingers tightened on the sill, heedless of the broken glass that cut his horn-hard skin. He felt sickening and horrible loss, a desolate longing as he looked out upon the green, sunlit world that was suddenly so alien to him.

Silent and enigmatic the towers rose far distant. Their stone sides were studded with windows. Within the great structures, Woodley knew, people lived. They were not clad as he was, did not wear wolfskins and go half-naked.

He clambered through the broken window, landing lightly on the ground outside. His legs bent springily, as though with long practice. Struck by a thought, Woodley examined the muscles of his arms.

They were lithe and strong as the muscles of a savage. He shook his head, oddly puzzled at this.

The contour of the ground was also “wrong.” Soil seemed to have drifted on to a street, a rooting place for plants, which grew here profusely. Woodley knelt and scraped away with both hands till, a few feet down, he uncovered a hard surface of concrete. Somehow he had expected this. Yet he was a little frightened at the discovery. Such a metamorphosis could not have taken place in a month or a year.

How long had his conscious mind remained dormant? What had happened during that time?

A sound brought him to his feet, looking up. To left and right, fronting the park, were buildings, silent and desolate. Some were brownstones, four and five stories high. Others were great monuments towering far above ground level. It was from a brownstone that Woodley had emerged.

What had made that sound? It did not recur, but he felt that eyes were upon him—hostile eyes, well hidden. Some subtle sense, conditioned to this strange world rather than to his mind, told him of furtive movement going on unseen. There were so many mysteries!

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The buildings towered even higher into the sky toward the south. In that direction, Woodley knew, was water, but it was salt. Fresh water lay directly across the park. He remembered a broad river, spanned by webwork bridges under which boats plied.

He glimpsed a movement in the building he had left, whipped around. It was his own reflection in a window that had remained unbroken. Woodley moved closer, fascinated by the unrecognizable.



Kent Woodley

He saw the bearded face of a savage, with lines of ferocity and harshness that Woodley could not recognize as his own. The shaggy eyebrows were drawn together in a scowl. A scar ran from ear to lip, white with scar-tissue and manifestly long healed. The bushy hair was jet black, save for a single streak of white which swept back from the center of the forehead.

The face was lean and hard as stone, bronzed and weathered as ancient iron, and the cool, level, intelligent gray eyes were utterly incongruous in that face. The eyes were the only features Woodley knew as his own. If that face was his own, it was changed almost beyond recognition. Woodley had expected to see a smooth, civilized countenance, and there was only a savage with level, puzzled eyes which did not belong to a brute such as Woodley's face

and body indicated he had become.

Slowly he turned, stared out at the silent forest. All his senses were alert, as though trying to catch some hint of a solution to the enigma. There was nothing.

The trees let their leaves dance gaily, like small mirrors of sunlight. Far distant was the flat, silver glint of water. And beyond rose the towers, cryptic and baffling with their hint of unremembered familiarity.

Something was wrong with the entire scene. Sound and sight and smell told Woodley that something was lacking. Surely the silence was wrong. . . .

## CHAPTER II

### *The Silent City*

Pursued by memories, Woodley walked south. There was still no sign of any living being. The park stretched eastward, and in the distance great towers stood against the blue sky. Over all, the deadly blanket of stillness hung.

Woodley drew into a doorway and stood hesitant. What next? He was conscious of hunger and thirst, but he also realized that he had to find some means of self-protection.

There came to him the vision of a blue-jacketed, brass-buttoned figure. To him it symbolized protection. But police had passed with all else, and something more was necessary now. Police had used . . . nightsticks . . . revolvers. . . .

He had only a vague recollection of what a firearm was and how it operated, but he sensed complete protection in the possession of a gun. It would be a good weapon against rock-throwing savages.

The window at his side was broken. The shop itself was gutted. Woodley stepped out into the street—now covered with soil and weeds—and crossed to the park. Making his way southward in the direction of the taller towers, he felt safer as he slipped cautiously through the undergrowth.

He examined the windows of the shops across the street. Without exception they had been gutted. Markets especially had suffered. Nearly all of the ground-floor windows were smashed, as though by a mad mob.

At last Woodley found a shop that had once sold firearms. But he was doomed to failure here. Cases were overturned, the walls pitted and scarred with bullet marks, and there was no ammunition. Yet the fur-clad men who had pursued him were unarmed, save for stones. What did this mean?

As Woodley found store after store ravaged and empty, with cans of food broken open and empty, he began to catch some vague glimpse of the truth. The wilful, wanton destruction reminded him of the work of children.

“Children?” he pondered, staring at a building that had burned to a shell long ago. “Not ordinary ones. Idiot children, more likely. They’d grab all the food in sight, might even discover how to load and fire a gun. That’s more than I remember, anyhow.”

This was not entirely true. The sight of revolvers and automatics and rifles had brought back memories.

“Kids . . . improvident, eating the best, wasting the stuff they didn’t want immediately, letting it rot, using up ammunition without replacing it. But why didn’t those savages who hunted me have knives?”

Though he gave up the problem, his determination to find a weapon was now inflexible.

In the park he found a spring and quenched his thirst. Not long after that, he found another gutted shop where guns had once been sold. Searching diligently, he found a few cartridges that were unspent, and a heavy Luger caught his eye in a dark corner. He picked it up.

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Instinctively his hands went through motions his mind did not understand. He saw himself load the gun with the three bullets, wished there were more. The Luger fitted into his palm

with the ease of long practice. In his previous life, then, he had been well acquainted with firearms.

What was to happen next? He had no idea. He must adjust himself to this new world. He must also, if possible, regain his memory, for without that he could not make plans. As for making a survey of the situation, there was always the possibility of danger. He could not help believing that the battle with the unknown man was a criterion.

New York lay empty. Weeds grew on the streets. How much time had passed while Woodley's mind slept, he could not estimate, but he guessed that it was years and years. That, too, troubled him. During so long a time he should have aged, but he had not. He had hardened, grown tougher. The white streak in his hair was the result of a wound, the scar of which still crinkled his scalp. Trying to remember the past, he could recall only a date—1942. It was no help. What was the date now?

He was armed, but hungry and thirsty. Remembering the carcass of the deer in the cellar, he guessed that the remnants of mankind had become a race of hunters. Perhaps they were nomads, like the ancient Amerindians, following game about the land. All the shops had been looted. With his gun he could bring down deer, but he'd have to find them first.

The ramparts of a bridge loomed ahead. Beyond the turbulent river were more skyscrapers and the chimneys of factories. The crescent Moon was a pallid shadow in the morning sky, scarcely visible. The sight of it aroused memory in Woodley.

A crescent . . . a crescent-shaped scar on a girl's slim hand—Janet! Again he saw the baffling picture of her face. She had played an important part in his previous life, he knew, and the sense of aching loss was strong within him. Confusedly he remembered candlelight and soft music, a throng of dim faces and the shuffling of feet upon a dance-floor. A day long past, it was seen through a glass darkly. . . .

Woodley trudged on across the bridge. It was in fairly good condition, though debris was piled high about the piers below. The brown water surged and rilled, its motion contrasting oddly with the utter stillness of the city itself. Only nature still moved. The blue sky was unclouded by smoke, for there were no fires.

Following the exit of the bridge, Woodley came out in a plaza that might once have been a park. Now it was merely a tangled thicket, its drifts and hedgerows stretching like the tentacles of an octopus up the adjoining streets.

All at once the stillness was broken harshly. A whistle shrilled out, high-pitched and peremptory. In answer came the piping of other whistles. Before Woodley could think of finding a hiding place, he heard the slap of naked, hurrying feet.

Dodging around the corner of a building, a man came into view some twenty feet away. Like Woodley himself, he was bronzed, shaggy and muscular, with a broken nose and flaming red hair. In one gnarled hand he held a jagged stone.

Woodley drew his Luger as other men appeared, armed like the first. They stood waiting, apparently for a signal. The red-haired man stepped forward and pointed in the direction from which Woodley had come. Culturally he said two words that were somehow recognizable.

“Go back!”

## CHAPTER III

### *The Tribe*

Woodley hesitated. These men were not going to kill him on sight, as the other savages had apparently intended. This was his first contact with possible friends. He sought desperately in his clouded mind for some helpful clue.

"Why?" he asked, trying to imitate the thick accent. "I am a friend."

The red-haired man knitted his brows.

"Eh? You cannot be. Those who come from there—" he pointed back toward New York—"they are not friends. We have no food to spare. We kill you if you do not go back."

The ring of savage faces drew closer, silent and ominous.

"I am not like those," Woodley said. "They will kill me. They drove me out."

"What is that to Geth?" asked the redbeard. "Or to Geth's tribe? We have trouble enough getting food without feeding extra mouths."

"He looks strong, Geth," a gnarled, crag-faced man with gray hair interrupted. "Perhaps he is a good hunter."

"Can he run down a deer?" Geth asked sardonically.

"Yes," Woodley said. "I can do that and many other things. I can kill from a distance."

"I, too, can do that."

Geth shifted his rock significantly from one hand to the other. Woodley hefted the Luger. It would not do to waste the three bullets he had, but perhaps one could be sacrificed.

"I bring you gifts," he said at last. "I can kill a deer without touching it. I can make fire."

He was surprised at the savages' reaction to his words. First surprise, and then furious anger and hostility showed on their faces.

"Make fire?" Geth snarled. "You shall not do that here!" He pointed off to the south. "Fire brings ruin. Look."

Woodley turned. Blackened, gutted towers rose in the near distance.

"Many miles," Geth said. "Burned by foolish ones who made fire. That was long ago, though. There are no more fire-sticks."

"Fire-sticks?" Woodley repeated.

"Splinters of wood. When we rubbed them on rock, fire came. And too often it destroyed." The chief's face grew dark. "Will you go back?"

"Let me stay," Woodley pleaded. "I can help you."

"We have no time to waste," Geth grunted. "We are hunting. Go back!"

"Let me hunt with you. If I can kill a deer for you from a distance, may I stay with your tribe?"

Geth shook his head, but the gray-haired man whispered to him. At last the red-bearded growled grudging assent.

"Well, it will do no harm. We need food. Our women are hungry. If you can kill a deer for us, we shall talk further. Come."

Without another glance at Woodley, he started away. The gray-haired man grinned.

"Stay with me, stranger, though you are not a complete stranger."

"Eh?" Woodley blurted.

"I've seen you hunting with your tribe across the river. They've cast you out now, I suppose. What's your name?"

"Woodley."

"Mine is Sand."

---

The little band hurried up one street and down another, till Woodley was hopelessly confused. It seemed hours before they were in open country, and many more hours before they sighted game. But after that, all went with surprising ease.

Vague memory guided Woodley as he aimed and fired. The buck leaped high, bounded away and fell. Pleased cries went up from the savages, who did not seem unduly alarmed by the sound of the explosion.

"So you have found a gun that works, eh?" Geth said.

"You know what guns are?"

"Oh, we found them long ago. But they stopped working after a time."

Geth barked orders. His men began to skin the slain animal while a crude pole-support was contrived.

The band began to retrace their steps. Nothing more was said about Woodley's position, so he wisely asked no questions. He kept near gray-haired Sand, wishing he knew more of the situation. But he could only wait. . . .

Geth's tribe lived in what had once been an apartment house. Most of the upper-floor windows were unbroken, and fur-clad, unkempt women and a few children were visible, peering down from above.

"We've been here only a moon," Sand explained. "We follow the game, and every year it grows less. We should go east, into the open country." "Why don't you?" Woodley asked curiously.

Sand shrugged his brawny shoulders.

"Something holds us here. At least it holds me. I do not know what."

He left it at that. Woodley continued wondering. Did Sand, too, suffer from the strange amnesia that affected him? Later he would make it his business to find out. Meanwhile he curiously examined the community into which he was being inducted.

The women were subtly brutalized. Some of them were pretty, and a few were even lovely, but a certain dull shallowness in their eyes gave them a stupid appearance. All were darkly tanned and muscular. They watched Woodley's advent with interest. The five children in the tribe seemed subhuman in intelligence, clinging closely to their mothers like young apes.

In the lobby Geth superintended the division of the meat, taking the best portion for himself and throwing the less choice hunks to the members of the tribe. Woodley, holding a bloody piece, hesitated as he noticed the savages sinking their white teeth into the raw meat. He was shocked.

Food, he remembered, should be cooked. But the subject of fire was too touchy to bring up just at present. Deciding that he had probably been devouring raw meat for a considerable time, Woodley shrugged and joined the others. After all, he was hungry.

When he had finished, he looked around. The men were relaxing. Occasionally the women brought them water in rusty pans. Sand handed one of these to Woodley.

"Thanks," Woodley said, wiping his bearded lips with the back of his hand.

"Eh?" Sand stared.

"I said thanks."

“What are those?” the graybeard inquired.

“Never mind.” Woodley grinned. “I’d like to talk to you, Sand.”

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He shot a quick glance at the chief, who was still gnawing on a bone. Sand nodded understandingly. He rose, patting his paunch, and led the way outside. There he sniffed the air like an animal, looked at the mid-day Sun, and then at Woodley.

“Well?”

“Let’s talk as we walk.” Woodley set the example. “I want to find a razor. I’m a stranger here, Sand.”

“You’ve been on the western island, with your tribe,” the graybeard grunted.

“I—I suppose I have.” Woodley pondered. “Have you always lived here, Sand?”

“Always.”

“You were born here?”

“Born? I do not know what you mean.”

“I mean, since you were a child.”

“I have always been as I am now,” Sand said simply. “Once there were many children, but they were useless. Only a few lived. You saw them today.”

“I don’t understand,” Woodley protested. “There are no— What do you mean?”

“These are the only ones left.”

“But don’t they grow older?”

Sand’s craggy face was puzzled.

“I don’t understand. They never change, unless they are killed. You should know that well enough.”

“But are no children born?”

“No human life ever comes into the world,” Sand said. “We do not change. ‘Grow older?’ Those words are meaningless to me. We die, of course, if we are killed. Not otherwise.”

“How old are you?”

Sand shrugged. “Old?”

“How long ago do you remember?” Woodley pursued.

“I have been here always, since the beginning. I shall remain as I am, unchanged, till I am slain.”

“You’ve seen me before?”

“Across the river, with your tribe. You’ve been there as long as I can remember.”

At last Woodley realized that for years he had lived as a savage, a victim of amnesia. Suddenly his true self—though not his complete memory—had returned in that New York cellar.

His last memory of a date was 1942. That was somehow connected with a mental picture of a museum, in which he might have been standing when the unknown catastrophe fell. At that time mankind, as he had known it, vanished. How? Had it been transformed into this brutalized race of savages?

Working on that assumption, he went further.

In 1942 his mind had suffered a total blackout. After that, a savage among savage tribes, he had lived as the others had, with no memory of his past life or of any civilization. For an unknown period this had gone on, until Woodley thought a blow on the head had brought him back to partial sanity.

Sanity wasn't the word. Self-realization was more like it. From a mindless savage, he had recovered the mind of Kent Woodley, though only a few of his memories.

That blank period from 1942 to his awakening in the cellar of the brownstone house was completely puzzling. How long had it been? How long had he lived among the savages? What had caused the quarrel that culminated in his killing a man in a dusty cellar?

Sand supplied a possible answer.

"There are roaming tribes, all hating each other. If you killed a deer and a man of another tribe saw you do it, he would attack you immediately. The man you killed probably cornered you in a cellar, and you were stronger than he."

It was more than likely. Woodley forebore to ask more questions, not knowing how far he might trust Sand.

He felt dazed. Since 1942, he had been living as a semi-mindless, brutal savage, a victim of more than amnesia.

## CHAPTER IV

### *The New Life*

Sand watched in silence as Woodley painfully scraped at the beard that hid most of his face. It seemed a useless procedure, for the hair would grow out again. Woodley, awkwardly handling the razor he had found in a wrecked store, squinted at his mirrored reflection and ignored the painful cuts. Slowly his features began to emerge, white in contrast to the deep tan around his eyes and upon his bronzed forehead.

The face was far more familiar than the brutal bearded countenance the hair had indicated. Woodley's nose was rather sharp, and hard lines bracketed his mouth. The wide-set gray eyes were still incongruous, yet not so much as they had been. Wonderingly Woodley fingered the scar that marked his cheek. How had he gained that and the streak of white in his hair?

Finished at last, he set out on another quest, followed by Sand, who seemed to have adopted him. Woodley was looking for some means of making fire. There were no matches, but at last he found a cigarette lighter, which gave forth sparks as the steel wheel was spun. Fuel took longer. It was fully an hour before Woodley discovered an unbroken can of lighter fluid. Satisfied, he turned back to the tribal headquarters.

His ammunition was rigidly limited. He must prove his usefulness to the band in one way or another, and he did not care to waste his two remaining bullets. They might be needed for an emergency. Warily he questioned Sand.

"The men hunt," the graybeard explained. "The women and children search for food. There are still some cans left in cellars, if they can be found."

"What else do you do?"

"What else can we do? It takes all our time to get food enough to live."

In the past, such hungry nomadic tribes had little scientific or cultural advances. They became warriors, like the hordes of Genghis Khan, living upon the loot of conquered nations. Or else they became agriculturists, raising their own produce and eventually finding time to build a culture of their own, as the Egyptians had done.

This tribe, however, knew nothing of agriculture. It was a throwback to primeval times, when man was emerging from bestial stupidity and groping for the light. Yet there was a difference, which Woodley noticed even in his conversation with Sand.

These people did not grope. They were satisfied, dully complacent. No questions existed in their minds. It was an effort for them to think. Sometimes they would try, but not for long. It was as though a mental barrier existed, shutting them remorselessly into their own savage existence.

Not even Sand and Geth, the chief, were intelligent. That showed in the language. A corruption of English, it made use of only the words that were necessary to everyday existence, and had to be pieced out with primitive gestures. There was something strangely childlike about them.

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That night, cooking his food over a small fire he had built in the basement, Woodley talked at length with Sand and Geth. He had finally overcome their objection to fire, after showing them how it might be controlled by quenching it with soil and water.



Garth

He learned little and much. The tribe had always lived here. It wandered about, following game. Most of the other tribes had gone east into the open country, but Geth stayed because, by dint of diligent search, canned food might still be found amid the ruins.

It had not always been thus. The chief remembered that a long time ago, the city had been a paradise of food, to be had for the taking. Who owned it? He did not know. He recalled vast mobs surging through the city, anarchistic, mindless, looting and feeding and wasting. But that was long ago. The shops were utterly depleted now.

The tribe itself had gathered together for mutual protection. Existence circled around the unending search for food. Weapons? They had not made any, because they did not know how. This puzzled Woodley a good deal. He sensed in them a certain mental lack, for they were utterly without the desire for experimentation.

Geth and his people lived and fed, and that was all. It was a race in ruin. Who had built the city? No one knew. Few even wondered. There were vague stories about a time when the world had been different, and the specter of hunger had not stalked eternally. But these were only legends.

"Yet I do not know," said Geth, staring somberly into the fire. "Sometimes I have queer dreams of a different world. And when I awaken, I am very hungry, though not with my stomach. I want something, I do not know what."

"That is true," Sand assented. "Most of us dream. I do. Sometimes I see a city filled with people wearing odd garments." He made an impatient gesture. "It does not matter. Show us how to make fire, Woodley."

That was strangely difficult. The savages could not seem to grasp first principles. They watched and blunderingly imitated, but it was long before they succeeded in emulating Woodley's patient example.

Gnawing on a bit of scorched deermeat, Geth said:

"You may stay with us for awhile, anyway. As long as you are useful."

There began a period of troubled readjustment for Woodley. Still fearfully handicapped by his lack of memory, he tried to fit himself into the life of the primitive tribe. It was, to him, a completely alien situation, for which he had never been intended. Yet he persevered, for in his mind was the spark of reawakened initiative which the others apparently did not possess.

More than once this strange lack puzzled and distressed Woodley. He tried hard to teach the tribe new tricks. But the women made stupid, ridiculous mistakes when they learned to build fires and cook, and the men were inept at making or casting spears. The simplest strategy was beyond them. It was incredibly difficult for them to learn anything new.

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Gradually he became part of the tribe. Memory, or something else, told him where the precious cans of food could be found. Without quite knowing why, he led the others to shopping districts, apartments with kitchens in which were well stocked cupboards, and similar places.

By dint of hard, insistent effort, he made weapons for the men and showed how they should be used. They eventually learned to handle spears, but the use of bows was much harder to master. Still Woodley planned new ways of killing game, and managed to make a few traps. These, though, were often robbed by wolves and bears that came from the open lands to the east.

Always he wondered and questioned. Was all the world like this? Had civilization survived anywhere? He could find out little. At night, sitting beside the fire that had brought heat and warmth to the tribe, he worked on various useful artifacts and pondered. There were so many objects in the city that looked useful, if he could only remember how to use them. But always he ran up against his barrier of amnesia.

He found books, mildewed and ancient, but he could not read them. The pictures helped little. There was a hint of baffling familiarity, and that was all. Theories were useless unless they could be made practical.

One thing he did learn—there was a possibility that civilization still existed. A city lay westward, which no man had ever entered. It was guarded by a moat, canyon-deep and wide as a river. Beyond the moat could be seen a city, or something that resembled one, and there were people in it.

Woodley did not follow this clue immediately. He was in a decidedly precarious position, a stranger in a hostile world, safe only so long as he stayed with Geth's tribe. He procrastinated, waiting day after day, making his preparations. He needed weapons. He sought vainly for more ammunition.

Clothing he did discover, however, and discarded his wolf-pelt for a strong whipcord shirt and breeches, which he found in an airtight show-case.

He shaved daily and cut his hair to a civilized length. Instead of boots, however, he preferred sandals manufactured from deerhide, for they made little noise when he stalked game.

One day he wandered back across the bridge and found himself in Manhattan. He was armed with a steel knife and a bow, as well as with the Luger he always carried in a leather holster he had found. Consequently he did not fear attack.

Memories surged back, stronger than ever. He was in territory that should have been familiar to him, he knew. Once he caught sight of a fur-clad, hurrying figure far up a street, but it dodged out of sight and was gone.

He walked on toward the south, passed another park that was now a tangled thicket. He came into a district that brought back poignantly vivid memories.

"Greenwich Village," he thought abruptly.

There were wrecks of machines all around, buses and automobiles, some with whitened skeletons still in them. Many were overturned or had smashed into store fronts. Whatever catastrophe had overtaken New York, it had come with terrible suddenness.

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Memory led him down a narrow alley to a flight of steps, guarded by a corroded iron rail. He descended into a dingy, large room, filled with tables, and with a small dais at one end.

Slowly he moved forward, clouds of dust rising about his sandaled feet. He remembered dim lights, and soft music, and faces shifting like phantoms in a softly luminous glow. He had come here before. He had come here with Janet, to dine and dance and talk. . . .

A shadow darkened the threshold. Woodley whirled. His hand went to his Luger at sight of the hunched, fur-clad figure standing before him. He waited.

The savage shuffled forward. Long, filthy hair hung straggling about the sun-blackened shoulders. The vacuous face, with shallow eyes of pale blue, was turned to Woodley. She put out her hands in a fumbling, vague gesture. On the back of one of them was a crescent-shaped scar.

Woodley's eyes rose again to the face.

It was Janet.

## CHAPTER V

### *Strange City*

Disbelief was Woodley's first reaction. He felt stupid, paralyzed. The world had stopped moving, and all that existed was the terribly familiar face at which he stared. The cellar room was suddenly suffocatingly hot. Woodley's heart was beating fast. He could feel its pounding and the hollowness beneath it. He could not think. His mind would not work. He could only stand there in the half-light like a hypnotized bird.

"Janet," he said softly.

The blue eyes wavered. Janet made a mournful sound deep in her throat. Her hands were still outstretched, and Woodley gripped them.

"Do you—remember me?" he asked hoarsely.

She only stared uncomprehendingly. Woodley found himself talking without volition, words that tumbled out from the abyss of his lost memory.

"We—we were going to be married, you and I. We met first in Palm Beach. Don't you remember that?"

Poignantly he saw a broad yellow beach and blue water stretching to the horizon beyond it, gay striped umbrellas and a slim figure lying beneath one of them . . . Janet! But that Janet was alert and intelligent.

Her eyes were shallow and dull. She listened without understanding, murmured meaningless sounds and searched Woodley's face, then touched his shaven cheek gently with one hand.

He felt a surge of hopelessness. She, too, had forgotten. But why should she have returned to this ruined Village restaurant, so replete with memories? Gently he took her hands again.

"You're coming with me. You'll remember."

Unresisting, she let him lead her up into the street. The sunlight there was blinding. No one was visible, but Woodley kept a vigilant watch as he set out toward the bridge. Often he stole sideward glances at Janet. She was still lovely, despite the changes that had brutalized her.

As they walked, Woodley tried to arouse some gleam of light in her darkened mind. It was useless. She recalled nothing. She was sunk in an apathy too deep for him to plumb. Sickeningly he remembered the dull, moronic women of Geth's tribe.

What was to come next? He could not say. He had felt that, should he find Janet again, life would begin for him once more. But he had not counted on this tragic meeting.

Slowly he made a plan. He would take Janet back to the tribe, then set out to find the mysterious city that was supposed to lie westward. He might find help there. Too long he had remained sunken in the apathy that brooded over the world today, in the wake of the cryptic cataclysm that had ruined it.

The pair met no one till they were in what had once been Long Island City. From around a corner Sand appeared, a spear in one hand and the carcasses of a few rabbits in the other.

"Woodley, who is this? You have found a mate?"

"Yes," Woodley said hesitantly. "I suppose so."

"Well, let us go and tell Geth."

The red-haired chief shrugged in acceptance of the new member and offered Janet a deer-steak, which she seized hungrily.

“She doesn’t look strong,” he grumbled. “However, that is your business, Woodley.”

---

Janet’s advent aroused scarcely any curiosity. She was accepted and forgotten. Nothing could disturb the cloud of dullness that shadowed the tribe. Little could interest these savages, save the ever-present need of filling their stomachs.

That night Woodley spent in torture, alone with Janet by a fire, trying frantically to strike some responsive chord in her mind. It was a useless effort. Physically she was unchanged, save for the natural metamorphoses worked by years of struggling against arduous hardship. Mentally she was under the same influence that blunted the intelligence of the others.

In the morning Woodley sought out Geth and Sand.

“I’m leaving,” he told them.

“Why?”

“To find food.” They would understand that readily enough. “If I succeed, we’ll always have plenty. Meanwhile, this new girl is my mate. No one must harm her. Will you protect her, Geth?”

The chief nodded his shaggy red head.

“I shall guard her, too,” Sand declared. “But why does she not go with you?”

“She would be in the way. There will be danger . . .”

Within the hour Woodley took his departure, armed and carrying with him a quantity of dried and salted meat. He did not see Janet before he left. Instead he purposely turned all his thoughts forward.

If the mysterious city existed, if he found it— There was a chance of finding help there, and some explanation for the catastrophe that had apparently overtaken the whole world.

His journey was uneventful. He walked over the bridge to Manhattan, crossed the Hudson River far upstream by the George Washington Bridge. The few savages in Manhattan had not attempted to molest him, warned off, perhaps, by sight of the Luger at his belt. They still remembered firearms.

He went inland through New Jersey, and into Pennsylvania. The supply of meat he carried served a double purpose. He met roving bands of fur-clad men, and gave them food in exchange for information. A moat-surrounded city? Yes, there was one. It lay farther south, though. Woodley bore south, following a river that led him into a ruined metropolis. He remembered the name Philadelphia.

Following the rumors, he turned west once more, into a land of pine-clad mountains. Few savages dwelt here, yet the legends were less vague.

One night, Woodley saw a light in the sky. It was the first artificial illumination he had seen since his awakening in a New York cellar. Steady, pallid and cryptic it glowed beyond the mountain ridges, beckoning him on.



## Scene melted into scene as Woodley followed the dream symphony (Chap. XI)

He was unshaven and tattered, his eyes deeply sunken, his cheeks haggard. Too intent on his purpose to waste time in stalking game, he often went hungry. But he clung to his weapons, knowing that without them he might fall prey to the wild animals that roamed this wilderness.

The source of the light was farther away than he had thought. It was not until after nightfall of the next day that he topped a rise and found himself on the edge of a broad plateau. Ahead was the city.

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It was a great white jewel rising out of the flat plain. Buildings, increasing in height as they neared the center, lifted to form the outline of a hemisphere made of dozens upon dozens of pale structures which, at the distance, seemed to be of stone. Faintly Woodley could make out the greenness of verdure atop the buildings, vast roof-gardens far above ground level. His heart pulsed faster. His throat went dry.

The city did exist, after all!

Till now Woodley had not quite given credence to the tales he had heard. The savage tribes had mentioned a city with a moat around it that a few had seen, though only from a distance. It might have been a myth, but it was not. The will-of-the-wisp he had followed by vague clues from the shores of the Atlantic Ocean had materialized into amazing reality.

The towers seemed to grow as he advanced, until the city was gigantic. He could make out few details. Presently even these were lost, for a high wall entirely surrounded the metropolis. He stood on the brink of an abyss—the moat that surrounded the city. It was at least as broad as the Hudson River near its mouth, and bottomless, as far as he could make out.

He hesitated, found a stone and dropped it over. No sound came up. Descent was impossible. It was like looking down a steep cliff over the edge of the world. Beyond the pit the city rose, cryptic and colossal. No gates were visible in the white walls, which were darker in contrast with the pale glow of the towers within.

How could he enter? Would the inhabitants of this city be hostile? That was a chance that must be taken.

Woodley knew distinctly that such a bizarre metropolis as this was no part of his memories of the past. It was completely new and alien. Yet the intelligence that must have reared it seemed to have died out from the world.

He shouted. There was no response, though he scarcely expected any. He unslung the bow from his back, selected an arrow and carefully blunted the tip on a stone. It would be easy to send the shaft over the wall, attract someone's attention. But his motive might be misunderstood. Retaliation would be painful.

How could he send a message? The thought of pencil and paper came to him, but he had neither, nor could he remember how to write. English words came easily to his tongue, yet he could remember nothing of reading or writing. At last he compromised by winding a strip of cloth about the arrow's head and sending it arcing up.

It dropped from sight behind the wall. Woodley waited for an outcry that did not come. He had as yet had no glimpse of the city's inhabitants. For an instant he had the queer thought that they might not be human.

Slightly to his left, a movement in the wall itself caught his eye. A smooth, white tongue of stone thrust out, licking toward him with surprising speed. It elongated till it became a

bridge that spanned the abyss, one end resting lightly on his side of the great moat. The whole incident took place in silence.

---

Puzzled, Woodley moved to the bridge and examined it more closely. It was not of stone, after all, but some substance he could not recognize—a plastic, perhaps. Anyhow, it was broad enough to tread safely.

He stepped out upon it. Instantly vertigo assailed him. He felt movement beneath his feet and looked back. There was an abyss behind him, and the wall of the pit was receding into the night.

Swaying, Woodley turned his head. The rampart of the city leaped toward him. Before he could move, he was swept through a portal that opened abruptly at his approach. He stood in a flat-floored, domed white room. The light seemed to come from within the walls themselves. There was no trace of the opening by which he had entered. The bridge, or part of it, was now the floor on which he stood.

He was conscious of invisible eyes, coolly appraising him. With an effort he remained motionless and silent. A voice, low, clear and with every syllable sharply enunciated, asked:

“Do you speak our tongue?”

“Yes,” Woodley replied. “I am a friend.”

“You come alone?”

“Yes, alone.”

Woodley expected more questions, but there were none.

“Do not be afraid,” the voice said. “Before you can come into Center, you must be tested.”

“Eh?” he asked, startled. “How?”

“You will not be harmed. Coming from the outer world, as you do, you may bring diseases with you. Precautions must be taken to avoid infection. First of all, enter the elevator at your left and wait.”

Woodley glanced around. Part of the wall was sliding back like a camera shutter, revealing an oval opening and, beyond it, a small bare room. Without hesitation he crossed the threshold and stood waiting. The door closed.

There was a sensation of pressure against Woodley’s tattered sandals. Immediately it was gone, replaced by a sense of lateral motion. After a time this also vanished, and the wall opened.

Facing Woodley was a white-clad figure, the head entirely hidden by a light blue gauze mask.

“So there you are,” a pleasant voice said. “Well, I’m your medico. Come in.”

## CHAPTER VI

### *Sharn*

Woodley found himself in a large, windowless room, lighted by a soft white glow that came from the walls and ceiling. It was apparently a laboratory. He was reminded of a physician's office. There was not much equipment around, but the "medico" seemed capable enough as he took Woodley's arm and urged him forward.

"Get those rags off," he ordered. "They're filthy! In here."

He opened a door and showed his guest a sunken pool of greenish-yellow water. There was a tingling, aromatic odor.

"Don't be afraid. It's disinfectant."

Woodley felt a faint resentment, then realized that his journey had turned him into a ragged, grimy scarecrow. Besides, the thought of a bath was luxurious. He slipped out of his garments and willingly lowered himself into the pool.

The water was pleasantly warm and invigorating. There was no need for soap. In a few moments his body was cleaner than it had been, he felt wryly, for years. He ducked his head and came up spluttering. From the pool's brink the medico watched intently.

"You look half-starved," he said finally. "Come out now. Stand here. That's right."

He pressed a button and a blast of warm air shot out from an aperture in the wall, drying Woodley swiftly. The medico went out, came back with a glass of pungent, brown liquid.

"Drink it," he urged. "You'll feel better."

Woodley obeyed, but felt no different. The masked doctor laughed.

"It'll take awhile. Medicine isn't magic, you know. Come in and let me test you."

"I'd like—"

"No questions!" The medico lifted a warning hand. "I mustn't answer questions."

Woodley spun the glass in his cupped hand. It was a lovely shell-like cup of translucent pearl, slightly elastic.

"I was going to say I'd like a shave."

"Oh, I see. That's easy enough." A transparent jar was handed to Woodley. "Rub that lightly on your beard. It's a reagent that acts only on the cellular structure of hair. But put on these gloves first, or you'll lose you fingernails."

Woodley gingerly obeyed, applying the foamy cream to his cheeks and chin. There was an astringent, ticklish sensation for a time, but this vanished swiftly. The medico took Woodley by the shoulders and turned his face upward.

"Hold still." He ran a spongy, moist pad lightly over Woodley's features. "There. Off comes the cream, and the whiskers with it. Now you look almost civilized. Next you need a decent hair-trim. But first sit down and let me test you."

Passively Woodley accepted his treatment. Peeling off the gloves, he felt his cheeks and discovered that they were smooth and hairless. A specialized chemical that reacted only on hair, without harming the skin. That certainly was convenient.

Dimly Woodley remembered going through such ordeals before. He was stood up before a screen, his skeleton projected upon it by fluorescence. The medico pointed to a knotty bulge on the forearm.

"Bad break there. It must have happened years ago, though."

“Yes,” Woodley agreed, wondering. “It must have.”

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His blood was tested, his spinal fluid, his pulse and his heart. All went with surprising speed. Within half an hour, he judged, the medico had finished his task and stood up, the gauze mask fluttering as he sighed.

“You’re all right. Slight trace of coryza, but I’ve antitoxined that. I guess you’ll do.”

He took a conical object from his garments and revolved it slowly. Woodley stared. The device was somewhat smaller than a man’s hand, made of smooth white plastic, and featureless. Suddenly it glowed with soft light. The medico spoke into it.

“Report satisfactory. Good, healthy specimen.”

“Clothing is being sent with a guide,” a thin, disembodied voice said.

The medico flipped the cone into his other hand idly, then noticed Woodley’s curious gaze.

“It’s a portable phone. No harm in telling you that.”

“How does it work?” Woodley pursued.

“On a radio energy beam. That’s how we can make them so compact. Center’s engines are continually broadcasting power, so all I do is turn the radiophone till it’s on the beam, receiving the energy. It lights up then. You saw that.”

He stripped the gauze mask from his face, revealing a round, pleasant countenance. It was lightly tanned, with the soft curves of youth still evident.

“I’d like to answer your unspoken questions, but I can’t yet. It’s against the rules—or, rather, against the latest rule. My orders were to give you no information, so that’s that.”

Before Woodley could answer, part of the wall went a brilliant blue, while a musical, intermittent humming sounded. The medico looked around sharply.

“That’s my call,” he said. “I’m wanted. Funny. Well, wait here till the guide comes for you.”

He went out, with a nonchalant wave, by a door Woodley had not seen before. The panel on the wall changed color. It flamed scarlet. From it a voice came, soft and urgent.

“Listen!” it said. “There’s little time—”

Woodley whirled, staring. Was the message for him? As though to confirm his guess, the voice went on.

“Man from the outer world, listen to me! I am a friend. It’s dangerous for me to speak to you even now, but I must warn you. Be careful what you say while you are in Center. Be careful what questions you answer!”

“Who are you?” Woodley said.

“I—I have no time now. Later I’ll talk with you, when we can do so unobserved. Meanwhile—”

The voice fell silent. The red square on the wall died away and again matched the whiteness all around it. Woodley frowned, completely bewildered. What did this new factor mean? He could not guess. There was, of course, nothing to do but wait.

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A middle-aged man came in eventually, bearing a bundle of clothing. He himself was wearing something that resembled a white toga of soft cloth that seemed both comfortable and attractive. Nevertheless Woodley was relieved to find that his garments were more orthodox—light shorts and shirt of gray. He donned them in silence, which his guide did not offer to break.

At last he was ready and stood up, feeling more like himself than he had since his awakening in New York.

“All right,” he said. “What next?”

For answer the guide beckoned. Woodley followed into an elevator-like room, which was reminiscent of the one by which he had entered this city. There were visible controls, however. The guide pushed a button and sat down on a padded bench, motioning Woodley to follow his example.

As though propelled through a pneumatic tube, the car slid forward. It stopped at last. The door opened.

At the guide’s nod, Woodley rose and stepped out into a large, comfortably furnished room, which somehow startled him. He had expected something different, perhaps almost alien. Yet this room was not too unlike the ruined ones he had seen in New York.

The diffused light came from the walls and ceiling, and there were three-dimensional pictures apparently set within the walls. Their subjects were abstract, some pure design, others surrealistic, and there was one idealized portrait of a startlingly lovely woman. The floor or carpet was dead black, and gave slightly under Woodley’s feet, which were clad now in sandals of what seemed to be flexible glass.

Couches, decoratively carved tables and an oddly shaped piano made up all of the room’s sparse furniture. One whole wall was of glass. Beyond it Woodley could see a garden and glowing, pale towers.

The glass panel rose like a curtain. A girl stepped into the room, pausing when she saw Woodley.

“I was expecting you,” she said gently. “My name is Sharn.”

Woodley stared, at a loss for words. Subconsciously he had been expecting an interview with grave, bearded men. Instead they had sent a girl scarcely out of adolescence, clad in a flame-red robe cut in the Chinese fashion, with platinum hair bobbed page-boy style about her young face. Wide-set, grave blue eyes contemplated him with interest as she came forward.

“Don’t be surprised. Come out here, where we can talk comfortably.”

He let himself be drawn into the roof garden, as he now saw it was. Comfortably padded lounging chairs were set here and there under the trees. A cool wind blew against his face.

Beyond the parapet, the towers of the mighty city stood white against the dark sky. The scent of flowers drifted into Woodley’s nostrils. He relaxed in a chair.

The girl Sharn sat opposite him, crossing her legs and resting slim hands on her knees.

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“There’s food and drink on the table beside you,” she suggested. “And cigarettes. No, just draw in. The cigarette is self-kindling.”

This was true, Woodley discovered. Luxuriously inhaling, he realized how much he had missed tobacco.

“I scarcely expected this,” he said at last.

Sharn smiled. “We scarcely expected you. But you’re here now, and we’d like to know who you are, all about you. We thought there were only savages outside Center, primitives who could learn nothing. Then an artifact—an arrow—came over the wall. Naturally we investigated. Is intelligence really stirring in the nomad tribes?”

Woodley found himself talking without restraint. His civilized, calm satisfaction soothed his nerves, lulled his suspicions.

“There’s very little I know. My memories—”

He went on to tell her of his own experience. Abruptly he remembered the warning voice that had spoken to him out of the wall in the medico's laboratory, and talked more warily after that. But there was little he could tell that Sharn did not already know, he thought. When he had finished, she nodded somewhat wearily.

"We may be able to help you, give you back your memory. But I can't answer all your questions. What destroyed civilization is a mystery."

"A mystery?" Woodley was honestly shocked. "But surely you must know!"

"We do not. Something happened that wrecked the world. We are not—" She hesitated. "We are not survivors. We came after the catastrophe."

"From where?"

Sharn brushed a platinum curl back from her forehead.

"I don't know. There were several hundred of us. Perhaps we awoke, as you did."

Woodley pondered. It did not seem probable. The science of this city was far beyond him. Its very construction indicated a science more advanced than that of his own time. Sharn and the others were undeniably like himself. Yet was it possible that they had also suffered amnesia?

He was suddenly sleepy. The girl nodded at him understandingly as he stifled a yawn.

"There will be more time to talk when you've rested. Sleep now."

Woodley scarcely heard her. The brown elixir he had taken must have contained a soporific. Slumber rushed up and engulfed him.

Dreams came, confused and distressing. He saw Janet's face as he remembered it, pale and sweet. Then it changed to the dull-eyed, terrible mask of the savage. That, too, faded, giving place to a red square from which a warning voice whispered.

"Beware!" it murmured, over and over again. "Beware!"

## CHAPTER VII

### *The Rulers*

Woodley heard music, soft and languorous. It changed, grew louder, a lilting, elfin refrain that aroused him. He opened his eyes to a sky of blue across which white clouds raced. No, it was the ceiling, on which a picture of the sky was projected.

He sat up, throwing aside a silken covering. He was in a large, airy room, filled with the fresh scent of pine. One whole side of it was of glass, revealing the sunlit towers of the great city beyond the roof garden.

Through an open door came the sound of running water. Woodley entered a bathroom paved with what seemed to be warm, velvety moss. In the center was a bubbling pool of clear water. His clothes were neatly laid out on a small table, on which stood a jar of the depilatory cream.

Woodley dived into the pool and splashed about vigorously. Emerging after a time, he stood before a mirror, staring.

His hair had been deftly trimmed while he slept. It was rather short now, and glistened with a sweet-smelling oil. The brawny, hard figure in the glass startled him. Was that himself?

Truly he had changed since the life he could not quite remember. He was muscular and bronzed, with a grim mouth, his body marked with white scars. Level gray eyes stared back at him.

Woodley donned his garments and went back into the sleeping chamber. After a brief search, he discovered a stud in the wall. As the panel slid up, he stepped out into the garden.

The scent of pine was gone. Fresh, cool morning air blew invigoratingly upon him. Over his head branches tossed, and he walked over clovery grass still wet with dew. The towers of Center glistened, pale as marble.

Woodley walked to the low parapet and peered over. There was no street below. Instead he saw another roof garden, far down. Apparently there were no streets in Center. It was actually one great building, within which pneumatic tube-elevators provided transportation.

He found cigarettes on a table and put one between his lips, drawing till smoke came. Then he relaxed in a chair, pondering, feeling better than he had since his awakening in that New York cellar. To be civilized again, to feel the luxury of cleanliness and smooth garments meant more to Woodley than he had realized.

He was in the hands of his hosts. Whether they would be friendly, he could not guess. His recent experience was no criterion. There was much he had to find out before he could make a move. Meanwhile there was Janet to remember, and the unknown voice that had warned him from the wall.

---

Sharn entered the garden, slim and competent in a blue uniform-like garment. She waved down Woodley's attempt to rise and sank into a chair near him.

"You look better. Had breakfast yet? No?" She seemed astonished. "It's on that table, waiting for you."

Woodley had not noticed it. He pulled the wheeled table close to him and examined its contents—fruit, some small, round cakes, and a liquid that resembled milk but was not.

"We're feeding you lightly at first," the girl explained. "You've been half-starved. Go ahead. I've eaten."

Woodley obeyed.

"When do I meet the—the ruler?" he asked hesitantly, choosing his words.

"Any time you like, if you want to. It isn't a ruler, though. There's a Senate that administers Center. It's considering what you told me."

"Oh." Woodley frowned. "You gave them the information."

"There was a microphone hooked on to your chair. Your words were recorded last night. The Senate felt you'd speak more freely to a pretty girl."

In the face of such disarming candor, Woodley could not help but smile. He sank his teeth into a peach.

"Do you grow these?"

"Yes. With hydroponics mostly. We never venture outside the city."

"I have so many things to ask!"

Woodley shook his head. The girl looked at him with grave inquiry.

"I'll take you around Center when you've finished," she said. "We had to be careful at first, of course. More than once the savages have tried to attack us, but naturally they failed. Yet if they were to become intelligent, we'd have to take more precautions. When you sent your arrow over the wall, we wondered. Now we realize that your intelligence is an accident." She laughed a little. "I don't mean to be insulting, Kent Woodley."

The tour of the city was an amazing experience. Science had been so expertly blended with esthetics that the result made up a seemingly perfect whole. All the facilities of research were here, invented and perfected by minds far above the average. Woodley saw electronic telescopes that brought the planets close. A smiling young worker pointed out the silvery rays branching from some of the craters on the Moon.

"Know what those are?" he asked. "Fossilized remains. The remnants of an exo-skeleton. We've discovered that there was once life on the Moon, a sort of silicate, immobile life, growing rather like plants. When the creatures died—it must have been ages ago—their skeletons were left. Without air, there wasn't any disintegration. Those gigantic fossils have been on the Moon for eons, we think."

He fumbled with a photographic plate.

"We're studying an explosion in Vega now. But come back some night and let me show you the Martian *canali*. We have some interesting speculations about the origin of those."

Biology, physics, chemistry, psychology—innumerable sciences were keenly studied in the laboratories of Center. Yet Woodley noticed an odd thing. Though the workers were alive with curiosity, at times they seemed amazingly impractical. They would go off on tangents, struck by some new idea, useless but fascinating. They worked, Woodley decided, when they felt like it. At other times they simply did not bother.

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The city was a complete unit, an organism sufficient unto itself, protected and isolated from the outer world. To the dwellers in Center, it was as though anything outside did not exist. They were not curious about it. They knew what it held, and it did not interest them. They concentrated on making Center a unit of perfection.

Plastics were much used, for they had a tensile strength beyond that of steel. Everything in the city seemed to move like a well oiled machine, yet it was significant that there was no machinery in sight. It was hidden by molded plastic, murals, mosaics.

There were great roof parks, amusement areas devoted to pleasure. Nor was anyone excluded by poverty, for there was no money in Center. There were mediums of titillating every sense, and even machines for inducing dreams by audio-suggestion. Work was done only when it was a pleasure, otherwise practically everything was left to the labor-saving machines. Necessary labor was reduced to a minimum.

The people seemed happy, though, Woodley thought, slightly decadent. They were already on the downgrade. But this was so subtle a point that he could not really decide.

He tried to think of a word that would describe Center. At last he remembered it. It was a city of hedonists, following the doctrine that pleasure was the chief good. Everything else was subordinated to that cult.

He could find no flaw. It was a selfish, feline civilization, sufficient to itself, and in itself perfect. Nothing could intrude upon its perfection. Weather was artificially controlled. Diseases were non-existent. Work was done by those who thoroughly enjoyed it.

Woodley saw not an unhappy face among those who dwelt in Center. There were not many, a few thousand men, women and children. Unlike the savages outside the moat, they grew older and procreated the race. No tinge of immortality was evident in them.

Hedonism and pleasure might be static, perhaps—but so was a jewel.

Sated at last with so much beauty and strangeness, Woodley requested an audience with the Senate. There was little delay. Sharn took him immediately, via tube-car, to a great room that looked strangely informal. Fountains tinkled amid shrubbery and bright-colored flowers. The walls were a mosaic phantasmagoria. The Senate, a dozen men and women, were lounging in comfortable seats, sipping drinks, smoking and talking idly.

Standing beside Sharn, Woodley let his gaze rove over the group. None of the members was young. All wore assorted garments, not one alike, but all becoming to the particular individual. There was a bearded, gray man in a toga. A blond woman wore a gown spun of gray cobwebby stuff that revealed the gentle curves of her body. Another man had a square, blocky face and iron-gray hair that bristled up stiffly.

The Senate watched Woodley with interest as Sharn led him forward to a seat.

“We’ve been in session considering your case,” said the bearded man. “It was astonishing to find intelligence outside the moat. We had thought only savages existed out there.”

Woodley hesitated. “Savages may become civilized.”

“Not these. For more than a hundred years—much more—those outside Center have remained the same. They can’t learn. Something has stultified their minds while it prolonged their life-span.”

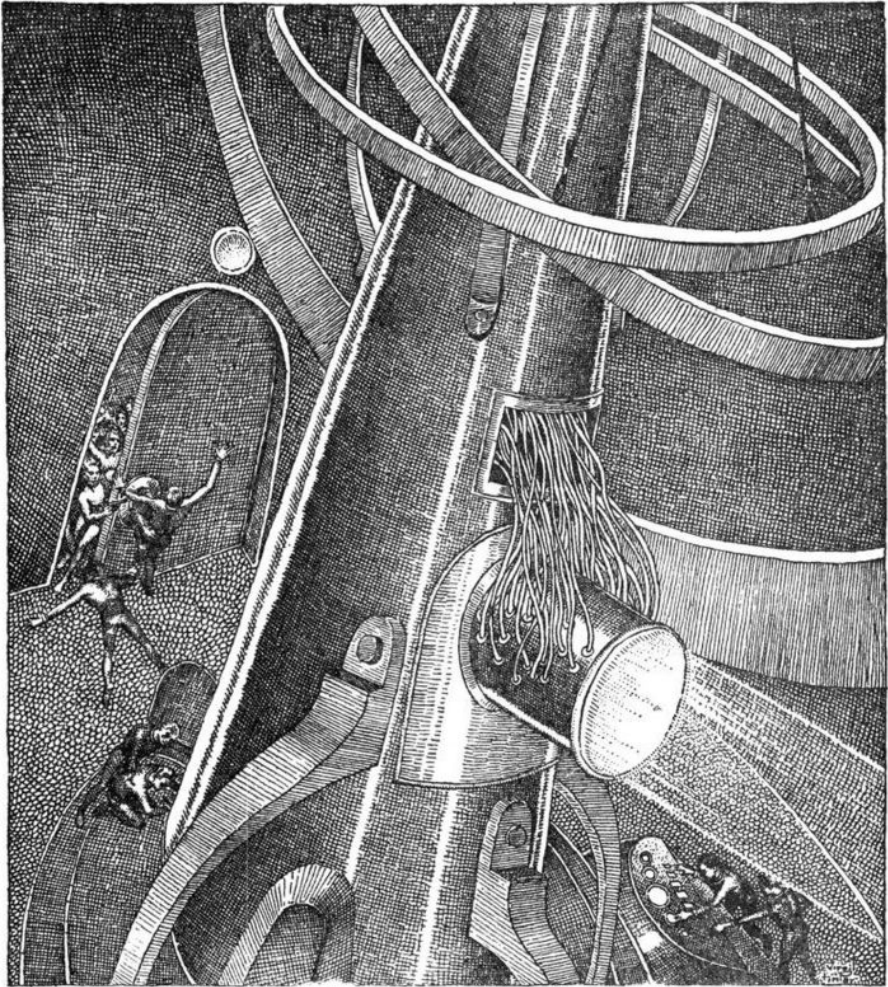
“I see. . . . You know my story, of course.”

The gray man nodded. “Presently, if you wish, we’ll try to help you regain your memory completely. You may remain with us if you desired. There’s nothing for you in the outside world.”

Woodley shifted uneasily in his chair. “Does anyone know what destroyed civilization?” he asked.

“No. There were no records found. More than a hundred years ago, our grandparents and a few of our parents found themselves in a ruined world. They were adults, but with blank minds. They remembered nothing, yet they had within them the seeds of great intelligence. They experimented and learned day by day. At first they were merely a savage tribe, but presently they outstripped their neighbors in wisdom.

“They found old books and deciphered them. They discovered that there was once a great civilization on Earth, which had been destroyed. No one knew how. The books stopped. July tenth, Nineteen-forty-two was the last recorded date. Newspapers still on their presses bore that date.”



Technicians battled to repair the projector, while savages swarmed into the city  
(Chap. XV)

Woodley frowned at a new thought.

“How could you keep track of time then? When you found yourselves in a wrecked civilization, how much time had passed since Nineteen-forty-two?”

“That was not difficult. We did not know at first, of course. But we found records, magazines and so forth. We discovered calendars that predicted eclipses and their paths. When an eclipse occurred, we checked it against the old records and learned the date. It is a hundred and thirty years since Nineteen-forty-two—”

“Judgment Day,” Woodley said under his breath.

The graybeard nodded. “True. Some unknown judgment descended upon Earth then, making men into savages, wrecking their minds. But we survived and learned. We mastered the science that had existed before we came and surpassed it. Eventually we sequestered ourselves from the rest of the world, building this city and surrounding it with an impassable moat to keep out the savages.”

“How did you make the moat?”

“Pressure strong enough to fuse rocks into lava.”

“The savages—what’s wrong with their minds?”

“We do not know that,” said the gray-haired man with the square face.

“Wait.” The bearded Senator lifted a hand. “Some of our research scientists have only lately discovered a little. An unknown power affected the minds and bodies of the primitives, destroying intelligence and wiping out memory, but changing their basal metabolism and cellular structure. Men grow old for one reason—loss of energy. The atomic make-up of the savages has been changed, so that little energy is lost.

“Quanta is not released in quantity. The savages live far longer than we. They may be almost immortal. We have never heard of any natural deaths among them. They kill each other, of course. They prolonged their life-span at the cost of intelligence. It is nature’s check-and-balance system.”

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The bearded Senator’s explanation was the one that had been at the edge of Woodley’s consciousness, seeking only the proper words.

“Can the condition be cured?” Woodley asked.

“Yes, at the cost of semi-immortality. If we wished, in the light of recent knowledge, we could change the savages back into normal human beings.”

Woodley’s pulses beat faster. He felt unexpected triumph. Before he could speak, the graybeard went on.

“Your case is an unusual one. While you slept, we probed your subconscious mind with a psychological device, hypnotic in nature. By means of association and suggestion, we found out a good deal about you that you do not know. There was a possibility that through your memories we could learn the nature of the cataclysm that wrecked Earth.”

“And?” Woodley blurted hopefully.

“Well, we failed in that. But we learned why you suddenly woke, a hundred and thirty years after Nineteen-forty-two. Your thought-images were caught, their vibrations altered to show a pictorial view. You may see them now, if you like.”

His throat dry, Woodley could only nod.

“Lie back, then. Watch the ceiling.”

## CHAPTER VIII

### *Night on Earth*

He obeyed. At first the smooth white plastic was blank. Gradually a confused melee of color began to shift across it, came into sharp focus. Woodley's memories, seen through his eyes so long ago! Flashing, confused, blurred . . . in no chronological sequence, but arousing poignant chords of remembrance. . . .

A farmhouse where he had lived as a child . . . the roaring confusion of Chicago's Loop . . . palm trees against a yellow beach . . . faces in which certain features were improbably dominant, warped by Woodley's own memory. A school-teacher he had once known. The girl who had been his first date. A flood of ticker-tape fluttering down into a crowded street. . . .

Slowly he remembered them all. The visions of a past long buried came to life. And through them all, like a motif, floated the dear face of a girl, framed by auburn curls, her blue eyes sometimes sparkling with laughter, sometimes grave with thought, sometimes tender. Janet!

Woodley forgot his surroundings. He lived again in a world he had once known. It was like stepping through a doorway into the past. All this had lain dormant in his mind, sleeping but unforgotten.

Then came a scene of the interior of what seemed to be a museum. Glass cases were visible. In a large one was a jagged boulder of pitted metal, a meteorite. Janet's face showed on the screen. Then a confused blur moved too fast for Woodley's eye to follow. A voice shocked him.

"We have reconstructed," the graybeard explained. "On July tenth, Nineteen-forty-two, you were in a museum, examining a meteorite in its case. When the catastrophe came, you fell, breaking the glass and collapsing partly under the meteorite. Its bulk shielded you from whatever affected the rest of humanity. Certain ores and compounds in that bit of rock acted as a screen, protecting you. Thus you recovered from the plague of immortality after a hundred and thirty years."

"Perhaps the others will recover, then?" Woodley asked.

"That is most doubtful."

"You said you can cure them."

"We can."

"Will you?"

For a long moment it was utterly silent in the garden room, save for the tinkling splash of the fountains. The vision on the ceiling had gone.

"This is our world," the gray man said quietly. "In it we are perfect. Why should we create discord? We have no concern with the savages, nor with anything outside Center. Here we shall remain isolated forever, finding complete happiness. The outer Earth no longer exists for us. We shall not interfere with it. The savages must remain savages."

Argument proved useless. The Senate was adamant. Woodley gave up at last as his hosts began to wander out one by one. He let Sharn draw him away. In the girl's eyes was sympathetic understanding.

"We'll dine together," she said. "Let's go out on the terrace."

The sunset turned the towers of Center into black silhouettes against the western sky. But twilight had come to Earth long ago, Woodley thought as he relaxed in the roof garden, and it was still a mystery. What had caused the catastrophe?

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Restless, chafing, he ate food that seemed tasteless. Sharn watched him with concern.

"That girl," she said anxiously. "What happened to her?"

Woodley told the dread story. He was sick with hopelessness.

"If you'd seen her!" he finished. "A mindless savage—and your people could cure her if they would. But they won't!"

"We are hedonists," Sharn said. "We seek only pleasure. I can understand the Senate's decision. But it must be hard indeed for you, Kent Woodley."

"Hard?" His voice died away into bitterness. "You haven't my memories, Sharn. A whole world, my own life, crashing down in ruin more than a century ago. If Janet had remained the same, I might have stood it better."

"I know—a little." Sharn rose and went to the parapet. Leaning out over the abyss, she plucked petals from a red flower and let them drift down like drops of blood. "We learned to read the old books. We copied many into our microprint libraries. I remember a poem by a man named Chesterton."

For the end of the world was long ago—

And all we dwell today

As children of some second birth

Like a strange people left on Earth

After a judgment day. . . .

"I, too, have thought of the past," she said, after a pause. "From what I have read in the old books, I imagine it was a very lovely world. There was much pain in it and much sorrow, but a great deal of pleasure, too. Here we have only pleasure, and that cloys. Till you came, Kent Woodley, I had not quite known the meaning of the sated dullness I felt sometimes. But now —"

She turned back, her face pale in the twilight, her hair like an aureole.

"There comes a point when beyond pleasure there is no more pleasure. Only a sickness and a groping for something that may not exist. Yet we are afraid. How can we give up what we know in a foolish search for something that may not even exist at all?"

A sudden bond of sympathy sprang into existence between them, a melancholy sadness, one springing from too little pain, the other from too much. It was a cry of sheer agony that rose from Woodley's heart as he gripped the girl's hands.

"Can you help me, Sharn? Can you?"

"Can you help me?" she pleaded. "I do not know. Even if I wished to—" She made a queer, groping gesture. "You have changed my life. You have made me realize a lack, a hunger. I have seen Center through your eyes, and there is wonder in them. I have never seen the world outside, and perhaps I, too, might find wonder there."

"There's a lot I can't remember," Woodley said. "But I think I know what's wrong with Center, Sharn. It's too civilized. It's a matriarchy."

"You're wrong. We have complete equality."

"But your life is a feminist one, without hardship. I recall a parallel. Let's see." He pondered. "The old Chinese Empire."

"I've read of that."

"Opportunities were thought dead. Men were convinced that was true. It was a feminist culture, based on convenience and luxury, soft and sheltered and weak. It was decadence. There are patriarchs only among pioneers."

---

Sharn bit her lip. "The others in Center do not feel as I do yet. They haven't seen through your eyes, as I have. What is it you want?"

"Your people can cure the rest of mankind, make them intelligent again, give them back their memories."

"That would mean the end of our isolation."

"It would mean hardship for awhile, perhaps for a long time. But eventually mankind could be raised to your own level of culture and intelligence. The whole world would be a step further on the road of progress. It would be the end of hedonism, I think. There'd be pioneers again. Everything but the pursuit of pleasure has been lost in Center."

"Not lost," she corrected. "Forgotten. The outsiders were luckier than we, perhaps."

"They're savages. Your people are blind and selfish. They don't realize that they're going down to decadence and destruction."

"Is that wrong for a hedonist?" Sharn asked. "We live for ourselves, not for our children. The race may die, but we shall be dead long before that. We have been content to drift. We worked for awhile to reach perfection. Now we are resting."

"Drifting toward a waterfall," Woodley said. "Don't you understand what it means to live for others?"

She looked at him oddly.

"If the Senate could be convinced, it would be easy for them to cure mankind of mindless immortality. I might be able to help." She paused. "You were in love with that girl, weren't you?"

"Janet? Yes."

Sharn turned away abruptly.

"I'll see what can be done. It may take days. I must see certain leaders of Center, do some research in the old books, consult the psychologists and administrators. Perhaps we can bring pressure to bear on the Senate."

Woodley was on his feet.

"You mean that there really is a chance?"

"Not a very good one. You wouldn't be satisfied with Center—as it is, I mean—would you?" Her gesture took in the white brilliance of the great towers, and all that lay within them. "But you would not, I know. Well, I'll see what happens. I may not be free for days. I'll arrange to have a guide sent tomorrow."

"I can't thank you," he said quietly. "You've given me too much hope for mere thanks."

Sharn's smile was curiously bitter as she murmured a farewell and slipped away through the garden. Woodley stood staring after her. Then he settled back in his chair, looked up at the night sky and lighted another cigarette.

An incongruous thought came to him. How had he remembered how to smoke? It had been a hundred and thirty years since he had last held a cigarette between his fingers. Habit, conditioned reflex, of course.

The Milky Way was a winding, nebulous cloud of light far above. Mars was red on the horizon. The blur of Cassiopeia was familiar, and Orion's belt was bright. He could remember

these without difficulty. But there were so many dark, starless places in his memory!

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That ultra-scientific miracle he had seen on the ceiling of the Senate chamber had dredged up vague flashes from the past. What he had seen there he recalled distinctly. But their edges were blurred. They faded into nothingness in past and future, like lights on a bridge by night. The lights were bright. Between them was darkness.

Closing his eyes, Woodley visualized what he had seen. In that last vision in the museum, Janet had been there. And he had been quoting a fragment of verse that was poignantly familiar.

In the nation that is not

Nothing stands that stood before. . . .

Judgment Day, he thought, one more terrible than any that had been visualized by scientists or prophets in the unremembered past. It had been no clean, fiery ending, wiping out all the world. Ruins had been left, standing untenanted and desolate in the deep night, more than a century after the cataclysm.

Somehow a few people had been given another chance, every opportunity to build again, and they had failed. They had reared a magic city of science, in which they slept.

Night had fallen on all the Earth.

So many mysteries, Woodley thought. If only he possessed the key to them! Yet there was a hope, now that Sharn had offered to help. What she could accomplish he did not know, but at least it was better than nothing. He might save Janet.

It was not merely Janet, though. The thought of mankind degraded into bestiality was horrible. Men had dreamed and thought and written, produced great music and created great beauty. Knowing himself how much he missed the small, tender lovelinesses of old days, the easy familiarity, the struggles, the triumphs, Woodley felt deep sympathy for all those other millions who had been robbed.

He remembered Geth and Sand and their tribe in what had been Long Island. Though robbed of all they had ever possessed, their very minds, they struggled on with indomitable courage. They were degraded to savagery, yet they were not selfish hedonists. The instinct of duty persisted. Geth saw to it that the weaker of his tribe were fed and sheltered.

Prisoned men like Geth were trying to break out into the sunlight, groping, fumbling, bending to help the weaker ones. In Center, though, men built prison walls higher and higher about themselves. Shutting themselves in forever, they used their mighty powers to dig themselves deeper graves.

Woodley felt inexpressibly depressed as he left the roof garden to seek his bed. Somehow he did not really believe that the hedonists would be induced to aid him in his project. He had half-convinced Sharn, he thought. But what of the others?

Doubting, wondering, he fell asleep to the tones of languorous music from some concealed amplifier.

Next morning, right after bathing and shaving, he found a newcomer waiting for him in the garden, a man he had not seen before. He was lounging against the parapet, his eyes on the city beyond. For a moment Woodley wondered if he had found another dweller in Center who, like Sharn, was half-aware of the utter futility of their life here.

The newcomer was young, but on his dark, strong face was a shadow almost of unrest, as if a mood troubled him which he could not understand. Then he heard Woodley's footstep and

turned. The smile that lighted his handsome, dark face drove the moodiness away. Woodley doubted whether he had seen it at all.

“I’m Rogur,” the newcomer said, his voice soft and friendly. “I’m to be your guide while Sharn’s busy.”

“Glad to know you,” Woodley acknowledged. “Have you had breakfast?”

“No. We’ll eat together if you like.” Rogur sat down and idly plucked a flower that grew beside his chair. He twirled it between his fingers. “Sharn said she’d taken you around Center, but you can’t have seen all of it. It’s a big place.”

“I imagine so.”

Woodley, was wondering what the girl was doing now. She had gone to see certain leaders, she had said. Well, that would naturally take time. Meanwhile he’d have to wait, and it would do no harm if he became well acquainted with the situation here.

A thought crossed his mind. Perhaps Rogur might be induced to become a recruit to his cause. Perhaps he, too, subtly sensed the uselessness and decadence of life here.

## CHAPTER IX

### *Garth*

As the day passed, Woodley was not so sure. In Rogur's deep-set eyes sometimes was a vague shadow, but this showed only at rare intervals. The hedonist devoted himself to showing his charge about Center, and there was much to see. Inevitably Woodley found himself comparing Center's luxury and loveliness with the hard, brutal environment that existed outside the moat.

"We work only when we wish," Rogur explained, halting in a tower room whose transparent walls gave a good view of the roof gardens all around. "My duties are here, at that switchboard, but I need not work if I don't care to do so. I check those lights and see that certain machines are running smoothly. Simple, isn't it?"

Again the shadow flitted across the dark young face.

"Don't you ever wish to do more?" Woodley asked.

"Very often," Rogur said curtly. "Come, I'll show you one of our theaters."

He did not speak for a time. Woodley became engrossed in a "film" that appealed to the senses of touch, taste and odor, as well as sight and hearing.

"The principle is a vibratory one," Rogur explained. "It—it's rather difficult to explain."

Instead the guide began questioning Woodley about the outside world, and Woodley was not loath to answer. He was hoping to arouse interest, and perhaps something more, in Rogur's mind. Were all the people of Center potentially like Sharn, possible converts to his own way of thinking? Were they all tired of their system of living, without quite realizing it? He could not be sure. But he realized that Rogur drank in every word eagerly.

"Do you like this life?" Woodley asked at last. They were alone on a terrace, idly smoking, resting from an experience with hypnotically induced dreams that to Woodley had been completely astounding. "Do you feel free?"

"I suppose so," Rogur said. His eyebrows were drawn together, his lips compressed ill-temperedly. "I suppose so. Not that I enjoy doing a menial task."

"I thought you could do whatever work you wished."

Rogur flushed. He refused to answer, turning instead to stare out over the city. The Sun was low.

"I have a friend who is anxious to meet you, Kent Woodley," he said finally. "He may be able to help you a great deal. But the meeting must take place secretly. If anyone else learns of it, there would be serious trouble."

"A friend?"

"I wasn't assigned to the task of guiding you. I asked for it, so I could talk to you alone and arrange for you to meet Garth. He was the one who spoke to you from the red wall-panel."

Woodley started. "How do you know about that?"

"Garth told me. At midnight tonight, enter the pneumo-tube car in your room. It will be guided to a certain place. There Garth will meet you and tell you things I cannot." Rogur lifted his hand in a warning gesture as a laughing couple wandered close. "No more now. Remember, midnight."

---

There was no further conversation on the subject. Rogur evaded without apparent difficulty Woodley's attempts to solicit more information.

"Wait," was all he would say.

So Woodley waited and wondered. Was there more discontent than he had suspected in the city? Was this Garth the leader of an anti-hedonistic band?

Rogur left Woodley at the door of the suite. His dark, sullen face remained vivid in Woodley's mind as he smoked a last cigarette on the terrace. He had hoped that Sharn would visit him that night, but she did not appear. Presently he lay down on the bed, fully clothed, and pulled a cover over his body. He dared not sleep.

At midnight he was tense with expectation. Silently he arose and went to the wall-panel that hid the tube-car. At the touch of a stud the conveyance opened.

He entered and sank down on a padded seat. The door slid shut. Instantly the car started. It went, he thought, by a circuitous path, more so than was necessary, though it was difficult to judge. But at last the sense of motion ceased and the door opened.

Woodley looked into a small room, bare save for two chairs and a table. In one of the chairs a man sat, wearing a voluminous cloak, his face hidden by a gray hood. Through slits his eyes gleamed enigmatically. He waited as Woodley stepped forward and heard the panel slide shut behind him.

"You're Garth?"

The hooded man nodded. "Sit down, Woodley. Rogur gave you my message, of course."

There was something familiar about the low voice. Rogur had told him it was the one that had spoken to him from the red panel. Yet Woodley felt that was not the only place he had heard it before.

"I can help you," Garth said. "I know what you want, but without my aid you cannot get it. You see"—he hesitated—"I have a great deal of power in Center."

Woodley did not reply. He waited for further information.

"Much power, yes, but I am not like the others. I am a man like you, from your own time, and possessing memories that you have forgotten." The hooded head bent, as though in sadness. "You see, Woodley, I am the one who destroyed your world."

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In the deadly stillness of the room, Woodley could distinctly hear the pulse of blood within his ears. Unbelievably he repeated:

"You are the one? But how?"

Garth made a weary gesture.

"It's not a short story, by any means. It goes back a hundred and thirty years. More than that. . . ."

"You mean the catastrophe was man-made?" Woodley asked, still unable to believe.

"Be still and listen," the tired voice ordered. "Go back to your own time. I was a scientist then, and a good one. Go back in your memory, Woodley, to the days when men worked and dreamed. I dreamed, too. I was young, but I was already recognized as a rising and capable scientist. I'd had papers published. Everything seemed rather wonderful in those days. My future was most promising."

Again the hooded head bent.

"I wanted prestige, the recognition of my fellows, power. Everything else was forgotten, even my forthcoming marriage. I decided against it, for I realized it would mean distractions. Very often now I remember Marian— Well, that doesn't matter. I worked on new theories. My

idea was to eliminate disease. I failed in that, but I stumbled across something far more important.”

“Immortality?” Woodley put in.

“Not quite. The prolongation of the life-span to more than two thousand years, or so my figures said. Naturally I couldn’t be sure. But I made the mistake of advancing my theories too soon. I was laughed at. I experimented and my backers refused to let me have the money I needed. They wanted practical inventions, they said. No one would listen to me. From being a rising, respected scientist, I became a crackpot and a fool. They laughed at me.”

There was a tremor of rage in Garth’s voice as he went on.

“I decided to prove my theory, give them more than they’d bargained for. It was unwise, of course. But I had justification. I was very angry. I got money. It doesn’t matter how, but I got it. I built my equipment. And—I made mankind immortal!”

“How?” Woodley asked softly, after a pause.

The robed figure made an impatient gesture.

“That doesn’t matter, either. I upset the electronic balance in the body’s structure, altering basal metabolism so that man would lose far less energy. With the money I acquired I built a machine and broadcast my ray over the entire world. But before I did that, I tested it on myself, on a minor scale. That was necessary, of course. If it had harmed or killed me . . . but it didn’t. My atomic structure was altered. I found by laboratory tests that I had seemingly become almost immortal.

“Then I turned the ray loose on Earth. But I miscalculated. Even yet I do not know how. The ray did not affect me. I’d already been exposed to it. There was an explosion which I survived, though wounded, and I woke to a world of horror. It was not as I had expected. I had thought that man would hail me as a savior.”

Woodley looked more sharply at Garth, but he did not interrupt.

“My equipment was destroyed in the explosion. Though man had been made immortal, I think the ray was far too powerful. I lengthened my own life-span somewhat, without ill effect. But there was too much power in the final experiment, and I made the race almost immortal. They became godlike in body. In mind—”

---

Garth breathed heavily, unwilling to go on.

“In mind, they suffered,” he said at last. “Nature’s check-and-balance system. I prolonged their lives at the expense of their intelligence. All their memories were wiped out and they were reduced to savagery. Nor could they ever learn again. The ray gave them immortality and ruined their brains. I was alone in a world of beast-people.

“You cannot comprehend the ghastliness of it, Woodley. All my dreams and hopes and plans shattered! Everywhere I looked, I saw ruin that I myself had made. I contemplated suicide, of course, but not for long. I tried to undo the harm I had done. My equipment was destroyed, as I said.”

Woodley frowned. “Wait a minute. Why wasn’t your mind affected by the ray?”

“I was exposed to it for only a fraction of a second. That was all that saved me. The ultra-violet ray will tan your skin in ten minutes, but over a period of hours it’ll kill you. Well, the immortality ray must have played over Earth for many hours while I lay unconscious, wounded by the explosion.”

“And the ray didn’t affect you?”

“My intention was to turn it on for only a short time, less than a second. I’d already been exposed to it, and I feared the results of overexposure. So I wore a protective suit of an alloy I created—a substance which barred the rays completely. That, of course, was why I didn’t suffer the same fate as everyone else.”

Garth sighed.

“When I woke, I tried to undo the harm my projector had made. I worked. It took months. I worked blindly, almost. Perhaps the ray had affected my mind a little . . . but I succeeded. I perfected a serum that would shock the victims back to normality. Or, rather, they were born again. They didn’t get back their memories, but my serum lifted the blanket that dulled their minds, lifted it more than I had expected.

“Each man and woman I treated became a genius. I succeeded better than I ever expected. I could not restore the Earth, for I had not sufficient supplies of the necessary chemicals. But at least I had a few hundred intelligent beings to work with. I taught them at first. After that it was scarcely necessary. They learned fast—very fast.”

There was bitterness and scarcely concealed fury in Garth’s voice.

“They mastered all we had known in Nineteen-forty-two and went beyond. They built Center and isolated themselves. I was with them, of course, though they did not know the part I had played in the world catastrophe. I thought it best not to. . . .”

He hesitated and went on at a tangent.

“I ruled them for awhile. Then they outstripped me. They said my mind was degenerating, but that was wrong. They are all geniuses.”

## CHAPTER X

### *Imperfect Ideal*

Woodley was not so sure that Center's inhabitants were geniuses. If a ray had destroyed mankind's intelligence, could not a lesser dose of the same ray have affected Garth similarly? He listened again as the hooded man continued.

"Time went on, and I did not die. The hedonists had lost their immortality when I injected my serum in them, but I still lived. They decided that was an accident. Their memories of the days just after Nineteen-forty-two are very hazy. Indeed, no one is alive now who was among the original band I saved. Their children and grandchildren dwell in Center."

There was a question in Woodley's mind.

"Why didn't you go on as you'd planned?" he asked. "Couldn't you inject the serum in the rest of mankind?"

"I intended to at first. But as I waited, I saw that I'd failed again. Geniuses? They're hedonists! Is Center a Utopia?"

Woodley saw the point.

"They are geniuses, though," Garth went on, "and they are more intelligent than I. They know a way to restore the world to its former state. A counter-ray, I think. I'm not certain. My serum would only create more geniuses and eventually a whole world of decadent hedonists." His voice hardened. "Center must be destroyed and all those who dwell in it. But first we must get from them the secret that will save Earth."

"Does a counter-ray exist?"

"Yes, created by those who worked for the sheer pleasure of it, not for any altruistic purpose. They never intended to use the ray. Science? They can't understand the word! They play at their tasks."

Garth's gloved hands twisted together. His body shook with an intensity of emotion that startled Woodley. To some extent Woodley could understand the hedonists' viewpoint, though he didn't agree with it. But he sensed that Garth hated them with a ferocity that surpassed any other emotion.

"They must die!" the scientist repeated in a whisper.

Woodley realized that Garth had come to blame the hedonists for all his failures. They had become a symbol of a prison, perhaps—a prison without walls, which had made Garth a misfit, isolated from humanity as the hedonists were isolated from the world.

"Together we can accomplish something," the scientist said. "Alone I could do nothing. But the two of us can do it."

Woodley nodded slowly. "Do you really believe that a counter-ray machine has been constructed and that it'll work?"

"Yes. Of that I am certain. But the hedonists will never consent to freeing mankind."

"I wonder. Perhaps pressure can be brought to bear on them somehow."

"They're geniuses. We are not."

"I know," Woodley agreed. "But I think you've forgotten something. They're becoming decadent, too. They've allowed for every known factor that might affect their lives. They can guard against such things. But I'm new to them, Garth. They tested me, proved that I brought

no infectious diseases into the city. They forgot that the deadliest viruses are created in the mind.”

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Garth stared questioningly through the slits in the hood.

“Why can’t I use psychology on them?” Woodley explained. “To them, I’m an X, an unknown quantity. If I can spread propaganda, make the people dissatisfied with their own way of life—”

“They’d guard against that, too,” Garth insisted. “Pleasure is all that matters to them. Any discordant notes are removed.”

“I’d be killed?” Somehow that did not jibe with Woodley’s impression of this strange culture.

“I said removed. Not harmed physically, but put out of sight, or hypnotically conditioned till all thoughts of revolt passed from your mind. They’re marvelous psychologists. I’d have been conditioned into a hedonist if I hadn’t pretended to be one of them.”

“Well. . . .” Woodley pondered. “Let me get this straight. The ray projector—how long need it be in operation?”

“Its waves travel at the speed of light. Only a moment or two, and man will regain his memory, pick up his life again where he left off in Nineteen-forty-two.”

“And the projector is assembled,” Woodley pursued. “Wouldn’t it be possible to get to it and turn it on? Are there guards?”

“Life in Center follows a pattern of pleasure. Any deviation from it is apt to be detected very quickly. Are you thinking of fighting your way to the projector?”

“That wouldn’t be necessary, unless there are guards.”

“There aren’t—the swine!” Garth said with sudden sharpness. “The world would have hailed me as a benefactor! I’d have been famous, greater than Newton or Galileo!”

Woodley’s brows contracted in a frown as Garth kept on, with no sign of stopping. The tirade against the hedonists was mingled with a queer sort of boasting that was definitely reminiscent of something. Woodley remembered other things about Garth that affected him unpleasantly as he considered them. Certain fumbling, groping gestures, brief hesitations in his speech, searchings for words, a querulous note . . . of what did this remind him?

Suddenly he knew, with a sense of abysmal shock. An old man who was part of his memories before 1942 had talked and acted thus. An oldster who groped for words childishly ranted against those he thought hated him. Persecution complex? Insanity? No. Merely senility.

Garth had lived for more than a century and a half. The minds of the savages outside, like their bodies, were frozen into a state of stasis, in which they moved blindly and uncomprehendingly. But for a hundred and thirty years Garth had thought and worked and remembered, and he was old.

A vagrant thought came to Woodley, something he had once read about immortals. But those immortals had been toothless, blind, deaf, declared legally dead by the authorities, sunken in a hopeless apathy of senility in which only the thought of food meant anything, and all food was tasteless to their dulled senses. Garth was not like that, but he was unquestionably senile. That would explain his vicious hatred for the hedonists.

Woodley wondered just how much of Garth’s mind remained. It was like playing with dynamite, to have for an ally a man who might at any time relapse into the unpredictable vagaries of old age. So that was the penalty of immortality!

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Horror shook Woodley. More than ever he was determined to save mankind from its fate. He saw a picture of the world a thousand years in the future, peopled by beings no longer even savages, monstrous parodies of mankind degraded beyond all imagination.

Interrupting Garth, he asked an obvious question.

“You say you are in a position of power here. Just what is that position?”

It was far more likely that the scientist, his mind slowly crumbling, would be entrusted with mechanical duties, rather than anything that called for clear and intense thinking. Garth looked up, startled.

“Eh? What is it? I lied to you, Woodley. I have no power here. Vanity on my part, but you’d find out the truth eventually. I wasn’t sure that I could trust you, either, so I wore this mask. They made me a slave! Oh, not hard work. Not even that. They gave me a duty that I’d have relegated to a schoolboy. They said my mind was failing. They lied! After what I’ve done, the things I’ve created—”

He made a broad gesture.

“Look about you. This ruined world was a work of destruction, but it took intelligence to bring it about. I made man immortal! The price was too heavy. I had not expected that. But I made man immortal, and I gave the hedonists their genius. They forgot me. Their first memories faded swiftly. Their children and grandchildren said my brain was wearing out. I should have ruled Center, for without me it could never have existed. They—they—”

He stumbled, then went on with fresh vigor.

“They tricked me, saw to it that I failed at every task I was given. At first I had all the facilities I needed, including a laboratory of my own.”

Woodley could visualize the tragic picture. Garth, his mind already weakened by his near-immortality, had tried frantically to remember, to focus his brain upon the science which he should have had at his fingertips. Groping and failing again and again, relentlessly he degenerated to duties that any menial could hold. He did not need to work at all, of course. But even a fool’s task was better than complete inaction.

He must have longed bitterly for the past days of triumphal experiment in the laboratory. And so he had come to hate the hedonists, telling himself that they were responsible for his fate. A mind in ruin—fit judgment for the man who had ruined the world. Yet it was horrible.

Woodley shook off a feeling of hopeless depression. Garth’s help was better than none, and perhaps he underestimated the scientist’s capabilities.

“This is my idea,” he said. “I’ll pretend to fall in with this way of life. I’ll apparently be assimilated into the system. Suspicion will be lulled, and when we strike, there’ll be less difficulty. We must learn all we can about the counter-ray projector, first of all.”

“Yes, I suppose so.”

“You know a girl named Sharn? She may help us, and your friend Rogur is unhappy here, too, I think.”

The masked figure was motionless.

“You saw that?” Garth breathed.

Briefly Woodley thought of the shadow he had seen in Rogur’s deep-set eyes, the depression on the dark, strong young face. Abruptly Garth laughed. With a swift motion he drew the hood from his face. A shock of amazement stiffened Woodley.

Garth was Rogur!

## CHAPTER XI

### *Dreams*

Rogur was young, darkly handsome, clean-limbed and clear-eyed as a boy. But within that lithe body was the weary, senile mind of an old man! Somehow it seemed utterly wrong that Rogur should not have grown wiser and greater with the years. Weariness might have looked out of those dark eyes, but great intelligence should also have been there.

It was more horrible than anything Woodley had ever known. It was clear to him now. Physically the scientist had not aged. He had remained as young and strong as he had been in 1942. His body was perfect, all his senses keenly attuned with youth, like a well constructed machine. But the guiding force of the machine was feeble, old, and unable to guide it.

"Long ago my name was Roger Garth," the scientist said bitterly. "Now it is merely Rogur. This secret meeting was necessary, though. The hedonists have sharp eyes and ears. Nor was I sure whether I could trust you."

"I see," Woodley said thoughtfully. With an effort he concentrated on the problem at hand. "Well, my idea still holds good. I'll lull suspicion by—"

"Don't trust the girl," Rogur broke in. "Don't trust any of them. They act on whim. For a little while she may befriend you, but when it comes to giving up her comforts and pleasures, she'll betray you."

"I don't think so," Woodley said with conviction.

"I know these people." Rogur closed his deep-set eyes wearily. "You must go back now. No suspicion must be created. I'll see you tomorrow, as your guide."

He watched Woodley enter the pneumo-tube car.

"Remember," he called, before the door slid shut. "Don't trust the girl!"

The vehicle streaked away. Automatic controls brought it swiftly to Woodley's own suite. His absence had not been discovered, he decided, though it was long past midnight. Dawn was slowly brightening the darkness of the eastern sky.

He undressed, pondering over what he had learned. Despite himself, a little germ of doubt had been planted. Sharn seemed friendly enough, and certainly did not intend to betray him—now. But as Rogur had said, she might be acting merely on whim, believing her motive to be something more valid than it actually was. At the crucial moment, she might well balk at the prospect of a future of hardship and toil.

Even if the hedonists maintained their isolation after the restoration of the rest of mankind, there would still exist for them a danger that had not existed previously. Nothing could harm them now, they thought. But in a world peopled by intelligent beings rather than savages, the situation would be somewhat different. What assurance could Woodley give the hedonists that their isolation would be respected afterward?

It was a dangerous game he played, but for the highest stakes. He could not afford to take unnecessary chances. If Sharn helped him, well and good. But he would give her no chance to betray him to her people.

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He could not sleep. He kept remembering Janet and wondering how she fared back in Long Island, with the savage tribe led by Geth and Sand. Who had those two been, in the days prior to 1942? Business men, politicians or criminals? Woodley sighed. Perhaps it would have

been better had he never awakened from his dull oblivion. He would never have been conscious then of the doubts and fears that beset him now.

There was so much to do. How could he, alone save for doubtful aid, triumph over a civilization of geniuses? Yet the seeds of weakness had been sowed with those of genius. The hedonists were decadent. They were not fighters. And Woodley, conscious of the hard muscles that rippled beneath his bronzed skin, realized that for a long time he had been fighting against hostile environment and enemies. True, he had been mindless then.

But now he believed that he was stronger than any of the pleasure-seeking men of Center. He would need that strength, and all the stamina and energy he possessed. With that thought in mind, he slept.

It was late when he awoke, but he felt fresh courage. New plans had come. Without delay he started to put them in operation. It could not be done in a day, of course, but he could at least make a beginning. Suspicion must be lulled. The hedonists would naturally be wary of an outsider from the past. To make a sudden reversal from his previous attitude would be far from convincing.

Woodley merely let himself be guided passively about the city, making few comments. But he evinced interest in many things, nor did he need to pretend this. For Center was a wonderland. Toil had been transmuted alchemically into pleasure here. It was futile to ask:

“What is the justification of this mode of life?”

“Why do we need justification?” the hedonists would have replied.

To that there was no answer, since they seemed undismayed by the prospect of decadence and the ultimate death of their race. It was fatalism carried to the last degree.

Rogur decided to quit his task of guide. It would be better not to court possible suspicion, he explained, and Woodley agreed.

“I’ll communicate with you when necessary,” the scientist said. “Meanwhile we can’t take direct action. I’ll find out all I can about the ray projector.”

For that day, and days thereafter, Woodley viewed Center with the aid of a new guide. The dream palaces especially fascinated him. Dreams could be induced by vibration that impinged directly on the brain, a development of an old device that used sonic waves. Machines could create master patterns, matrices, but these were not as satisfactory as those made by human minds. Woodley was reminded of musicians composing symphonies. He let himself test the “dream organs.”

He was taken into a small room, furnished only by a low couch and a network of shimmering wires across the ceiling. He was given a soporific and asked what sort of dreams he desired. It was difficult to answer.

“I’ll leave it to you,” Woodley said drowsily as he relaxed on the couch.

His eyes closed, opened again when a flicker of wavelike vibration shifted over the wires upon the ceiling. Then the dreams came.

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Woodley was strolling through a garden with long, slow steps like the glide of a fish through water, effortless and smooth. Fragrance was all around him, and the susurrus of a breeze through leaves swaying in the dim green air. Long ropes of hanging flowers brushed his face as he glided through the grass. There was fruit there, half-hidden among the shadows on the ground. Golden melons, purple globes of nameless fruit lay thicker underfoot as he advanced.

Presently he stumbled and felt himself falling with no sensation of dismay at all. The flowering vines caught him gently, caressed him as he fell. They let him down slowly upon the cushioning grass, amid a shower of drifting petals that touched his face like the stroke of cool silk.

He found the weightless globe of a melon under his palm and lifted it to his lips. Without effort he found himself eating the cool, delicious flesh within it. Sweet juice trickled down his throat, crisp mouthfuls crunching between his teeth.

There was music in the green shadowy air. The melon had vanished from his fingers. He was lying on one elbow, peering through the flowers toward an advancing figure that seemed clothed in melody.

A slim brown girl was coming through the hanging vines, and music rose and fell with every motion of her body. She wore a garment of strung pearls woven into fantastic patterns. At each step the pearls rustled together with the sound of music more sensuous than he had ever heard before.

Was she singing? He could not be sure, but she was moving around him now in a slow dance, and the music of her pearly robe swelled and sank and swelled through the vague air. The trees behind her shifted into new patterns and became swirls of changing color. She bent toward him, holding out bare brown arms from which the pearly garment fell away.

He took her hands, rose to his feet effortlessly. The girl spun away with a rising whirl of music as her pearl-strung robe rang sweetly. He leaned forward into the air, as if into supporting arms. Suddenly, without surprise, he found himself flying.

It was like riding air-currents. He soared high and floated low over the changing scenery of a beauty seen only in dreams. The brown girl drifted just ahead, the music of her garments ringing in his ears.

Smoothly scene melted into scene, sensation into sensation, color into color, the music of the girl's pearl-hung robe running like a motif all through the melting episodes of the dream. Time had ceased. Effort did not exist. There was nothing in life but the dreaming present, where all good things offered themselves and were enjoyed and vanished soundlessly to make way for more. But the slim brown girl drifted always ahead of him, just out of reach.

He woke slowly, the ringing music of her garment still in his ears. For a few moments he lay with closed eyes, given up to the exquisite memories of things past. There was an even more exquisite sorrow mingled with the memories of delight, sorrow for the lost music and the sweet brown girl he had never touched and would never see again. Without that delicate bitterness the dream would have lost half its savor.

It was difficult for him to realize that some deliberate craftsman had composed the dream, put it together note by note and color by color, deftly linking it all together and sharpening it to an edged beauty with the slender girl whom the dreamer could never hope to touch.

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He opened his eyes reluctantly, haunted by the sound of her garment and the fading memories of beauty. But he remembered Janet, grew sick with a soul-shaking yearning for the girl he had loved before Judgment Day. She was somehow part of his dream.

Cursing, he sprang up from the softly padded couch. Almost he found himself hating the hedonists as bitterly as did Rogur. Then sanity came back. When the door opened to disclose the attendant, Woodley was again in control of himself.

"No more now," he said.

For the rest of the day he tried to forget, to lose himself in analyzing the civilization in which he dwelt.

But later he revisited the dream palaces. Again and again he experienced the strange, manufactured visions of the hedonists. They appealed to all his senses, and in all of them he found the same undertone of bitterness, of gray futility. It was the subconscious hopelessness of a slowly dying race that saw no escape and consciously sought for none.

In all the dreams Woodley found that he was a passive agent. That appeared significant. The elements of personal conflict and initiative had been lost, even in dreams. It was this that gave him a new idea.

He decided to become a dream composer.

In such a position he could subtly influence the minds of the hedonists, as he had already influenced Sharn's. The girl was wholeheartedly with him now, though he had taken Rogur's advice and refused to give her his complete confidence, particularly since she seemed to make little headway. A few people were vaguely interested, but it was difficult to rouse them from their apathy. Apathy wasn't the word. Opium-scented visions described it better.

Remembering the possibility that Sharn might betray him, Woodley pretended to have become lukewarm in his desire to free mankind from savagery. But he made sure that Sharn would continue her efforts. It was too much like tricking the girl to sit easily on his conscience, yet he saw no other way out. Later he could make amends.

So Woodley pretended more and more to fall in with the way of his hosts. He took pains not to make the transition too sudden to seem convincing. At times he showed sudden flashes of distaste for all that existed in Center, but these flashes came progressively less often. When he finally was summoned to the Senate, it wasn't difficult to pretend complete conversion.

"I was wrong," he admitted. "But your life was new to me then. Even now I don't know if I'd like this sort of existence forever, but I'm willing to try it for awhile."

The gray-bearded Senate leader smiled.

"You are free to do exactly as you choose."

"Well, my position isn't easy. I'm sure I wouldn't enjoy inaction."

"We work when we wish."

"I'd need work for awhile, anyway. But what can I do?"

"You have seen the city. Make your choice."

Woodley deliberately offered several suggestions which he knew would not be practicable, tasks for which he was manifestly unfitted because of lack of specialized training.

"I'd like to try dream composing," he said at last. "Is that difficult?"

"Some can never master the trick," the graybeard replied, "just as some can never compose a symphony in sonic music. Imagination is necessary and the ability to focus the will. But if you can do that, and wish to, you may. I'll assign someone to explain the method."

Triumph leaped within Woodley, but he kept the emotion well hidden. So far the hedonists were not suspicious. It was up to him to keep their suspicions lulled from now on.

"You may have some interesting dreams to compose," the Senate leader stated thoughtfully. "Your freshness may create new variations on old themes. It is a good idea."

## CHAPTER XII

### *Desperation*

The training began immediately. At his own request, Woodley was taken to a dream palace and showed into a room that resembled one of the sleeping chambers where the dreams were broadcast. The ceiling was of woven wire.

He was asked to relax upon a couch and given a control button, which would start or stop the recording machinery. Then his head was encased in a translucent helmet.

"Thoughts create vibrations," the instructor told him. "That was known long ago. If you talk into a microphone, your words can be recorded and repeated. But you must first compose those words coherently. Here you must compose dreams in the same manner."

Inside the bulky helmet, Woodley tried to nod, but failed.

"I see," he murmured instead.

"Simply close your eyes and concentrate. Day-dream. Let your mind wander, but guide it. Visualize pictorially and employ all the other senses that you can. If you wish to create a rose, see it mentally, but recall its fragrance and its texture, too. Recreate tactile sensations in your mind. Recreate emotions. When you wish to record, press the button you hold in your hand. Press it again to stop the process."

That was the entire process. Woodley relaxed and tried to marshal his thoughts into some sort of coherent order. He had a brief flash of warning. If his thoughts were to be recorded, it would be dangerous to reveal his plans of revolt. These must be suppressed rigidly.

Creating a dream symphony was not as difficult as he had expected. At first Woodley experimented fumblingly, as a musician strikes halting chords or an artist sketches. Pictorial impressions came first. He tried to remember tactile sensations, olfactory, auditory, and found it not too difficult. By the time the instructor interrupted him, he was lost in an engrossing work.

Later he was congratulated on his success, and told that with little effort he could become an excellent dream composer.

"You have imagination and willpower. You're able to concentrate, focus your attention. Soon you can plan out complete dreams. You have a natural talent for this."

It was like playing a piano "by ear," instead of spending long years of intensive study. Woodley was jubilant.

"I hope you don't lose interest," the instructor said anxiously. "Everyone will be eager to try your dreams. You've brought something new into Center, a freshness that's delightful. Even in those experimental flashes of yours, there was a wonderful gusto."

Woodley smiled as he left the dream palace. Curiosity would bring the hedonists to "hear" his "symphonies." Crude they might be and unpracticed, but in decadent Center they were the blast of chill, refreshing wind. Perhaps he would provide a hurricane that might blow away the perfumed, poppy-laden air that shrouded the city. Slowly, subtly, the attitude of the hedonists might be changed with propaganda that appealed to the subconscious mind directly.

At last Woodley had the weapon!

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Sharn was interested, Rogur skeptical.

"There's danger in it," the scientist warned. "You must guard your thoughts every moment. If you let a stray memory of our plans slip through to the recorder, we're finished."

But when Woodley told Sharn later, she was much intrigued, though she did not realize the significance of the plan.

"You'll like your work, I know," she said. "Perhaps you may decide to stay here with us, unless you've already done so."

There was a strange light in her eyes. She wanted him to stay, Woodley realized. He would—till he had accomplished his plan. If only he could find out something about the ray projector! But he did not dare to ask direct questions that would arouse suspicion, nor could an unskilled man request work connected with the machine. He must play for time, try to gain converts, and wait.

So the days passed drowsily. Woodley became completely engrossed now in his dream creations. He could depend on Sharn to make friends, to seek out those who were dissatisfied with conditions in Center. But first of all he had to implant the seeds of unrest in those minds. All the tools were ready to his hand. He had certain memories of the days prior to 1942. Besides, his emotions were primal and strong, more sensitive than the hedonists'. Theirs were slightly dulled by too much pleasure. Yet Woodley knew they were not jaded. Had they been completely sated with experience, his task would have been easier.

He began on the premise that all the hedonistic dreams involved a passive protagonist. The dreamers were content to rest and let the tides of sensation pour over them. Seldom did they become active. The dream of flying was recurrent, a motif.

Woodley drew on his uncertain memories. He was guarded at first, concentrating on fantasies in which the protagonist gradually became more and more active. These "Woodley dream symphonies" became overwhelmingly popular. People flocked to the palaces to experience them. They had novelty, freshness and a certain zest in life that was fascinating to the hedonists.

He swung to legends he recalled—Paul Bunyan and his red ox of the northwest, the saga of John Henry—all of them set in surroundings Woodley knew well. Gradually the element of personal conflict began to enter the dreams. Conflict ended in triumph, without the undertone of bitter-sweet that the hedonists inevitably seemed to add in their own creations.

From his faulty memory Woodley told other stories. With Abraham Lincoln the hedonists vicariously hewed logs in the wilderness, fought against overwhelming hardship, triumphed over opponents like Douglas. With Boone and Crockett they fought Indians and held the Alamo. The saga of America was told through Woodley's created and guided dreams, for the benefit of those to whom it was not even a name.

Nor did he neglect the thrill of making something with one's hands, of creating an antitoxin that would cure disease, the pleasure of watching a fire built with wood painfully gathered by oneself. Small things and large, they were alike in eventually having an active protagonist and in stressing the rewards of personal effort.

Often Woodley felt like a silly Pollyanna. He knew his former world was not as he pictured it, but in defense he realized that he needed strong medicine to combat the virus of hedonism.

Curiously he became more and more out of sympathy with Rogur's violent hatred for the people of Center. They were certainly not cruel. They would protect themselves, but preferably not at the expense of others. From their completely hedonistic viewpoint, it was not

wrong for them to seek to preserve their isolated safety. And in truth, Center possessed much that was lovely and good.

There were enchanted nights on the roof gardens, under the jeweled splendor of the stars, with color and sound and scent combining to form an intangible essence of sheer beauty. The soft, kindly people of the city, acting so often on impulse, never wilfully doing harm, might have stepped out of an ancient concept of Paradise.

There was no pain in Center. They would not save the rest of mankind, but they would not have been capable of destroying it. Alone, aloof, harmlessly pursuing pleasure, they went gaily down the long road to the tomb of the ages. The ages would swallow them, leaving no trace but the silent, untenanted beauty of the magic city. No ugliness or stain would mark the memory of these people. Asking nothing, giving nothing, living only for delight, they were happy.

Woodley felt pity for them. They had not asked to be created, yet Rogur, who had made them, was longing and plotting for their complete destruction. And so was he, in another way. If he succeeded, the sunny, laughing faces would be darkened many and many a time. Care would come, and sorrow. Would it be worth the cost? Yes! The compensation would lie in becoming human again.

Yet more than once Woodley felt uncertain. If mankind had not been doomed to mindless savagery, he might have thought it best to leave the hedonists to their own selfish, happy lives. But the memory of Janet's empty, brutalized face always made him realize that his was a task that must be accomplished at any cost.

One night he was telling Sharn about a new dream symphony he had created.

"I like it, Sharn. I want you to see it."

"I can't see the new dream," she said, turning her face away so that he saw only the smooth, sleek platinum hair.

"Why not?"

"Oh, I am too busy. I saw some of the old ones, though. The girl Janet was in all of them."

Woodley frowned. "Why, no. You're wrong."

"She wasn't there visually, but in every other way. It was easy to tell that she was the motif. She was there emotionally, through stray sensations in the dreams, feelings of loneliness and longing." Sharn turned to gaze at Woodley with her grave blue eyes. "You can never forget that girl, you know."

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He scarcely heard the rest. It was all true, but he had not understood it till now. And if those subconscious longings had slipped unguarded through his mental censor, perhaps other, more dangerous thoughts had also slipped through.

"Your dreams have had other effects," she added. "You've created quite a cult, though the members don't know you're heading it. An underground clique is secretly advocating the restoration of intelligence to the rest of the world, tired of the life here in Center. Your dreams have influenced them, Woodley, given them glimpses of something they never knew before. They're tired of being passive agents. They want to live the sort of dreams you've given them."

Woodley looked at her with hooded eyes.

"Well?"

Sharn made an impatient, angry sound.

“Oh, you are stupid, or else a stuffed figure with sawdust inside! I thought we had a leader in you. It was you who made us dissatisfied. Before you came, we were not unhappy, discontented.”

Woodley dared not answer. If he committed himself definitely now, it would ruin everything. The new organization would be discovered. Later, at a suitable time, he could align himself with the “underground clique.” Meantime, he felt sure, it would continue to gather in force, while he went on making his dream propaganda.

Yet it distressed him to look at Sharn’s hurt, angry face, especially since he realized that all her words were true. There had been happiness in Center before he came.

He saw Rogur that night. The scientist was coldly bitter, seated in the tiny one-room cubicle hidden in the city’s labyrinth. He looked incongruously youthful, but his voice betrayed him.

“I warned you, Woodley. I knew we faced danger. I didn’t understand this one.”

“What are you talking about?” Woodley demanded, irritated. He settled himself more comfortably in the chair and nervously lit a cigarette. “What’s gone wrong?”

Rogur’s deep-set eyes probed into his.

“You. You have.”

The man was senile. He was talking foolishness. Yet, despite himself, Woodley listened as the other went on.

“You’re procrastinating. At least it started as that. You said we’d better wait till we could strike with some assurance of success. That was logical, but you’ve changed.”

“I?” Woodley asked. “What makes you think so?”

“You’re becoming a hedonist, if you haven’t become one already.” Rogur was on his feet, angry, accusing. “You’re content with dreams now! I saw some of them. You’re satisfying yourself the easiest way, by imagining things you’re afraid to do!”

“You’re crazy!” Woodley snapped, springing up. “You can’t even understand that I—” He stopped.

“So you’re beginning to realize it,” Rogur jeered, his young face alight with mocking anger. “You’ve been converting all your desires and wishes into dreams, putting off action, satisfied with drifting. Do you still want to destroy Center?”

“I never wanted to destroy it,” Woodley said hotly. “That isn’t necessary. It would be wanton murder, even if it could be done. If the neutralizing ray is broadcast and man’s memory is restored, that’ll be enough.”

“Enough?” A veil seemed to drop over Rogur’s dark eyes. “You think that would be enough?”

“Certainly. Afterward the hedonists can stay here isolated, or mingle with the rest of the world. That won’t matter. What we’re working for is the restoration of mankind. As for the dreams, you know my purpose in that. There’s an organization already formed that wants the same thing we do.”

“Then what I said was false?” Rogur’s lips twisted wryly. “You can’t deny your hedonism—traitor!”

## CHAPTER XIII

### *The Criminal*

Woodley hesitated. He realized only too well now that imperceptibly, without realizing it, he had been drifting into hedonism. He had been walking on quicksand, and his own dreams had insidiously begun to snare him.

"All right," he said at last to Rogur. "You win. I hadn't properly estimated the attractiveness of hedonism."

Rogur went to the wall, brought out two cloaks and hoods from a cupboard.

"We understand each other again," he stated. "Good. I haven't been inactive, Woodley. I've been making my own plans, too. Tonight we can turn on the neutralizing ray."

"Tonight? But how?"

"I told you I'd been active!" Rogur snapped petulantly. "Put on this robe and hood. After we've succeeded, we'll be in danger. The hedonists will be searching for the culprits, so we mustn't show our faces. Later Center must be destroyed, but tonight there's a chance to use the ray."

Reluctantly Woodley took the robe and hood.

"Are you sure this is wise? If we wait till the anti-hedonists are strong enough, the Senate will be forced to do as we wish."

"And if the ray is never turned on, would you care very much?" Rogur's voice was fiercely sardonic.

Grunting in hopeless disapproval, Woodley donned the concealing garments. The chance was worth taking, anyway. Cloaked and hooded, he joined Rogur in the tube-car.

"Destroying Center can come later," the scientist muttered almost to himself. "But it must come! Many times I have tried to find a way. . . . Far up the valley, Woodley, there's a dam still standing, built before Nineteen-forty-two. Once I thought of dynamiting it and wrecking the city, but now I know Center could resist far greater forces than that. The hedonists have few weapons, know nothing of warfare, but Center is almost impregnable."

He touched a control stud.

"We must work swiftly," he continued. "If anyone's in the laboratory, we can't wait to argue. I couldn't get any weapons, so we must use our hands. But don't be afraid to do that!"

"The projector's set up?" Woodley asked. "It's all ready to be turned on?"

"Yes, yes," the scientist said impatiently. "Be ready now."

He turned as the door opened. With Woodley behind him, he sprang out into a vast, well lighted chamber.

---

It was the central and consequently tallest tower in the city. The ceiling was of transparent plastic. In the room's center was a complicated machine reminding Woodley somewhat of an atom-smasher. It was not, he realized. It was something far more potent. This machine could broadcast the ray that would lift the curse of immortality from mankind and restore memory and intelligence.

High above the two men's heads it towered.

"Do you understand its operation?" Woodley whispered.

He knew he himself could never hope to fathom the complicated details of the machine's construction. Rogur's face was hidden by the hood, but there was hesitation in his attitude.

"Yes—" he said at last, rather doubtfully, and moved forward.

Woodley cast a wary glance about the huge room before following. There was no sound. The night sky was starry above the transparent roof. White light glowed from the plastic walls.

Rogur was fumbling with a switchboard. He caught his breath in a little gasp.

"Here. The buttons are labeled. This is the one!"

He pressed it. Nothing happened. With a hot muffled curse Rogur tried another button, and then, in a sudden access of fury, one after another.

"Something's wrong," he muttered. "There's no power. The—the machine can't be operated. Maybe some vital parts are missing."

That was logical enough. The hedonists would scarcely leave the ray projector in working condition, taking the chance that it might be turned on by accident. Woodley felt like a fool for not having foreseen this obvious precaution.

"Come away," he whispered urgently. "We'll have to try the other plan after all. It's no use staying here longer."

"No!" Rogur objected stubbornly. "I'll find out what's wrong and fix it."

He stared up at the towering mass of the still machine, his mind groping for science he had long since forgotten. Woodley started at a sound from nearby.

"Come on!" he urged, tugging Rogur's arm. "It's hopeless now. We'll have to wait."

"Leave me alone!" the scientist cried, his voice shrill with anger.

Woodley froze at the sound of a door opening. He whirled.

A gray-clad man stood framed in an opening that had appeared in one wall. His eyes were wide in astonishment. Shouting for aid, he sprang forward. At his heels came more men.

"Capture those two!" the foremost cried. "Capture them!"

Woodley's glance around had showed him that the pneumo-tube door was still ajar. To remain and fight was useless. Still gripping Rogur's arm, he lunged toward the wall. The scientist was caught off balance, resisting until he nearly fell. Then he understood and followed.

Woodley pushed him into the car and whirled to face the first of the attackers. Through the slits of his hood he saw a slim youth rushing at him, hands outstretched to seize and hold. Realizing the weakness of these people, Woodley planted his fist in the boy's chest and sent him staggering back. Then he leaped into the car as the panel began to close.

Instantly the vehicle lurched into vertiginous motion. Woodley was hurled against the wall, collapsed on a padded seat. He recovered to see Rogur at the control panel, bent double as he pressed stud after stud on the board before him.

The scientist's body was shaking. He seemed in the grip of a dreadful fear. And this, Woodley knew, was logical enough. Fear and hate were correlative, in some degree. Rogur wished to destroy the hedonists, and attributed the same motive to them. Woodley was not so certain of their fate, but he knew that capture would mean the failure of any future plan. As yet the two culprits remained unrecognized.

He drew the hood-mask closer about his face.

Only a moment later the car slowed to a stop. The panel opened and Rogur sprang out into a large chamber, which held what seemed to be control machinery.

Seeing there was no sign of pursuit, Woodley followed the scientist.

"What do we do now?" he asked. "Where are we heading?"

But Rogur was frantically working at an instrument board.

“We’ve got to get out of Center! They’ll kill us!”

He was half-mad with fear. He pulled a lever back, spun a wheel and whirled toward a gap opening in the wall. Beyond Woodley saw the night sky and the great moat that surrounded the city. They were within the great wall of Center.

“Wait!” he said hurriedly. “Nobody recognized us. If we run away now, we’ll lose everything we’ve gained.”

---

The scientist did not hear. A white span was licking out into the darkness, spanning the moat. It was like another strange bridge by which Woodley had entered Center.

Rogur cried out sharply and sprinted toward the threshold. His cloaked figure loomed for an instant in the black gap. Then it was gone. Woodley heard the diminishing sound of his feet racing over the bridge.

There had been reason for Rogur’s sudden flight. Woodley saw that panels were opening in the walls, revealing tube-cars. The pursuers had caught up. They came pouring out into the room.

It would have been easy to follow the fleeing Rogur, but Woodley’s mind was working fast. He had not been recognized, since he was masked. If he had to escape from Center, all his carefully laid plans would come crashing down in ruin. But there was another way.

The hedonists were pouring into the room, unarmed but numerous. Woodley felt a strange reluctance to fight his way through them. Conscious of his own muscular superiority, he was not the sort of man who took pleasure in battle for its own sake. His hard fist could smash those smooth, handsome faces into pulp, even though the weight of numbers would eventually overwhelm him. It was hedonism of a sort. He did not wish to destroy beauty if he could help it.

The memory of a game of his time came to his aid. His arm automatically lifted, as though cradling a pigskin. He whirled aside, spun lightly on his toes and ran. The perfect coordination of trained muscles aided him. One man he sent spinning with a lunge of his shoulder. He hurtled clear over the bent form of another. Then he was through and in a tube-car!

The panel slid partly shut as his fingers flickered over buttons. He drove out his arm in an open-handed shove that cleared the threshold of men who were trying to push their way in. Then the door closed and the car shot away.

Almost instantly he changed its course in the maze of tubes that threaded through Center. He stopped it, leaped out and entered another car. He doubled on his tracks, playing a desperate game of hare-and-hounds. Finally he discarded his cloak and hood, leaving them in one car before he changed to another.

Ten minutes later he was in his own suite, lying quietly in bed, with no trace of his recent adventure anywhere save in his hastened breathing and increased pulse. But these slowed, and no one burst into the apartment to question him. So at last Woodley slept.

The next day there was an undercurrent of excitement in the city. The tale had been told of two masked figures who had tried to turn on the neutralizing ray machine and failed. One had escaped from Center. The other was still here. Who was it?

Woodley felt uneasy. Knowing the capabilities of the hedonists’ science, he felt none too certain that his identity would not be discovered. Scopolamine or truth-testing psychological machines would betray him, he knew. Yet there was no way in which he could escape. Suspicion would inevitably point at him, in view of his past record.

Then new word came and the bottom dropped out of Woodley's stomach. The culprit had confessed.

It was—Sharn!

She had lied to save him, of course. She had guessed the identity of the masked figure and realized that Woodley was actually in sympathy with her own aims. The authorities had already discovered, by Rogur's absence, that he was one of the criminals. Now Sharn contended that she was the other. Her motive? She refused to say. But she declared that she far preferred the outside world to Center.

She was to be conditioned psychologically and hypnotically until she was once more satisfied with the hedonistic cultus. Or at least that was the original plan. But Sharn demanded that she be allowed to leave Center.

By the time Woodley got the news, the girl had already been sent out into the wilderness of what had once been Pennsylvania. The authorities were not willing to force her into a course she disliked, for that was the antithesis of hedonism. But with her out of the city, the source of friction would be removed, shut out of sight.

Sharn was alone in a world of savages! Woodley's immediate impulse was to go after her and bring her back, assuming the guilt that was rightfully his.

He had started toward the Senate rooms with that in mind when a slim, blond youth crowded into the pneumo-car with him. The boy touched a button and the vehicle paused between levels.

"What's the idea?" Woodley asked impatiently. "I'm in a hurry."

"I have a message from Sharn," the youngster said. "She thought you might go to the Senate and that would spoil everything."

"Who are you?"

"Sharn told you of the secret organization that wants to open Center's gates and restore mankind's memory. Well, I'm a member." The boy looked around furtively, though there was no chance of any eavesdropper here. "Sharn took your guilt so that you could remain here. If you had left, the whole crusade would fail. It's all built around you. You're a concrete symbol, Sharn said. She'll wait outside till we're strong enough to get what we want. Then she'll return, when we're in power. And she had another errand, too."

"What kind of errand could she have in the outside world?"

"I don't know."

"I'm going after her and bring her back!" Woodley declared fiercely. "She'd have no chance out there."

"You couldn't find her," the boy said confidently. "She expected you to talk like this. She's gone far east, and she took supplies with her. Sharn's clever and resourceful. You've got to do as she wishes now. If you don't, it'll spoil everything, without helping her at all."

Woodley bit his lip.

"You don't understand. You're still a hedonist. I'm responsible for the whole thing."

"We'll soon be strong enough to demand that the ray be turned on. Keep on with your propaganda dreams, Sharn said. It's the only way!"

## CHAPTER XIV

### *Deluge*

Swiftly the boy touched a button. The car slid forward, the panel opened and he was gone. Woodley remained hesitant, wavering. It went completely against his grain to know that Sharn had sacrificed herself for him, but it was her life against the whole future of mankind, the entire world.

Woodley sent the car swiftly toward a dream palace. Direct action had failed. He must wait now and build up a strong revolutionary movement.

For days thereafter he was vastly worried about Sharn. More than once he considered going after her, but he did not. With Rogur gone, there was no other way. He concentrated on creating more potent propaganda dreams.

Days, weeks, months dragged past. Woodley's contacts with the secret league were few, and strangely they became fewer. At times he felt that he was shut out of their confidence. He became so busy that he had no time to view even his own dream symphonies. There must be no relapse into the lotus-eating habits of the hedonists.

Weeks . . . and more weeks . . . chafing against inaction, waiting for piled-up waters to break the dam . . . waiting . . . waiting . . .

He felt utterly alone, yet he was beginning to love Center, its gay beauty, its *mañana* spirit. The world would be the loser if it perished. But it need not die, Woodley told himself. It would still exist, eternally lovely, in a world of intelligent humans such as had existed before 1942.

Over all the Earth lay the darkness of the long night after the Judgment Day. Only in Center was there light.

One day he was asked to visit the Senate. All the members were there, men and women, the gray-bearded leader, the crag-faced man he remembered. He had no idea what was wanted. For some days there had been no message from the secret organization. But he was feeling encouraged as he relaxed in one of the padded chairs and waited for the Senate's words. Soon the day would come to strike.

The graybeard smiled at Woodley.

"We felt the time had arrived to talk frankly to you. We like you, for you bring freshness and vigor to Center. But you have brought something else that might have been dangerous."

Might have been? The words reechoed ominously. What did he mean?

"I don't understand," Woodley said, tense as wire inside.

"Your propaganda films, of course. They were very clever. At first even the Senators began to fall under their spell. But since the girl Sharn left Center, we looked more closely into certain effects. We discovered a secret organization which wanted to destroy our isolation and give the savages back their memories."

Involuntarily Woodley looked around, as though judging the chances for escape. A woman laughed with a tinkling, musical sound. The leader shook his head.

"No harm will come to you. We don't even know if you were connected with the movement, or if you meant wilful harm. It doesn't matter now."

What did he mean? Woodley, feeling sick hopelessness, decided to take a bold course. He stood up. His throat felt dry, but he spoke in a hard, defiant voice.

“All right. You’ve found out. The ‘secret league,’ as you call it, is stronger than you think —strong enough to force you to turn on the ray projector!”

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To his astonishment a ripple of laughter went around the group.

“I’m sorry, Woodley,” the graybeard said. “We were forced to fight you with your own weapons. It was, I’ll admit, rather enjoyable, something none of us had known for many years.” He lifted shaggy eyebrows. “But that little conflict was quite enough. More would be dangerous. It is ended now.”

“What do you mean?”

“You haven’t been to any of the dream palaces lately. You’ve been too busy making dreams. We saw to it that your own dreams were edited before release. We drew their teeth, made them innocuous. We also used psychology and created counter-dreams that neutralized yours. Very slowly we have guided our people back into the safe track of peace and satisfaction.”

Counter-propaganda by dreams! Yet it was true, Woodley realized now. So that was the explanation of the flagging interest in his crusade! Not until that moment did he recognize at its true worth a falling-off of members, a certain lack of enthusiasm among the anti-hedonists. Slowly, gradually they had been fed psychological medicine that neutralized his own subtle poison.

“You may still make dreams if you wish, but they must be edited. Unrest has gone again from Center and we can live for pleasure, as we did before you came.”

Somehow Woodley knew that the Senator spoke truth. Perhaps eventually he might gain back his former adherents, but what chance had he, now that his plot was discovered?

“Well?” he asked. “Do you want me to leave Center, or will you kill me?”

“Of course not. We are not evil, Woodley. We harm no one. There was some discordance even in the Senate. A few of us actually were in sympathy with you. But we finally decided that hedonism is best. As for you, you may remain here if you wish. You’ll be perfectly free, but we’ll see that you cause no more discord. Our rule is gentle. You’ll feel no restraint.”

“So?” he persisted.

“It may be necessary to condition you. But we don’t wish to do that unless it’s necessary. We like your freshness, your vigor. We’d prefer to keep that. But the source of discord must be removed.”

Woodley’s stomach felt hollow.

“You mean—”

“The counter-ray machine is being dismantled. Its plans will be destroyed, all memory of its principles wiped out by hypnotism. We’ll use psychology to create a mental block in our scientists, which will prevent them from ever again discovering the ray.”

Woodley stood with bowed head. His world was crashing about him. There was no hope now at all.

“I am sorry,” the gray man said gently. “Very sorry. If you wish, we can wipe out all your painful memories. That will make you completely one of us.”

Briefly Woodley was tempted. Then he shook his head.

“No,” he said. “I’d rather not. This way, at least I’m myself. And somehow I can’t make myself hate you. I’m trying to.”

“We are not evil. We harm no one. There is no hate in our city, Woodley.”

He went toward the door, bowed with failure. All his plans were wrecked. His only satisfaction was that now he could save Sharn, if she still survived in the outer world. He'd lift the false guilt from her shoulders, get the Senate's permission to bring her back to Center, and then leave the city forever. He would go back to Janet, care for her, remembering her as she had been before the curse had fallen.

He saw the future that stretched grayly before him, one mortal in a world of immortals, one man with intelligence in a race of savages.

On the threshold he paused. A warning hum went through the room. From a concealed amplifier a voice cried:

"Danger! Flood!"

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Woodley whipped around. Through the transparent side of the room he looked out over the city and beyond it, up the valley that stretched northward. The Senators, too, were staring in the same direction.

"To shelter!" the voice cried. "Swiftly!"

Small figures in the lower roof gardens scurried from view. One by one the great windows were closed. Soon Center was a closed, airtight prison. Great plastic shells swung out to shield the gardens. Far in the distance, up the valley, Woodley saw movement. It drew closer, resolving itself into a green wall of water topped with white.

"There was a dam in the valley," the graybeard said. "It has broken, I suppose."

"There is no danger," the unseen speaker called. "Center is built to resist such things. Find windows. It will be a spectacle worth seeing."

Incredibly vast the flood mounted. Woodley remembered some words that Rogur had spoken about the dam.

"Once I thought of dynamiting it and wrecking the city. . . ."

Was this Rogur's doing? If so, it would be futile.

The waters lifted like iron against the sky. It was near sunset. Red light shot through the green, fringing the wall's top with blood. The moving mountain hurtled down on the silent city. It was an experience that staggered imagination. Inevitably fear came, the insistent knowledge that no wall could resist this tremendous battering-ram. Tons of water, driving with the bellow of clashing armies down the valley, poured resistlessly against Center.

Higher the terror rose, and higher. It sprang up with impossible speed. Its movement seemed suddenly upward, as though it leaped into the sky, ready to swoop down and smash the world.

Every person in the room fell back from the window. The flood loomed momentarily, for a split-second, as a black wall that blotted out all else. Then it struck!

The city shook. Built on solid rock, a part of the Earth itself, stronger than steel, the mighty towers shuddered with agony at the wrenching strain. Only the science of pure genius could have withstood that horror for more than a second. Darkness covered Center. Even through the insulation, the shouting roar of the mighty waters was deafening.

Within the buildings was light, but the windows were veiled with blackness, too intense for any illumination to penetrate. The roaring, bellowing fury raged. There were swirlings and foamings visible in the water now, Woodley saw, and a faint greenish light. The worst of the flood was over.

The city had withstood its tremendous impact.

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Suddenly he saw the sky again. Water dripped and trickled down the outside of the great pane. Northward the valley was a foaming, brown, turbulent river. Debris and flotsam surged with the flood. But it was over.

Murmurs of appreciation went up from the Senate. They were actually appreciating the esthetic beauty of the terrifying scene. Whatever else the hedonists might be, they were certainly not cowards.

The graybeard picked up his conical narrow-beam phone and listened.

“No damage was done,” he said at last. “The flood has passed on down the valley, but the moat is filled with water. We must drain it.”

The Senators drifted away. Woodley, still dazed by his recent experience, retreated to his own suite. Soon darkness fell on the city, and with the shadow came a faint, insistent murmur.

At first Woodley thought it was within his own ears. Restlessly he tossed on his bed, where he had lain down to rest. His mind was in turmoil. There were so many things to be done—tomorrow. Tomorrow he would go after Sharn.

“Woodley!” The voice was urgent. “Woodley!”

Suddenly he realized what was happening. With a swift motion he reached for his beam-phone and held the larger end to his ear. Long ago he had been given one of the convenient devices.

“Woodley!” called Sharn’s voice.

“I hear you. Sharn?”

“Yes. Quick, let me into Center. I’m outside Gate Four.”

Sharn, returned to the city? Hastily Woodley sprang up. Some impulse toward secrecy made him thrust the phone into a pocket. But he met no one, and the control room for Gate Four was deserted.

Hurriedly he manipulated the simple device. The wall opened. The bridge licked out into darkness.

He waited a moment, then pressed the button that brought the span licking back.

It flashed toward him.

Two figures materialized in the gloom. They were drawn into the room where he stood.

Sharn—and Janet!

## CHAPTER XV

### *The Hordes Attack*

A hundred questions raced through Woodley's mind, but there was no time. Janet's shallow blue eyes stared around wonderingly. She was cleaner than Woodley remembered, and he guessed that Sharn was responsible for that. But why had she brought Janet here?

Sharn herself was in a sad state, ragged and torn, with an automatic pistol stuck in her belt and her platinum hair disheveled. But her eyes glowed with excitement.

She drew Janet into the pneumo-car, and the savage girl followed docilely. Dazed, Woodley followed. Sharn sent the car racing to his suite.

"There's not much time," she said, sinking down exhaustedly into a chair. "But I'll have to explain."

Janet was wandering about the room with dull curiosity. Woodley took his eyes from her.

"You found Janet."

"Yes. You told me enough, so that wasn't difficult. I found weapons." She touched her pistol. "And I made my way to the Eastern Ocean. I found Janet."

"But why?"

Sharn made a weary gesture.

"There's so much to tell, so little time. I knew you loved her, Kent Woodley. And I thought somehow that our plans of revolt might fail. If they did, I intended to bring Janet here, induce the Senate to cure her. You'd have her, even if you were unable to save mankind."

Woodley found it difficult to speak.

"You did that? But why?"

"There's no time to talk. Center is in danger of a new menace. Do you remember Rogur?"

"Of course. He left the city."

"He hates the hedonists viciously. All his thoughts gathered about that single focus. He wants—well, he calls it revenge. If he can destroy Center, he'll be satisfied. He has organized an army of the savages to march on Center."

"The savages?" Woodley blurted. "They haven't enough intelligence."

"Intelligence wasn't necessary. He played on the one emotion they understand. Their lives are devoted to searching for food. They're always hungry, every tribe of them. He's spent these past months in wandering around, telling them that all the food and loot they want is in Center, ready for the taking. I saw his army. It's incredibly large."

"But savages!"

"Savage beasts, thousands of them, outnumbering my people ten to one! The hedonists have no weapons. We've always relied on our isolation."

Still Woodley was unconvinced.

"But Center can withstand a flood, Sharn. The savages can't get in."

"Rogur made that flood. He dynamited the dam up the valley. The moat is no longer a barrier. It's filled with water to the edge, and the savages can swim across. Right now those hordes are marching on Center, plowing through the mud of the valley. Rogur has given them guns."

"Even if he succeeds, he can't use the ray machine. He doesn't understand it. He's no longer a scientist. He's senile."

"I know. But what can we do? We have no weapons—"

"But I have!" said a harsh voice from the wall.

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Woodley spun around at the words. The pneumo-car panel was open. Standing within the room, a pistol aimed unwaveringly, was Rogur! His dark, young face was alight with somber triumph.

"Don't move, Woodley," he said. "Nor you, Sharn."

His free hand held a submachine-gun. He lowered it carefully to the floor. Stepping forward gingerly, he took the girl's weapon.

"Rogur, you fool!" Woodley said. "You can't—"

"Be still! Tie him, Sharn. Use curtain-cords."

The girl looked at Woodley. He slowly nodded, turned to Rogur again.

"This is insane. You'll wreck everything."

But Rogur merely watched impassively as Sharn bound Woodley. When she had finished, he found more cords and tied her securely. Then he tested Woodley's bonds and, dissatisfied, tightened them. He stood above the two prostrate figures on the floor, smiling as though with an effort.

"I followed you, Sharn," he said. "I swam the moat, pushing a ladder before me to mount the wall. I followed you here and listened. You'll have no chance to warn the hedonists now. The savages are already outside the city. I know the way to the master control room. I'll open all the gates, extend all the bridges. I'll throw open all the windows of Center, so that the savages can enter without difficulty. They know only the law of killing."

He picked up the submachine-gun.

"As you said, Sharn, your people have no weapons. I'll have little difficulty, though I anticipate none at all." He patted the gun's stock. "I had a great deal of trouble in finding ammunition. Most of what I did find was useless."

He drew the automatic he had taken from Sharn. After a quick glance around, he aimed it at the floor and squeezed the trigger. Nothing happened.

"The rooms are insulated, but you see? You never tried to fire this, Sharn. If you had, you'd have realized that there aren't many guns or shells that would explode after a century and a half."

"But I—" Woodley said.

He stopped suddenly, remembering that he had discovered a usable gun in wrecked New York. Still that might have been a freak accident.

Rogur smiled. "I looked for and found an airtight storage vault where weapons were kept. It was made by a munitions company to store dynamite, but there were guns and ammunition, too. I tested and repaired what I needed. Now I'm ready to destroy Center."

"What about afterward?" Woodley said sharply. "What then?"

"I'll use the ray projector, restore mankind's memory."

"You don't know how. It's being dismantled. You couldn't put it together, and if you did, you couldn't operate it."

There was a flash of anger in the dark, young face. It gave place to a contemptuous smile.

"You will see."

"You senile fool!" Woodley snarled. "Your mind cracked long ago. You're no longer a scientist. You're nearly as stupid as the savages!"

Rogur went as white as though he had been struck across the mouth. Without a word he turned, entered the pneumo-car and closed the panel behind him.

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A heavy silence fell. Sharn lay motionless, her eyes closed. Woodley watched her. Death was marching toward them, he knew, and upon the unwarned, unarmed hedonists as well—the laughing, helpless, beauty-loving people Woodley had come to know so well. The thought was horrible to him.

He struggled against his bonds. It was useless. Rogur had done his work well. Nor could Woodley wriggle toward Sharn to free her. Rogur had tied him to the leg of a heavy couch, and the girl to the opposite leg.

At last he relaxed, gasping with effort. What was happening? He thought of Rogur, moving like a tower of destruction amid Center, armed with the vicious submachine-gun, going resistlessly toward the central control room to open the gates that would admit the savage hordes. . . .

"I am sorry," Sharn said. "Not only to see my people die, but for you. I had hoped that you and Janet would be happy again."

Woodley turned his face toward her.

"I've been an incredible fool," he said hoarsely. "I misunderstood so much that you knew. You love me, don't you, Sharn?"

She bit her lip and shook her head.

"I love you," he breathed incredulously. "I know it now."

"You love Janet," she insisted. "All your thoughts were colored by her."

Woodley's smile was bitter.

"A century and a half ago there was a man named Kent Woodley," he said. "He was an ordinary fellow, fairly wealthy. He never had to work. He was pretty much of a hedonist himself. He loved Janet, because she was fragile, lovely, soft. She was like him, a reflection of that Kent Woodley."

Sharn did not speak.

"Kent Woodley has changed from an idle, hedonistic wastrel to an older, harder man, with certain ideals. I thought I still loved Janet. She typified all I had lost, that whole civilization in which I once lived. She was a symbol. I mistook the symbol for the reality. But I was changing all the time, Sharn. And the man I now am loves you."

Sharn's eyes were closed, but tears trickled past them to her cheeks.

"I'm glad, Kent. And I'm glad Janet will never know. I wouldn't want to see her hurt."

Through the room a voice blasted suddenly.

"Danger! To your apartments, swiftly! Stay there. Wait! Center is being attacked by savages. Central Control is in the hands of an enemy. He has opened the gates and sent out the bridges. He has opened the windows in the towers. Go to the higher central buildings at once! Stay away from the walls. Savages are attacking us!"

Woodley abruptly turned into ice. Rogur had succeeded!

"The controls have been smashed," the voice continued. "The man who did it has fled, after killing many of our people. We cannot close the city. Go to the central towers!"

Sharn smiled sadly.

"So we perish," she whispered. "The world will be the poorer for our passing, I think. So much beauty will be lost forever."

Woodley could not speak. He was watching the girl. There was the sound of a soft footfall. Woodley turned his head.

He saw Janet. He had forgotten her. She came out now from an adjoining chamber, stood staring dully.

An insane hope flashed into Woodley's mind. Perhaps there was a chance, after all!

"Janet," he said softly. The vacant-eyed girl looked at him. "Janet, come here."

After a pause she obeyed.

"Untie me," he said hopefully.

But this Janet's dulled mind could not understand. Sharn was watching despondently. Woodley gritted his teeth and thought frantically.

"Kneel down," he said. "That's it. Put out your hands. Here, on this cord. Untie the knot."

She did not understand.

"Wait," Sharn cried suddenly. "Janet, that cord is good to eat! Put it in your mouth. That's right. Now chew it."

Dazedly, uncomprehendingly the savage girl obeyed. Her strong teeth bit into the strands of cord. She stopped.

"Go on," Sharn encouraged. "It's good to eat, Janet, very good."

Abruptly the bonds parted. Woodley wrenched his hands free. With frantic, desperate speed he began to work on the other knots.

"To the central towers!" the audio-voice shouted. "The savages are attacking. We cannot fight them!"

---

He freed himself from the couch-leg. He hobbled to a table, broke a vase and used a sharp fragment on the remaining cords. Hurriedly he released Sharn. Again the voice cried:

"To the central towers!"

Woodley dragged Janet toward the wall, pressed the button that would bring the pneumo-tube car to this level. He pushed the two women into the vehicle. Sharn's eyes were wide.

"What can we do, Kent?" she pleaded.

"I don't know, but I have an idea."

He sent the car hurtling toward the Senate chamber. It did not take long. As he had hoped, the rulers of the city were there, talking with nervous haste.

Woodley burst into their midst without ceremony. He gripped the graybeard's shoulder, spun him around.

"A man named Rogur is leading the savages!" the audio-voice shrielled. "He is outside the moat now, urging them on!"

"You've got to listen to me," Woodley said. "I can save Center. You've got to listen!"

A murmur went up from the Senators. All eyes were on Janet. A savage, here? Sharn drew the girl protectingly behind her.

"Never mind her," Woodley rapped out. "The savages are entering Center. We haven't any time at all."

"We cannot fight," the graybeard said. "We have no weapons."

"You have the counter-ray!"

There was a stunned silence. Woodley plunged on.

"You can't stop a horde of armed savages. They'll kill your people to the last man. You can't protect yourself from brutes. But if you gave them back their memories, you could appeal to their reason."

The gray man caught his breath.

“Repair the projector! You can still do it, can’t you?”

“Yes,” a woman said. “It will take time.”

“Put every technician on it!” Woodley ordered. “It’s the only chance you have. The savages are attacking because they’re savages. Give them back their memories, let them be civilized human beings again—not beasts—and they will revolt against Rogur. Lift the curse of immortality from them!”

“It is your duty,” Sharn said. “You must save your people!”

Abruptly the room was galvanized into activity. The Senate leader was snapping swift orders. His subordinates raced to obey.

“We’ll work fast,” he promised Woodley. “If only the savages don’t—”

“Rogur is urging them on. It would be easier if I could get rid of him. Wait! You said there are no weapons. But when I came to Center, I had a gun. Where is it now?”

“Why, in Storeroom X-Three, I think.”

“I know where it is.” Woodley turned to Sharn. “Get to safety. Take Janet with you. The central towers will probably be the last to go.”

She met his eyes gravely.

“Good luck . . . my dear.”

He kissed her for the first time, perhaps, he thought, for the last. Teeth clamped grimly together, he fled to the nearest pneumo-tube car.

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The savages had not yet reached that storage building, and it did not take long to find the weapon. Woodley examined it hurriedly. It seemed in workable shape. But only two bullets remained, no more. And Rogur had a submachine-gun.

But Rogur had to be stopped. Without leadership, perhaps the savages might hesitate for a little while. Meanwhile the skilled technicians of Center would be working desperately to repair the ray projector.

Woodley took a car to the city wall. The sound of rising tumult was all around him. The savages looted and fed greedily, trampling down the gardens, smashing, blindly destroying. More than one enemy rose up to block his way, but Woodley did not waste bullets. His hard, strong body was a match for any savage. He used the gun as a club, knocking his opponents into insensibility. He did not wish to kill.

There was only one whom he wished to destroy. That was Rogur. Killing the senile, ruthless scientist was a necessary task.

He saw Rogur at last, on the opposite side of the water-filled moat, standing on a little knoll and driving the savages on. For nearly a mile about Center a surging mob of half-naked men drove toward the city. They poured across the bridges, swam the moat, remorselessly driven by hunger, the only impulse they knew. In the city was food. For the sake of food they would be unable to replace, a blind horde had come to destroy the only light in a dark world.

If that light went out, it would be Judgment Night!

Outside the city, the savages were less formidable somehow. They pushed on in the bright moonlight. Their only thought was to reach the city, to enter it. They ignored Woodley as he sprang out on one of the bridges and battled against the flood of humanity. He held his gun ready, but he did not have to use it. There was only the ever-present danger of being pushed off the bridge into the water by the insensate mob.

Would the gun work? Woodley had already fired one bullet from it, but he remembered Rogur's words. Few weapons could be used after a century and a half. The two remaining bullets might be duds. There was only one way to find out.

Almost at the end of the great bridge Woodley paused, seeing Rogur clearly in the bright moonlight. He lifted his gun, changed his mind and drove on again. He dared not risk his two bullets unnecessarily.

Rogur had not yet glimpsed him. The strong, young figure towered above the horde like an evil god, the dark face alight with an exalted sort of triumph. He held the submachine-gun loosely in one hand.

Without quite knowing how he got there, Woodley was only twenty feet from Rogur, at the foot of the knoll. He stood alone. The savages swirled like water about the hillock and left a small bare space beyond it. Woodley lifted his gun.

Rogur saw him, flung the machine-gun into position. But he would have cut down his own men with a stream of slugs. He dropped the machine-gun, whipped out a revolver. He and Woodley fired simultaneously.

The dark figure on the knoll staggered back, clutching at its side. Woodley heard Rogur's bullet whistle past his head. He took steady aim once more. He had merely wounded the scientist, he knew. That was apparent when Rogur again lifted his weapon.

Neither man fired. A high-pitched, shrill humming shook the air. Ear-piercing and agonizing it rang out for an instant, seeming to disorganize the very atoms of Woodley's mind. He felt brief agony.

It passed. There was silence. The savage hordes were frozen motionless, as though turned into ice.

Then from them rose a cry in a woman's voice, frightened and hysterical. Other cries blended into it. Slowly the roar of innumerable voices thundered up against the sky.

But the voices were not inarticulate, not mindless!

The hedonists had succeeded. They had repaired the ray projector, turned it on—lifted the curse of immortality from all the Earth!

Dazed and uncomprehending, the mob surged back and forth. Those in the moat swam shoreward, helping others who suddenly found they could not swim. It was as though those who had been plunged into slumber on Judgment Day were abruptly awakened, to find themselves in a place they had never seen before. All over the world, Woodley knew, this strange awakening was happening.

He looked up at Rogur. The scientist stood motionless, the gun dangling forgotten from his hand. His gaze wandered out over the army he had raised. His eyes were blind and bright.

He saw doom, Woodley knew. The feeble, senile mind, which eventually had focused only upon the destruction of the hedonists, now saw even that plan fail. Roger Garth had wanted prestige, the recognition of mankind. Roger Garth had given up love to follow his doomed star. Roger Garth had almost destroyed the world!

The mob surged past, ignoring the figure on the knoll. Roger Garth was ignored—forgotten!

Only Woodley saw what happened then. Garth—no longer Rogur—stared uncomprehendingly at the gun in his hand. He lifted it to his temple.

The sound of the shot went unheard amid the tumult.

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It was hours later before Woodley and Sharn were alone and able to talk. In his suite they stood looking out at the trampled ruin of the garden.

“They’re beginning to understand,” Woodley said. “They’re not savages now, of course. Your people are explaining, taking care of them. They’ll go back to their wrecked cities and take up life where they left off.

“It will be hard at first,” Sharn murmured.

“Yes. But your people will help them, guide them till there’s some semblance of order. Mankind has intelligence again. And it will be easy to rebuild with the aid of your people. Some will remain here, isolated. But I think many will prefer to mingle with the world.”

Slow dawn was breaking over the eastern hills. Already vague figures were toiling up the slope. Sharn sighed.

“And our own future? Janet loves you, Kent.”

Woodley smiled.

“I got back my memories, all of them, when the ray was turned on a few hours ago. There was so much I had forgotten. Janet doesn’t love me, Sharn. She broke our engagement before the catastrophe, to marry someone else. My subconscious suppressed that memory till now. That was why I didn’t remember. I still thought I loved Janet, and didn’t realize it when she became only a symbol to me.”

“She married someone else! Who was her husband?”

“An aviator. He was one of those who attacked the city. Janet’s with him now. They’ll be happy together.”

Woodley’s eyes met Sharn’s. There was nothing more to say. All that remained was an unsaid message that was as old as mankind, but it was enough. . . .

[The end of *The Land of Time to Come* by Henry Kuttner]