

A detailed illustration of a medieval-style castle with multiple towers and conical roofs, situated on a desolate, reddish-orange landscape. The castle's windows and battlements are illuminated from within, casting a warm glow. In the sky, a large, bright orange sun with visible solar flares dominates the left side, while a smaller, dark planet orbits nearby. On the right, a large, pale planet with prominent rings is visible against a deep blue and purple twilight sky. The overall scene is a blend of fantasy and science fiction.

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THE WIZARD OF VENUS

Edgar Rice Burroughs

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EDGAR RICE BURROUGHS



The Wizard of Venus by Edgar Rice Burroughs.

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Foreword

I often recall my introduction to Carson Napier. “If a female figure in a white shroud enters your bedchamber at midnight on the thirteenth day of this month, answer this letter; otherwise, do not.” That was the beginning of his letter to me—the letter that was almost consigned to a waste-basket.

Three days later, on the thirteenth, a female figure in a white shroud did enter my bedchamber at midnight. It was thus that Carson Napier convinced himself that he and I were in psychological accord and that I was the man through which his interplanetary wanderings might be transmitted.

After we had met in person, he explained to me how he had acquired this mystical power by means of which he could project whatever visions he wished to whatever distance and cause another to see them. It is by this thing that he learned from the old East Indian, Chand Kabi, that he has been able to transmit to me not only the story of his adventures upon Venus but permit me to witness many of them as truly as though I were present at his side upon The Shepherd Star.

I have often wondered why he uses this power so infrequently to meet the emergencies which so often confront him. In this, the latest story of his adventures that I have received, he has.

Honolulu

October 7, 1941

Edgar Rice Burroughs

One

I believe that it was Roy Chapman Andrews who said that adventures were the result of incompetence and inefficiency, or words to that effect. If that be so, I must be the prize incompetent of two worlds; for I am always encountering the most amazing adventures.

It seems to me that I always plan intelligently, sometimes over meticulously; and then up jumps the Devil and everything goes haywire. However, in all fairness, I must admit that it is usually my fault and attributable to a definite temerariousness which is characteristic of me. I am rash. I take chances. I know that that is stupid. The thing that reflects most discredit upon my intelligence is the fact that oftentimes I know the thing I am about to do is stupid, and yet I go ahead and do it. I gamble with Death; my life is the stake. But I have a grand time, and so far I have always beaten Death to the draw.

The misadventure which altered the direction of flight of my rocket ship, so that I landed on Venus instead of Mars, was the result of a minor miscalculation by one of America's most famous astronomers whose figures were checked and rechecked by several of his equally erudite fellows, as well as by myself. I feel that there was no lack of intelligence, no stupidity here; yet the result was a sequence of adventures such as probably never have befallen any other man.

I shall leave it to whoever may chance to read of this, my latest adventure, as to how much of chance and how much of stupidity were responsible for it. You are the judge. Arrange your reading lamp a little to the left of and just behind your favorite chair, and scan the evidence.

I knew Ero Shan in Havatoo, that model city beside the River of Death. He was my best friend there. He helped me build the first aeroplane to fly the empty skies of Venus. Duare called it an anotar, or bird-ship; and in it she and I escaped from Havatoo after the miscarriage of justice which had condemned her to death.

The next time I saw Ero Shan he was hanging on a wall in the museum of natural history in the city of Voo-ad, paralyzed from the neck down. Duare and I were hanging beside him in the same condition. He told me that he, with the assistance of some of the best scientific minds in Havatoo, had succeeded in building another anotar and that during a trial flight he had encountered the same terrific storm that had blown Duare and me thousands of miles off our course, with the result that he had been compelled to make a forced landing near Voo-ad, where he had ended up as an exhibit for hundreds of amoeba people to gawp at daily.

When we escaped, we took Ero Shan with us; and after a series of harrowing adventures we reached Sanara, the capital of Korva, which is a country on the continent of Anlap. Korva is the only country on Venus that Duare and I can call our own. I had fought for it against the blood-mad Zanies. I had saved the life of the little daughter of the present jong, or emperor, my good friend Taman; and because of these things he had adopted me as his son.

I am, therefore, Tanjong of Korva; and when Duare and I returned to Sanara after more than a year's absence, we received, both figuratively and literally, a royal welcome; for they had long since given up all hope of ever seeing us again.

We were banquetted and feted for days; and, that the people might see us and welcome us home, we toured the city in a royal howdah on the back of a gorgeously trapped gantor, one of those leviathan beasts of burden whose size might dwarf the mammoth or the mastodon.

Two hundred of these great beasts, bearing nobles and warriors, formed our cortege. At sight of us the people seemed to go mad with joy, attesting our popularity and the beauty of Duare.

At last we had a home, and we were home. We looked forward to long years of peace and happiness. No more travel, no more adventures for us! We were through. I didn't know whether crown princes like to wear carpet slippers and sit with their feet on a desk and smoke a pipe and read of an evening, but that is what I wanted to do. You shall see how I did it.

Two

I had promised Ero Shan that I would design and help him build an anotar in which he could fly back to Havatoo; and as Taman wished me to supervise the building of some for the Korvan army, we had two under construction at the same time.

While this work was in progress I designed and had fabricated an entirely new type of parachute which opened instantaneously and descended very slowly. It could also be guided by flaps which opened and closed holes in the fabric. Tests eventually demonstrated that it could be used safely at an altitude of only two hundred feet.

I might note here, parenthetically, that I was working on an even more efficient safety device at the time that Fate decreed new and unwelcome adventures for me; thus terminating my experiments. The fuel used in the silent motor of my anotar I have described several times before in recounting former adventures. It consists of a substance known as *lor*, which contains an element called *yor-san* and another element, *vik-ro*, the action of which upon *yor-san* results in absolute annihilation of the *lor*. To give you an idea of what this means in terms of heat generation, and therefore power, let me remind you that if coal could be absolutely annihilated it would release eighteen thousand million times more energy than by ordinary combustion.

Thinking therefore in terms of heat rather than power, I designed a small balloon gas bag of tarel, that incredibly strong fabric woven from the web of the targo, which was to be carried, collapsed, in a small container from which it could be shot by a powerful spring. Simultaneously, an infinitesimal piece of *lor* was to be annihilated, instantaneously generating sufficient heat to inflate the balloon, and continuing to generate such heat for a considerable period of time.

Thus, the airman compelled to bail out could be sustained in the air for a great length of time, or, by means of a rip cord, descend gradually to the ground. I was greatly disappointed that I could not have completed my experimental ballochute, as I called it.

But to get back to my narrative. As soon as the first anotar was completed I gave it a gruelling test. It was a sweet ship; but as I had incorporated some new ideas in its design, we felt it advisable to give it a cross-country test before Ero Shan set out on the long flight to Havatoo. Here is where either Fate or stupidity took a hand in shaping my destiny. This time I am going to give myself the benefit of the doubt and call it Fate.

We provisioned the ship for a long cruise, said our goodbys, and took off early one morning. I knew that Duare didn't want me to go by the expression in her eyes and the way she clung to me. I promised her that I would be back in not more than three days; and with her kisses still warm upon my lips, I climbed into the forward cockpit with Ero Shan and took off.

I had never flown very far west over Anlap, and as that part of the continent has never been thoroughly explored I decided to cruise in that direction and have a look at it. Sanara is at the extreme eastern end of Anlap, which, according to Amtorian maps, extends in a westerly direction for about three thousand miles. But as Amtorian maps are based upon an erroneous conception of the shape of the planet, I was sure that the distance was nearer six thousand miles than three thousand. Barring accidents, I felt that we should make the round trip in something like twenty-five hours flying at full speed; but as I wished to map the country roughly, we would have to fly much slower on the way out. However, I felt that three days would give us ample time. It would also be an adequate test flight for the anotar.

We passed over some very beautiful country the first day, and came down for the night in the center of a vast plain upon which there was no sign of human habitation and therefore no likelihood of our being attacked during the night. However, we took turns keeping watch.

When we awoke, the inner cloud envelope hung much lower than I had ever before seen it; and it was billowing up and down. I had never before seen it so agitated. However, we took off and continued on toward the west with a ceiling of about two thousand feet.

We had not flown far before I noticed that our compass was behaving most erratically. Though I knew that we were still flying due west, because of landmarks I had noted on our map the evening before, the compass indicated that we were flying south; and presently it gave up the ghost entirely, the needle swinging back and forth, sometimes a full three hundred and sixty degrees. And to make matters worse, the inner cloud envelope was dropping lower and lower. In less than half an hour our ceiling had fallen from two thousand to a thousand feet.

"This," I said to Ero Shan, "is the end of our test flight. I am going to turn back. We've mapped the country well enough to fly back to Sanara without any compass, but I certainly won't take the risk of flying on any farther with those clouds dropping lower and lower all the time and with no compass to guide us if they should eventually envelop us."

"You're absolutely right," agreed Ero Shan. "Look at 'em now. They've dropped to within five hundred feet in the last fifteen minutes."

"I'm going to land and wait it out as soon as we get beyond this forest," I said.

We were flying over a considerable area of forest land where a forced landing would have meant a crackup, which, if we survived it, would mean a long walk of between five and six thousand miles back to Sanara through a savage wilderness inhabited by terrible beasts and, perhaps, even more terrible men. It was something we couldn't afford to risk. We must cross that forest before the clouds enveloped us.

With throttle wide we raced above that vast expanse of heliotrope and lavender foliage which, like a beautiful mantle of flowers across a casket, hid death beneath. And the clouds were settling lower and lower.

I estimated the height of the trees at about a hundred feet; and now, above the trees, we had a ceiling of about fifty feet. The forest stretched on interminably before us as far as the eye could reach. On the way out we had crossed this forest in fifteen minutes; so I realized that, flying without benefit of compass, our course was not due east and that we were probably now flying the long axis of the forest, either north or south. The indecision and suspense were maddening. I have seldom if ever felt so helpless. Here was a situation in which no amount of efficiency or intelligence could prevail against the blind, insensate forces of nature. I wished that Roy Chapman Andrews were there to tell me what to do.

"Here she comes!" exclaimed Ero Shan, as the clouds billowed down ahead of us to merge with the pastels of the tree tops, cutting our visibility to zero.

I said nothing. There was nothing to say, as I glanced back and saw the clouds settling rapidly behind us shutting off our vision in all directions; but I pulled the stick back and zoomed into that semi-liquid chaos. At fifteen thousand feet I felt that we would be safely above the giant forests that are occasionally found on Venus as well as above most of the mountain ranges. We would have, at least, time in which to think and plan.

Now I was flying blind, without a compass, over unknown terrain; than which there can be nothing more baffling to the human mind and ingenuity.

I turned to Ero Shan. "Bail out, if you wish," I said.

"Are you going to?" he asked.

"No," I replied. "Even if we landed without spraining an ankle, or breaking a leg, or getting killed, the chances of our ever reaching Sanara would be practically nil. The anotar is our only hope of salvation. I shall stick with it. I shall either live with it, or die with it."

"I think it will be the latter," said Ero Shan, with a grim laugh, "but I'd rather take that chance with you than the other; though if you had elected to bail out I'd have gone with you."

Three

If Fate had been unkind to me in some respects, she had certainly not in the matter of a companion in misery. You'd have to scour two worlds to find a finer chap or a more loyal friend than Ero Shan, soldier-biologist of Havatoo. Soldier-biologist! In Amtorian it is Korgan Sentar, and it is a title of high distinction.

We climbed rapidly, and at fifteen thousand feet we emerged into clear air with horizontal visibility limited only by the curve of the planet. Now we were between the inner and outer cloud envelopes. It was infinitely lighter and brighter here, but the air was hot and sticky. I knew that at night it would be very dark and cold, for I had dropped down through it that night that I had bailed out of my rocket ship before it crashed. What an experience that had been!

I hadn't the remotest idea of the direction in which I was flying, but I had the satisfaction of knowing that I could see mountains before I crashed into them. I flew on, hoping that there might come a break in the lower cloud envelope eventually that would permit me to come down again. I voiced this hope to Ero Shan.

"Such a thing might happen once or twice in a lifetime," he replied. "I imagine that the chances that it would happen to us right when we needed it are about one to several billion."

"Well, I can always hope," I said. "I'm something of an optimist." How much of an optimist I am, you may readily judge when I admit that I have been hopefully waiting for years for seven spades, vulnerable, doubled, and redoubled. I might also add that at such a time my partner and I have one game to our opponents' none, we having previously set them nineteen hundred; and are playing for a cent a point—notwithstanding the fact that I never play for more than a tenth. That, my friends, is optimism.

"Keep on hoping," urged Ero Shan; "it doesn't cost anything, and it's an excellent tonic for one's morale. Lovely scenery here," he added.

"Ever been here before?" I asked.

"No; nor anyone else."

"I have. It hasn't changed at all. There has been very little building activity since I passed through."

Ero Shan grinned; then he pointed ahead. "Look!" he said.

I had already seen. The inner cloud envelope was billowing up, gray and menacing. I nosed up to keep above it, and the first thing I knew the outer envelope billowed down and engulfed us. The two envelopes had met and merged.

What has taken such a short time to narrate really encompassed hours of flying. We might be thousands of miles from where we took off, or we might have been constantly circling and right back where we started from.

"How about bailing out now?" I asked. "It is your last chance."

"Why is it?"

"Because I am going down. The inner envelope has evidently risen: we have just seen it come up: the chances are that we have plenty of ceiling below it. If we hit a mountain, we die: if we stay here, we die."

“If we don’t hit a mountain, we live to die some other day,” cracked Ero Shan.

“Quite right,” I agreed. “I am going down.”

“I am going with you.”

I came down in a long, slow glide—very slow: I was taking no unnecessary chances. Eleven thousand: ten thousand: nine thousand. I imagine that our visibility was something like a hundred feet, and at nine thousand I saw a jagged mountain peak looming dead ahead! I banked, and how I banked!

Ero Shan whistled. “If your landing gear hadn’t been retracted it would have scraped that mountain,” he said.

“It was retracted.” I felt as though my voice was pale: that had been a close call!

Now, in a new direction, I glided so slowly that most of the time I was almost on the point of stalling. Eight thousand feet: seven thousand. Six thousand: and Ero Shan and I both exclaimed in unison. Below us were hills and trees and rivers and—life!

The sudden reaction after that long nervous strain left us both mute for a time. It was Ero Shan who broke the silence. “That doesn’t look much like any country I’ve seen in Korva,” he said.

“Certainly not like anything I’ve seen near Sanara or Amtor and with which I am very familiar,” I agreed, “nor is it like anything we flew over coming out.”

“It is beautiful,” said Ero Shan.

“Even Oklahoma would be beautiful after what we’ve been through,” I remarked.

“I have never been to Oklahoma,” said Ero Shan.

“Let’s drop down and have a closer look,” I suggested.

It was a hilly country, cut by deep valleys and river gorges, a well watered country lush with vegetation; but it seemed uninhabited. However, we cruised around looking for a human being. I wanted to find one who was alone; so that we could come down and question him in safety. We had to learn where we were before we could make any plans for returning to Sanara.

Presently Ero Shan pointed and said, “There’s a building.”

It stood beside a river on a little knoll, and as I circled low above it I was astonished to see that it closely resembled the medieval castles of the Middle Ages in Europe. At least there were the outer walls with towers at the corners, the ballium, and the central building or donjon. There was no moat, and therefore no drawbridge, but the general effect was quite medieval.

While it was apparently in a fair state of repair, we saw no evidence of life anywhere about it; and so we flew on up the valley, where we presently discovered another similar edifice. This, too, seemed deserted.

“I wonder what’s become of all the people,” said Ero Shan.

“They may have gone to a clam bake,” I suggested.

It so often happens that Ero Shan doesn’t know what I am talking about that he had long since given up trying to find out. He says that what I refer to as a sense of humor would be diagnosed as psychopathy in Havatoo and lead to immediate destruction for the welfare of society in general and future generations in particular.

As we flew on up the valley we at last saw men. There were many of them, and they were armed. They appeared to be guarding a large herd of very small zaldars, about the size of earthly pigs. As the men were numerous and armed, we did not land; but continued on in our search for a single individual.

“Those zaldars looked very good,” said Ero Shan. “I wouldn’t mind having a nice zaldar roast right now.”

“Nor I,” I said. “It is remarkable how good such silly looking creatures can taste.”

I really think that an Amtorian zaldar is about the silliest looking creature I ever saw. It has a large, foolish looking head, with big, oval eyes, and two long, pointed ears that stand perpetually erect as though the creature were always listening. It has no neck, and its body is all rounded curves: ideal for beef. Its hind legs resemble in shape those of a bear: its front legs are similar to an elephant’s, though, of course, on a much smaller scale. Along its spine rises a single row of bristles. It has no tail and no neck, and from its snout depends a long tassel of hair. Its upper jaw is equipped with broad, shovel-like teeth, which protrude beyond its short, tiny lower jaw. Its skin is covered with short hair of a neutral mauve color with large patches of violet, which, especially when it is lying down, make it almost invisible against the pastel shades of Amtorian scenery. When it grazes it drops down on its knees and scrapes up the turf with its shovel-like teeth, and then draws it into its mouth with a broad tongue. It also has to kneel down when it drinks, because of its lack of a neck. There are two species of these animals: the large beef animal that is fully as large as a Hereford; and the smaller piglike creature, the specific name for which is neozaldar, or small zaldar.

The warriors guarding the herd over which we had passed had looked up at us in astonishment, and had fitted arrows to their bows as we came close. However, they had loosed not a single shaft. I imagine that the anotar looked altogether too formidable to them to risk antagonizing. What food for speculation and conversation we must have brought them! Even to the fourth and fifth generations their descendants will have to listen to it.

As we flew on I discovered a third castle perched on an eminence overlooking a river; and, as a forlorn hope, I circled slowly above it. Presently four people came out into the ballium and looked up at us. There were two men and two women. That didn’t look very formidable; so I dropped down closer, whereupon one of the men shot an arrow at us; and he and one of the women screamed insults at us.

About all I could make out was, “Go away, Morgas, or we’ll kill you!” Realizing that it was a case of mistaken identity and knowing that I must in some way learn where we were, I decided to make an effort to allay their fears and win their confidence sufficiently to obtain the information we had to have if we were ever to reach Sanara.

I turned the controls over to Ero Shan; and, taking writing materials from one of the compartments, wrote a note explaining that we were strangers in their country, that we were lost, and that all we wished was information that would help us find our way home.

One of the men picked up the note after we had dropped it in the ballium; and I saw him read it carefully, after which he handed it to one of the women. The other man and woman pressed close and read it over her shoulder; then they all discussed it for several minutes while we circled around above them. Presently the older man beckoned us to come closer, at the same time making the sign of peace.

When we were as close to them as I could get without hitting the towers and they had examined us as closely as possible, one of them said, “It is not Morgas; they are indeed

strangers,” and then the older man said, “You may come down. We will not harm you, if you come in peace.”

There was a small level piece of ground outside the castle walls, with barely space to land; but I made it, and a moment later Ero Shan and I stood outside the castle gate. We had stood there several minutes when a voice spoke to us from above. Looking up, we saw a man leaning from the window embrasure of one of the small towers that flanked the gateway.

“Who are you?” he demanded, “and from where do you come?”

“This is Korgan Sentar Ero Shan of Havatoo,” I replied; “and I am Carson of Venus, Tanjong of Korva.”

“You are sure you are not wizards?” he asked.

“Absolutely not,” I assured him; but his question made me wonder if we had, by ill chance, landed at an insane asylum.

“What is that thing that you came in?”

“An anotar.”

“If you are not wizards, how do you keep it up in the air? Why does it not fall? Is it alive?”

“It is not alive,” I told him, “and it is only the pressure of the air on the under surface of the wings that keeps it up while it is in motion. If the motor that drives it should stop, it would have to come down. There is nothing mysterious about it at all.”

“You do not look like wizards,” he said, and then he drew back into the embrasure and disappeared.

We waited some more; and then the castle gate swung open, and as we looked in we saw fully fifty warriors waiting to receive us. It didn’t look so good, and I hesitated.

“Don’t be afraid,” urged the man, who had come down from the tower. “If you are not wizards, and if you come in peace, you will not be harmed. My retainers are here only to protect us in the event you are not what you claim to be.”

Four

Well, that seemed fair enough; so we went in. I was so anxious to know where we were that I didn't wait for any proper introductions, but asked immediately what country we were in.

"This is Gavo," replied the man.

"Is it Anlap?" I asked.

"It is in Donuk," he replied.

Donuk! Now, I had seen Donuk on Amtorian maps; and as near as I could recall it was at least ten thousand miles from Sanara and almost due west of Anlap. According to the maps, there was a considerable body of water separating the two land masses: one of the numerous great oceans of Venus. I was glad we hadn't bailed out, for the chances were that most of the time we had been flying above that ocean.

The older man touched my arm; and, indicating the older of the women, said, "This is Noola, my woman."

Noola was a wild eyed looking dame with dishevelled hair and a haunted expression. Suspicion was writ large on her countenance as she appraised us. She said nothing. The man then introduced his son, Endar, and his son's woman, Yonda, a pretty girl with frightened eyes.

"And I am Tovar," said the older man, in concluding the introductions: "I am a togan of the house of Pandar."

Togan is something of a title of nobility, possibly analogous to baron. The literal translation of the word is high man. Tovar's real title, as head of the house of Pandar, was Vootogan, or First Togan: his son's title was Klootogan, or Second Togan. Noola's title was Vootoganja, and Yonda's, Klootogania. We had landed among the nobility.

Tovar invited us into the castle, where, he said, he had an excellent map of Amtor that might aid us in returning to Sanara. While I had maps in the anotar; yet, as usual, I was always glad to examine new maps in the hope that I might eventually find one that was not almost entirely useless.

The interior of the main building, or donjon, was a bare and cheerless place. There were a few grass mats scattered about the floor, a long table, some wooden benches, and a low divan covered with the pelts of animals. On the walls were a few pictures, bows, quivers of arrows, spears, and swords. The arrangement of the weapons suggested that they were not there for ornamentation; but that this main hall of the castle was, in effect, an armory.

Noola sat down on a bench and glowered at us while Tovar brought out the map and spread it on the table. The map was no better than any of the others I had seen. While I was examining it, he summoned servants and ordered food brought. Endar and Yonda sat silently staring at us. The whole atmosphere of the place was one of constraint, suspicion, fear. The fear in Yonda's eyes was like something tangible that reached out and touched one's heart. Even Tovar, the only one of this strange quartet who had made any gesture of hospitality, was obviously nervous and ill at ease. He watched us constantly, and after he had put the map away, he sat on a bench and stared at us. No one said anything.

I could see Ero Shan fidgetting, and I knew that the situation was getting under his skin just as it was under mine. I tried to think of something to say to start a general conversation and

relieve the tension; so I told them about our experience with the merging of the two cloud envelopes, and asked them if the clouds had come down to the ground in Gavo.

Tovar said, "No." That was his contribution to the conversation.

Yonda said, "The clouds came very low."

Noola, who up to this point had not entered the conversation, said, "Shut up, you fool!" At that, the conversation languished and expired. Strangely enough, it was Noola who revived it. "Nothing *human* ever went up into the clouds," she said. "A *wizard* might, but nothing *human*."

Once again there was a long silence, while the servants brought food and placed it on the table. Tovar said, "Come and eat."

The food was not very good: mostly vegetables, a little fruit, and some very tough meat which I thought I recognized as zorat meat. The zorat is the Amtorian horse.

I enjoy a little conversation with my meals; so I tried again. "Who is this Morgas to whom you referred?" I asked.

They appeared a little surprised by the question. Noola "Humphed!" and then elaborated upon this brilliant bit of repartee by adding: "As though *you* don't know!"

"I am sorry to reveal my ignorance," I said, "but I really haven't the slightest idea who Morgas is. You must remember that I have never been to your country."

"Humph!" said Noola.

Tovar cleared his throat and looked apologetically at Noola. "Morgas is a wizard," he said. "He turns people into zaldars." The others nodded their heads. Now I knew that they were all crazy; but after dinner they served in large tumblers something very similar to cognac, and I partially revised my estimate of them; at least I held my verdict in abeyance for the time being.

As I sipped my brandy, I sauntered around the hall looking at the pictures on the walls. They seemed to be chiefly family portraits, most of them very poorly executed. Noola was there, dour and sinister. So were the others, and there must have been fully a hundred that were probably of ancestors, for many of them were faded with age. I came upon one, though, that immediately arrested my attention: it was that of a very beautiful girl, and it was beautifully executed.

I could not restrain an exclamation of admiration. "How lovely!" I said.

"That is our daughter, Vanaja," said Tovar; and at the mention of her name, both he and Noola broke down and cried. Perhaps the cognac may have had something to do with this sudden access of sentiment: at least on Noola's part, for she had downed one entire tumblerful and started on the second.

"I am very sorry," I hastened to say. "I had no idea who she was, nor that she was dead."

"She is not dead," said Noola, between sobs. "Would you like to meet her?" Whatever wizards there might have been about the place must have been contained in that brandy. While it hadn't turned Noola into a zaldar, it had certainly wrought an amazing change in her: her tone was almost cordial.

I saw that they would like to have me meet Vanaja; so, not wishing to offend them, I said that I should be delighted. After all, I reflected, it was not going to be much of an ordeal to meet such a gorgeous creature.

“Come with us,” said Noola; “we will take you to Vanaja’s apartments.”

She led the way out of the castle into the ballium, and we followed. Ero Shan, who was walking at my side, said, “Be careful, Carson! Remember Duare!” Then he poked me in the ribs and grinned.

“And you’d better keep your mind on Nalte,” I counselled him.

“I shall try to,” he replied, “but you’ll have to admit that if Vanaja is half as lovely as her portrait it will be difficult for one to keep one’s mind on anything but Vanaja.”

Noola led us to the rear of the castle, stopping at last in a far corner of the enclosure before a pen in which a small zaldar, about the size of a pig, was down on its knees gobbling a lavender mash from a trough.

The zaldar didn’t even glance at us, but went on gobbling.

“This is Vanaja,” said Noola. “Vanaja, this is Carson of Venus and Ero Shan of Havatoo.”

“She is very sad,” said Noola, sobbing. “She is so sad that she refuses to talk.”

“How distressing!” I exclaimed, recalling that it is always best to humor those poor unfortunates who are the victims of mental disorders. “I presume that this is the work of Morgas, the scoundrel.”

“Yes,” said Torvar; “Morgas did it. She refused to be his mate; so he stole her, turned her into a zaldar, and returned her to us.”

Sadly we turned away and started back toward the castle. “Could you keep your mind on Nalte?” I asked Ero Shan.

Ero Shan ignored my question, and turned to Tovar. “Tell us something about this Morgas,” he said.

“Certainly,” replied our host. “He is a powerful vootogan, whose stronghold is farther up the valley. He is a man of ill repute and ill deeds. He has powers that are beyond those of human men: he is a wizard. He has many warriors, and with them he attacked the other three castles in this part of the valley. Mine is impregnable; and we repulsed him, but he took the other two. Those of their inmates whom he did not kill, he took back to his own castle and turned into zaldars. If you would like to see his castle, I can show it to you from the south tower.”

I said that I would, and soon we were climbing the long spiral staircase that led to the summit of the south tower. Noola and the others accompanied us. Noola “Humphed” a couple of times on the way up; and when Tovar finally pointed out Morgas’s castle standing on an eminence and just visible far up the valley, she said, “As though *they* had never seen it before!” I sighed, for I knew that the effects of Noola’s brandy had worn off.

From the tower we could see a large herd of zaldars grazing beyond the river that flows below Tovar’s castle. They were guarded by a number of warriors. It was, doubtless, the same herd above which Ero Shan and I had flown.

Tovar said, “Do you see those zaldars?”

“They are not zaldars,” said Noola, “as he very well knows: they are members of the Tolan and Ladja families to whom the two castles farther down the valley belong.”

Tovar sighed. “Morgas turned them all into zaldars. We used to eat zaldars, but no more; we might be eating a friend or relative. Now we eat zorat meat—when we can get it. Very fine zaldars were raised in this valley: each family had its own herd, and we used to go down with our soldiers and steal the zaldars belonging to other families: it was excellent sport.

“As the best grazing is down at this end of the valley, Morgas used to send his herd down here; and he had a lot of them stolen; because the Tolans and the Ladjas or we Pandars would often join our forces and attack Morgas’s men and steal his zaldars: we all hated Morgas. Although the rest of us stole each other’s zaldars, we were good friends: our families visited back and forth and intermarried. Yonda is a Tolan and Noola is a Ladja.

“I’ll tell you, those were the good old days; but when Morgas started turning people into zaldars, there was no use going down and stealing them, for no one would eat them: no one wanted to take a chance that he might be eating a father, a cousin, or even a mother-in-law. But Morgas and his people eat them: they are cannibals.”

It was almost dark when we returned to the great hall of the castle. Noola sat on a bench watching us with those wild eyes of hers: it seemed quite evident that she was mad. I was sure that Tovar was unbalanced, too; although he was not quite as crazy as Noola. I was not so sure as to Endar and Yonda: they sat silent and morose, and I gathered the impression that they were afraid of the others—that Yonda, especially, was: she had that frightened look in her eyes, which I had noticed from the first.

I thoroughly wished myself out of there, and regretted that I had not found an excuse to take off before dark. Now, with a few feeble, flickering lights, the castle was an eerie place; the evening meal something that might have been lifted bodily from a murder mystery story: the mad hostess, eyeing us with suspicion and hate; the uneasy host; the silent, frightened young people; the servants, slinking silently and furtively in and out of the shadows, terror and hatred in their eyes.

All these things conjured thoughts of poison, and when I had an opportunity I cautioned Ero Shan. We were both careful not to take food unless it was contained in a common bowl from which the members of the family helped themselves, and even then we did not taste it until after some of them had. As a social event, the dinner was not a success.

Immediately after dinner I suggested that we would like to retire, as we had had a hard day and wished to get an early start in the morning. At that, Noola laughed: I think a writer of horror stories would have called it a hollow laugh. I don’t know what a hollow laugh is. I have never known. I should describe Noola’s laugh as a graveyard laugh; which doesn’t make much more sense than the other, but is more shivery.

Ero Shan and I had arisen, and now Tovar summoned a servant to show us to our room. We bade the family goodnight and started to follow the servant, and as we passed Yonda she arose and laid a hand on my arm.

“Carson of Venus,” she whispered, “be-” and then Noola darted forward and dragged her away.

“Fool!” she hissed at the girl. “Would you be next?”

I hesitated a moment; and then, with a shrug, I followed Ero Shan and the silent figure that preceded him into the shadows which the lighted taper that it carried seemed only to accentuate. I followed up creaking, rickety stairs to a balcony that encircled the great hall and into a room that opened onto the balcony.

Here, the servant lighted a small cresset and then almost ran from the room, his eyes popping with terror.

Five

“What do you make of it all?” demanded Ero Shan, when we were alone. “They all seem to be afraid of us.”

“Noola has gotten it into her mad mind that we are emissaries of Morgas, and she has evidently convinced the servants of this. Yonda doesn’t believe it, and Tovar isn’t sure: I don’t know about Endar. I think that Yonda is the only perfectly sane member of the household.

“It all reminds me,” I continued, “of a very old legend of the world of my birth. Among other things, it recounts the exploits of an old magician named Merlin, who could turn his enemies into members of the lower orders, such as pigs; just as Morgas is supposed to turn people into zaldars.

“Then there were a lot of brave knights who rode around the country rescuing beautiful damsels who were shut up in towers or had been turned into Poland China sows. There were Sir Galahad, Sir Gawain, Sir Lancelot, Sir Percival, and Sir Tristram, that I recall, who sallied forth on the slightest provocation or on none to rescue somebody; but right there the analogy ends, for there don’t seem to be any brave knights here to rescue the fair damsels.”

Ero Shan yawned. “*We* are here,” he said with a grin. “Now I am going to bed. I am very tired.”

The room in which we were seemed large because the faint light of the cresset, an emaciated, anaemic little light, lacked the stamina, or perhaps the fortitude, to travel outward to the four walls, which consequently seemed far away. There were two very low beds, a couple of benches, a chest of drawers: a poor room, poorly furnished: a dismal, gloomy room. But I went to bed in it and went to sleep almost immediately.

It must have been about midnight that I was awakened. In that dark room, it took me several seconds to orient myself: I couldn’t recall where I was nor interpret the creaking noise that I could plainly hear. Presently I heard whispering voices, and then gradually I came to full awakefulness and a realization of where I was: the voices were just outside our door.

I got up and lighted the cresset, and by that time Ero Shan was awake and sitting up in bed. “What is it?” he asked.

“They are outside our door,” I replied in a whisper. “I do not like it.”

We listened, and presently we heard footsteps moving away. Whoever had been out there must either have heard our voices or seen the light shining under the door.

“Let’s bolt the door,” said Ero Shan: “we shall sleep better.”

There was a heavy wooden bar with which the door could be secured, and I quickly dropped it into place. I don’t know why we hadn’t done so before we retired. Then I blew out the cresset and returned to bed. Now, with a sense of security, we both must have fallen asleep immediately.

The next thing I knew I had what seemed like a whole regiment of soldiers on top of me: my arms and legs were pinioned: I was helpless. Nevertheless, I struggled; but it didn’t get me anything but a punch on the jaw.

Pretty soon a light was made in the room, after which my antagonists bound my arms behind my back; then they got off of me, and I saw that Ero Shan had been similarly trussed up. About a dozen warriors and servants were in the room, and the four members of the family. Behind them I could see an open door: it was not the door I had so carefully bolted: it was another door in another part of the room: it had been hidden in the shadows.

“What is the meaning of this, Tovar?” I demanded.

It was Noola who answered my question. “I know you,” she cackled; “I have known you all along. You came to take us to Morgas in that magic ship that flies through the air: only a wizard could make such a ship as that.”

“Nonsense!” I said.

“No nonsense about it,” she retorted. “I had a vision: a woman without a head came and told me that Vanaja wished to tell me something; so I went out and had a long talk with Vanaja. She told me! She told me that you were the same men who stole her and took her to Morgas.”

Yonda had come over and was standing close to me. “I tried to warn you,” she whispered. “She is quite mad: you are in great danger.”

“If you wish to live,” cried Noola, “restore Vanaja; make her a human being again.”

“But I can’t,” I said; “I am no wizard.”

“Then die!” screamed Noola. “Take them out into the courtyard and kill them,” she ordered the warriors.

“That would be very dangerous,” said Yonda.

“Shut up, you fool!” shouted Noola.

“I will not shut up,” retorted Yonda. I had had no idea that the girl had so much spunk; she always looked so frightened. “I will not shut up; because what you wish to do would endanger my life as well as yours. If these men are indeed the agents of Morgas, Morgas will be avenged if they are harmed.”

“That’s right,” said Ender.

This made Noola pause and think. “Do you believe that, too?” she asked Tovar.

“There would be great danger in it,” he said. “I think that we should make them go away, but I do not think that we should kill them.”

Finally Noola gave in and ordered us expelled from the castle.

“Give us back our weapons and we will get into our anotar and fly away,” I said, “nor will we ever return.”

“You cannot have your weapons, with which you might kill us,” objected Noola; “nor can you have your foul, magic ship until Vanaja is restored to us.”

I tried to argue the point, but I got nowhere. “Very well,” I said, “if we have to leave it here, we’ll have to leave it; but you’re going to be very sorry that you didn’t let us take it away, for some day someone is going to touch it.” I stopped right there and let her guess.

“Well,” she inquired presently, “what if someone does touch it?”

“Oh, it won’t hurt the anotar any,” I assured her; “but whoever touches it will die.”

We were taken from the castle and started down the steep trail toward the valley, accompanied by admonitions never to return; but I had left a thought in every mind there that

it might be wise to give the anotar a wide berth. I hoped that they would believe me: and why not? People who would believe that human beings could be turned into zaldars, would believe anything.

As we groped our way down to the floor of the valley our situation seemed rather hopeless. At the edge of the river we sat down to discuss our problem and wait for daylight.

“You and I are in a fix, Ero Shan,” I said: “unarmed, friendless, and five thousand miles from Korva with no means of transportation across unknown and unmapped lands and at least one ocean.”

“Well,” he said, “what are we going to do about it?”

“The first, and as far as we are concerned, the only consideration is to get the anotar back.”

“Of course, but how?”

“Rescue Vanaja and return her to her parents.”

“Excellent, Sir Galahad,” he applauded with a grin; “but Vanaja is already in a pen behind their castle.”

“You don’t believe that, Sir Gawain, do you?” I demanded.

“Of course not, but where is she?”

“If she is alive, Morgas must have her; therefore we go to Morgas.”

“Can it be possible that insanity is contagious!” exclaimed Ero Shan. “If you are not crazy, just why would you contemplate placing yourself in the power of an insane criminal?”

“Because I do not think that Morgas is insane. As far as I have been able to judge, I should say that he is probably the only sane and intelligent person in the valley.”

“How do you arrive at such a conclusion as that?”

“It is quite simple,” I said. “The other three families were stealing Morgas’s zaldars. Morgas already had a reputation as a wizard; so, banking on that, he started this cock-and-bull story about turning their relatives into zaldars. Thereafter, no one would kill or eat a zaldar; so Morgas’s herds were safe and he was able also to take over the abandoned herds of the others.”

Ero Shan thought this over for a while, and at last he admitted that I might be right. “It’s worth trying,” he said, “for I can’t think of any other way in which we can get the anotar.”

“Let’s start then,” I said; “there’s no use waiting for daylight.”

Six

We followed the stream up the valley, and shortly after daybreak we arrived before the massive gates of Morgas's castle. It was a formidable pile, frowning down from an elevation. We could see no sign of life about it: no sentry appeared upon the barbican. It was like a house of the dead.

I picked up a rock and pounded on the gates, and then I called aloud. "He doesn't seem much afraid of an attack by enemies," remarked Ero Shan.

"That is probably because he has no enemies left to attack him," I suggested, as I continued to pound on the gates.

Presently a little wicket in the gate was opened and a pair of eyes looked out at us. "Who are you? and what do you want here?" demanded a surly voice.

"We are visitors from a far country," I replied, "come to pay our respects to Vootogan Morgas."

I saw the eyes looking past us. "Where are your warriors?" demanded the voice.

"We are alone: we come in peace upon a peaceful visit."

There was a pause, as though the voice were scratching its head in thought. "Wait here," it said, and slammed the wicket closed.

We waited fifteen minutes, during which men came onto the barbican above us and looked down at us and the wicket opened and closed several times and eyes stared at us; but no one spoke. Soon, however, the gates swung open; and an officer bade us enter. Behind, was a detachment of some twenty warriors.

"Vootogan Morgas will see you," said the officer. He was looking us over carefully. "You have no weapons?" he asked.

"None," I assured him.

"Then come with me."

The twenty warriors surrounded us as we crossed the ballium toward the donjon, a large circular building surrounded by a fosse in the bottom of which many sharpened stakes were embedded. To my amazement, I saw that the fosse was spanned by a drawbridge: Morgas was a jump ahead of his contemporaries.

We entered immediately into a large hall, at the far end of which a man was seated upon a very high dais. Warriors were banked behind him, and others were posted below the dais. In addition to these, there were probably a hundred people in the great hall: both men and women. I immediately looked for Vanaja, but I did not see her.

We were conducted to the foot of the steps leading up to the dais. The man, whom I assumed to be Morgas, looked us over carefully. He was a most unprepossessing person: his hair, growing low upon his forehead, stood up on end; the whites of his eyes showed all around the irises; and his eyes were set very close to his nose. His hands were extremely long fingered and slender: the kind of hands that, in a man, have always impressed me as being particularly revolting, almost obscene. His skin was an unhealthy white: it had a corpselike pallor. All in all, as you may have gathered, he was a most obnoxious appearing person.

The room was very quiet, there was not a sound, when suddenly he shouted, "Silence! I cannot endure this infernal noise. Chop off their heads! Chop off their heads! Then, perhaps, I shall have peace."

This was the first outward demonstration of his insanity that we had witnessed; though his appearance had immediately convinced me that he was a congenital maniac. The only reaction to his outburst was a babble of voices and stamping of feet.

"That is better," he shouted above the din; "now I can sleep. Put their heads back on again." His eyes, which had been wandering about the hall, now returned to us. "Who are you?" he demanded.

"These are the strangers from far countries who have come to visit you," explained the officer who accompanied us.

"I am Vootogan Morgas, the wizard of Gavo," said the man on the dais. "Who are you?"

"This is Korgan Sentar Ero Shan of Havatoo," I replied, indicating my companion; "and I am Carson of Venus, Tanjong of Korva."

"So you don't believe I'm a wizard, eh?" demanded Morgas, and before we could make any reply, he added, "Come up here, and I'll show you. Don't think I'm a wizard, eh! Don't think I'm a wizard, eh! Come up here! Come up here!"

It seemed wise to humor him: so we mounted the steps to the dais, where he was rummaging around in his pocket pouch for something. At last he found what he had been searching for, and withdrew a small nut, which he held up before us between a thumb and index finger.

"Here you see a small nut," he announced. "Here! take it; examine it."

We took it and examined it. "It is, indeed, a small nut," said Ero Shan.

Morgas snatched it away from him, palmed it, rubbed his hands together, made some passes in the air, and then opened his hands. The nut had disappeared.

"Extraordinary!" I exclaimed.

Morgas seemed vastly pleased. "Have you ever before seen wizardry like that?" he asked.

I thought it best to assure him that I never had.

"You've seen nothing," he explained; then he approached Ero Shan and pretended to take the nut from one of his ears. The people in the hall gasped simultaneously. It was as spontaneous and unrehearsed as the drafting of a president for a third term.

"Amazing!" said Ero Shan.

After this Morgas did a few more parlor tricks of simple legerdemain. It was plain to see how he had commenced originally to get the idea that he was a wizard and to impress it on his simple and ignorant followers.

"Now," he said, at last, "I am going to show you something that will really take your breath away." He looked around the hall, and presently fastened his eyes on an individual at the side of the room. "You Ladjan," he shouted; "come here!" The man approached, fearfully, I thought. "This is one of the members of the Ladja family," Morgas explained to us. "I have turned him into a zaldar. You are a zaldar, aren't you?" he demanded of the man. The fellow nodded. "Then be a zaldar!" screamed Morgas, at which the poor creature went down on his hands and knees and scampered about the hall. "Feed!" shouted Morgas, and the man put his face close to the earth floor and pretended to scrape up turf with his upper teeth.

“Feed!” shouted Morgas. “I told you to feed: you are only pretending to feed. How do you expect to get fat enough to butcher, if you don’t eat anything? Eat!”

The unfortunate creature now dug at the hard packed earth of the dirt floor with his upper teeth, letting the dirt drop from his mouth immediately. That made Morgas furious. “Swallow it, zaldar!” he screamed; and the man, half choking, did as he was bid. “There!” exclaimed Morgas, triumphantly. “Now do you continue to deny that I am a wizard?”

“We have not denied it,” said Ero Shan.

“So! you call me a liar?” he demanded angrily.

I thought that we were in for it then; but his manner suddenly changed, as though he had entirely forgotten the imagined insult. “How did you get here to Gavo?” he asked in a quiet, rational tone.

“We flew in in an anotar,” I explained, “and came down to inquire where we were; because we were lost.”

“What is an anotar?” asked Morgas.

“A ship that flies in the air,” I replied.

“So they did not lie to me,” muttered the vootogan. “My herdsmen told me of the strange thing that flew through the air, and I thought they were lying. You know how it is with herdsmen. They all lie. Where is this anotar?”

“One of your enemies has it; and if we don’t get it back, he may use it to destroy you.”

“You mean Tovar? He is the only enemy I have left. How did he get the thing?”

I explained how we had been betrayed and overpowered. “So we came to you to enlist your aid in recovering our anotar.”

“Impossible,” said Morgas; “Tovar’s stronghold is impregnable. I have tried many times to take it.”

“With the anotar and our r-ray pistols it could be taken,” I assured him.

“What are r-ray pistols? Where are they? Let me see them.”

“They are weapons that kill from a great distance. Tovar has them now. If he learns how to use them and the anotar, he can fly over here and kill you all.”

Morgas shook his head. “No one can take Tovar’s stronghold,” he said.

“That won’t be necessary,” I explained. “We can get the anotar and the pistols back without risking a single life.”

“How?” he demanded.

“By letting us return Vanaja to her parents,” I said.

Morgas’s countenance clouded. “What do you know about Vanaja?” he demanded.

“Only what Tovar and his woman told us.”

“They already have her,” snapped Morgas. “She is a zaldar now. I sent her back to them a long time ago.”

“Such a good wizard as you should be able to turn a zaldar into Vanaja,” I suggested.

He looked at me narrowly. I think he suspected that I was spoofing him, but he came right back at me: “Bring Vanaja from Tovar’s stronghold and I will transform her into a girl again.” Then he stood up, yawned, and left the hall by a little doorway behind his throne.

Our interview with Morgas was ended.

Seven

Ero Shan and I left the Great Hall with Fadan, the officer who had brought us in. “What now?” I asked him.

Fadan shrugged. “He didn’t order you destroyed or imprisoned,” he said; “so I guess that you’re safe for the time being. I’ll find a place for you to sleep, and you can eat with the officers. If I were you, I’d keep out of sight as much as possible. Our vootogan is a little forgetful. If he doesn’t see you, he may forget all about you; and those he forgets are the safest.”

After Fadan had shown us our quarters, he left us to our own devices after warning us again not to enter the main building, where we would be most likely to encounter Morgas. “He seldom comes outside any more,” he added; “so you are reasonably safe out here. And keep out of the garden,” he concluded. “No one is allowed in there.”

“Well,” I said to Ero Shan when we were alone, “are we prisoners or guests?”

“I think we could walk out almost any night we chose to,” he replied: “you must have noticed that the gate was not manned when we arrived.”

“Yes, but I don’t want to walk out as long as there is a chance that we may find Vanaja and take her with us. Without her we don’t get the anotar back.”

“Do you think she’s here?”

“I don’t know, but I am inclined to believe that she is. Morgas may be crazy enough to believe his own foolish claims to wizardry, but I doubt if he really believes that he turned Vanaja into a zaldar. He just doesn’t want to give her up: that’s all, and if she’s as good looking as that picture we saw, I don’t blame him.”

“Perhaps she’s dead,” suggested Ero Shan.

“We’ll stick around until we find out.”

Morgas’s castle was large, and in addition to the donjon there were a number of smaller buildings within the enclosure which must have comprised fully twenty acres. Here, in addition to his retainers and their families, were a couple of hundred prisoners, held by their fear of Morgas.

I came to the conclusion that the fellow had some hypnotic powers, but I doubted that his victims really thought that they were zaldars. They were just fearful of what their maniac master would do to them if they didn’t play his game. He used these captives to cultivate his fields farther up the valley above the castle and to tend the herds of zaldars after they were brought in from pasture by the herdsmen. They all pretended to think that these zaldars were human beings transformed by Morgas’s wizardry. Consequently they would not eat them. This left all the zaldar steaks for Morgas’s people.

I tried to talk with several of these prisoners, both Tolans and Ladjas; but they seemed to fear me, probably because I was a stranger. They seemed hopelessly apathetic, accepting the fallacy that they were zaldars either because of fear of Morgas, or, as I came to believe, through self-hypnotism resulting from long suggestion. Some of them insisted that because they were zaldars they could not understand me; one or two even grunted like zaldars.

I discovered a couple who were willing to talk a little; but when I asked them about Vanaja they closed up like clams, their suspicions immediately aroused. Ero Shan and I came to the conclusion that there was some sort of special mystery surrounding the fate of Vanaja, and that made me all the more anxious to know the truth; aside from the possibility of using her to get the anotar back, I was commencing to take a definite personal interest in this girl whom I had never seen.

Ero Shan and I were constantly wandering around the enclosure, and though we saw many women among the prisoners there was none who even vaguely resembled the picture we had seen of Vanaja. After a week of this, we had about come to the conclusion that if Vanaja were one of Morgas's prisoners, he kept her shut up in the donjon—a really logical conclusion.

We saw Fadan nearly every day, and he continued to be very friendly; but when, one day, I asked him point blank what had become of Vanaja, he shook his head angrily. "Ill considered curiosity is sometimes fatal," he snapped: "the vootogan has told you where Vanaja is; if I were you I wouldn't inquire any further."

The conversation folded its tent like an Arab. I was squelched. Perhaps I shouldn't have brought the subject up in the presence of others. It was at the noon meal, and there were a number of officers present. After we had quit the mess hall, Fadan said, "And don't forget what I told you about the garden. Keep out of it!"

"That," I said to Ero Shan after Fadan had left us, "was not said for nothing."

"Of course it wasn't," he agreed. "It was said to keep us out of the garden and out of trouble."

"I am not so sure. Anyway, it has had the opposite effect: I am going into the garden."

"Once you told me of a very wise man of that world from which you came, who said, in effect, that only the stupid have adventures."

"Quite right," I said: "I am stupid."

"So am I," said Ero Shan. "I am going with you."

"No. I am going alone. There is no reason why both of us should get into trouble. If I get in and you don't you might be able to help me; if we both get in there will be no one to help us."

Ero Shan had to agree that I was right, and so I approached the garden gate alone. The garden is bounded on three sides by a high wall and on the fourth by the donjon. The gate was not latched, and I walked in and closed it after me. Mechanical locks are not needed in Morgas's stronghold. When he says keep out, that puts as effective a lock on a gate or door as any locksmith could contrive. Fear was the lock to which stupidity was the key. But was my act stupid? Only time would tell.

The garden was quite beautiful in a bizarre sort of way. It was such a garden as might have been conceived only by a mad mind, yet it was beautiful because of the natural beauty of flowers and trees and shrubs, which defy man to render them unbeautiful. Its walks were laid out in maze-like confusion, and I had gone only a short distance along them when I realized that I might have difficulty in finding my way out again; yet I ventured on, though I had no Ariadne to give me a clew of thread to guide me from the labyrinth. The only goddess upon whom I might rely was Lady Luck.

However, my power of orientation is excellent; and I felt that I might depend upon that by carefully noting every turn that I made. I soon had my mind filled with turns, all of which I would have to mentally reverse on my return trip to the gate.

Presently I came to an open space about fifty by a hundred feet in extent, and here I saw a woman walking with bowed head. Her back was toward me; and I could not see her face, but I immediately jumped to the conclusion that this was Vanaja; probably because I was in the garden for the express purpose of finding Vanaja.

I approached her slowly and when I was a few paces from her, I said in a low tone, "Jodades!" It is a common Amtorian greeting. The girl stopped and turned about, and the instant that I saw her face I recognized it by the picture I had seen of the girl in the great hall in the stronghold of Tovar. This was Vanaja without a doubt; but the picture I had seen of her seemed now an out and out libel, so far more beautiful was the original.

"Jodades, Vanaja," I said.

She shook her head. "I am not Vanaja," she said; "I am only a poor little zaldar." She looked at me dumbly and then turned and kept right on walking.

I overtook her and laid my hand gently on her arm. "Wait, Vanaja," I said; "I want to talk with you."

She turned again and looked at me. Her eyes were dull and uncomprehending. Morgas may be a wizard, I thought, or he may not; but he is most certainly a hypnotist of the first order. "I am not Vanaja," she repeated; "I am only a poor little zaldar."

"I have come from your home, Vanaja; I have seen Tovar and Noola and Endar and Yonda. They grieve for you and want you back."

"I am a zaldar," she said.

That thought was so thoroughly implanted in her mind that it was evidently her stock answer to nearly all questions or suggestions. I racked my brain in search of some avenue to her comprehension; and suddenly there flashed to my mind some of the teachings of Chand Kabi, the old East Indian mystic who had taught me so many things from his great store of occultism while, as a boy, I was tutored by him while my father was stationed in India.

I have practiced these powers but seldom, for I have the Anglo-Saxon's feeling of repugnance for anything that smacks of the black art; nor was I at all certain that I could accomplish anything with them in this instance in which I would have to combat the hypnosis which held the girl's mind in thrall; but I could try.

I led her to a bench at one side of the open space and bade her be seated. She seemed quite tractable, which in itself was a good omen. I sat down beside her and concentrated my thoughts upon that which I was determined she should see. I could feel the sweat standing upon my forehead as I strained to compel her, and presently the dullness passed from her eyes and she looked up wonderingly, her gaze apparently fixed upon something across the little clearing.

"Father!" she exclaimed, and rose and ran forward. She threw her arms around empty air, but I knew that she was in the embrace of the figment I had conjured from my brain. She talked excitedly for a moment, and then she said goodbye tearfully and returned to the bench.

"You were right," she said: "I am Vanaja. Tovar, my father, has assured me of it. I wish that he might have remained, but he could not. However, he told me to trust you and to do whatever you said."

"And you wish to return to your home?"

"Yes; oh, how much I wish to! But how?"

I had a plan, and I was just about to explain it to her when half a dozen men entered the clearing. At their head was Morgas!

Eight

The Wizard of Venus came storming across the clearing with his warriors at his heels. I could see that he was furious. "What are you doing here?" he demanded.

"Admiring one of your zaldars," I replied.

He gave me a skeptical look; and then a nasty, sneering smile replaced it. "So you admire zaldars, do you? That is well, for you are about to become a zaldar;" then he fixed me with his terrible, maniacal eyes and made passes at me with his long slender fingers. "You are a zaldar, you are a zaldar," he kept repeating over and over again.

I waited to become a zaldar, but nothing happened.

His burning eyes bored into mine. I thought of Chand Kabi, and I wondered if this man did have sufficient power to make me believe that I was a zaldar. Chand Kabi could have done it, but he never used his great powers other than beneficently.

I pitted my mind against the mind of Morgas. At first I wondered, but presently I realized that I was immune to his most malevolent machinations. I did not become a zaldar.

"Now you are a zaldar," he said at last. "Get down on your hands and knees and feed!"

Then I made a mistake: I laughed at him. It wouldn't have done me any harm to admit that I was a zaldar in which event I should probably have been turned out to pasture and had something of freedom; but that laugh angered him, and he had the warriors drag me away and put me in a cell beneath the donjon, and for good measure he had Ero Shan thrown in with me.

I told Ero Shan of all that had occurred in the garden. He was much interested in this strange power that I had exercised over Vanaja, and I told him a great deal about Chand Kabi and my life in India. I told him of how my father used to go out tiger hunting on elephants, and I had to describe tigers and elephants to him. Ero Shan's imagination was intrigued. He said that he would like to go to India some day; which was, of course, quite impossible. And presently we fell asleep on the hard, stone floor of our cell.

We were there some time. A jailer came every day and brought us food. He had a most unprepossessing face—a face that one could never forget. It was burned indelibly into my consciousness.

Every day Morgas came and told us we were zaldars. He glared and made his passes, and at the end he would ask, "Now you are zaldars, aren't you?"

"No," I said, "but you are a jackass."

"What is a jackass?" he demanded.

"You," I told him.

He smiled appreciatively. "I suppose a jackass is a great person in your country," he said.

"Many of them are in high places," I assured him.

"But you are only zaldars," he insisted. "I know that you are just lying to me;" then he went away.

That evening, when our jailer came, he said, "What fine zaldars! You are zaldars, aren't you, or do my eyes deceive me?"

“Perhaps they deceive you,” I told him, “but mine don’t deceive me. I know that you are not a zaldar.”

“Of course I’m not,” he said.

“Then what are you?” I asked.

“What am I? A human being, of course.”

“With that face? It is impossible.”

“What’s the matter with my face?” he demanded angrily.

“Everything.”

He went out and slammed the door and turned the great key in the great lock almost venomously.

“Why do you always try to antagonize them?” asked Ero Shan.

“I suppose because I am bored. While they annoy me, they offer the only momentary escape from my boredom.”

“What is a jackass?” he asked. “I know that it must be something obnoxious, or you would not have told Morgas that he was one.”

“On the contrary, the jackass is a really excellent fellow, a quite remarkable fellow. Creatures of far less intelligence have come to use him to—what should I say? personify? foolish stupidity. I am sorry that I called Morgas a jackass. I apologize to all jackasses.”

“You are a remarkable fellow,” said Ero Shan.

“Neatly put, Ero Shan.”

“I was just thinking that maybe you were a bit stupid in not using those marvelous powers you had from your Chand Kabi to frighten Morgas into releasing us.”

“There is an idea,” I said. “It might be worth experimenting with, but I rather doubt that it will accomplish anything.”

“Try it tonight,” he said; “people are more easily frightened at night.”

“Very well,” I agreed: “tonight I shall frighten Morgas out of seven years’ growth—maybe.”

“If you really made Vanaja think that she saw her father, you should be able to make Morgas think that he sees whatever you wish him to see.”

“Vanaja went and embraced her father and talked to him. It was a most touching reunion.”

“If I didn’t know you so well,” said Ero Shan, “I should be sure that you were lying. When are you going to start in on Morgas? That will prove to me whether—”

“I am a liar or a jackass or an A-1 Merlin,” I concluded for him.

“You are Galahad,” he said, grinning.

The great hall of the donjon was directly above our cell, and at night we could hear people walking around, and we could hear voices and, occasionally, laughter—not much real laughter; but, late at night, drunken laughter. I told Ero Shan that I would wait until things had quieted down and I was reasonably certain that Morgas had gone to bed before I started in on my necromancy.

It seemed to me that they caroused later than usual that night, but at last things quieted down. I waited about half an hour, during which time Ero Shan and I talked over old times in Havatoo; and then I told him that I was going to start in on Morgas.

“Just keep perfectly quiet,” I said, “so as not to distract me, and we shall see what we shall see. It will probably be nothing.”

“I shall then be greatly disappointed and lose all faith in you,” he threatened me.

So I went to work on Vootogan Morgas, the Wizard of Venus. Although I didn’t move, I worked until I was in a lather of perspiration. It is remarkable how similar the effects of sustained, highly concentrated mental activity are to those of physical exertion; but then, perhaps, they are due only to nervous reaction.

Ero Shan sat perfectly quiet. It was almost as though he did not even breathe. The minutes passed—tense minutes—and nothing happened. I fought to keep thoughts of failure from my mind. A quarter of an hour, and the silence of the tomb still reigned within the donjon. A half hour, but I would not give up.

Then suddenly we heard footsteps on the floor above us: the footsteps of running men and the shouts of men. I relaxed and wiped the perspiration from my forehead. “I think it worked,” I said to Ero Shan.

“Something is happening up there,” he replied. “I wonder what will happen next.”

“They will be down here in a moment, very hot and bothered,” I prophesied.

My prophesy was correct. A dozen armed men were presently at the door of our cell. It was unlocked and thrown open, and a torch was stuck in. Three warriors followed the torch inside and the others crowded in the doorway. When their eyes fell on me, surprise was written on their faces.

“What were you doing in Morgas’s sleeping chamber?” one of them demanded.

“Doesn’t Morgas know?” I countered.

“How did you get there? How did you get out of this cell? How did you get back into it?” The questions might have been shot from a tommy gun.

“Morgas, being a wizard also, should know that, too,” I told them.

They looked at me fearfully; they were worried and frightened as they talked among themselves: “The door is heavily padlocked,” said one, “and the padlock has not been tampered with.”

“It is incredible,” said another.

“Perhaps he does not realize that he is now a zaldar,” suggested a third.

“Could it be,” suggested a fourth in a whisper, “that the vootogan drank too much wine this evening?”

“That does not account for it,” said the first warrior; “because the woman who was in the vootogan’s sleeping chamber saw what he saw, and she had not been drinking at all.”

So! I had wrought better than I knew, or else the woman had lied. However, the result was the same.

“Do not leave your cell again,” ordered one of the warriors. “There will be armed men at every door, and if you come they will kill you;” then they went away, but before they closed the door I saw the ugly face of the jailer peering over their shoulders.

“Tell Morgas,” I shouted, “that if he will release me and my companion and the girl, Vanaja, I will bother him no more.”

They did not answer.

“Do you think he will?” asked Ero Shan.

“I think he will,” I replied, “but he will not know it.”

“What do you mean?”

“Wait and see.”

Nine

“You are really a most remarkable fellow,” said Ero Shan, “but I am commencing to be a little bit afraid of you,” he added, laughing.

“You needn’t be,” I assured him, “for Chand Kabi did not teach me how to harm people physically with these occult powers. He, himself, knew how: he could have caused people at the farthest ends of the Earth to die had he chosen to do so, but he never did. Dear old Chand Kabi never harmed anyone.”

“Were I you I should experiment,” said Ero Shan. “It might prove useful sometimes to be able to kill one’s enemies at a distance. Why, you could win a whole war all by yourself.”

“I am content with what I am already able to accomplish,” I assured him; “and now if you will devote yourself to meditation for a while, I shall go to work on our fine-feathered friend again.”

I did. Presently we heard a great commotion overhead. Thinly a voice reached us, screaming for help; and we distinctly heard the words, “He is chasing me! He is chasing me!” There was a lot of running, and we could hear other sounds as of furniture being overturned; then, as I relaxed, things quieted down. I heard Ero Shan chuckle.

Once more the warriors came. They peeked in fearfully. “You are here?” one demanded.

“Do you not see me?”

“But I just saw you up above chasing the vootogan. Why did you chase him?”

“Just for fun,” I said. “It becomes very tiresome sitting here in this little cell.”

“You had better put your mind on other things,” snapped the warrior, “for tomorrow you die. Morgas has had enough of you.”

“Well,” remarked Ero Shan after they had left, “it was fun while it lasted; but you seem to have been blown up by your own bomb. What are you going to put your mind on now?”

“On Vanaja and the jailer. This may not be so successful as the other experiment, but I can only try. In the meantime, you may devote yourself to silent prayer.”

Ero Shan lapsed into silence, and I went to work on Vanaja and the jailer. I find it more conducive to success to have an accurate picture of my subject’s face in my mind while I work on him. Nebulously hopeful, I had fixed the unattractive features of the jailer in my memory. They were easy to recall, but Vanaja’s were easier and much more pleasant.

An hour had elapsed since I had had my last fun with Morgas, and the castle had quieted down again. It was so quiet that I could hear the approach of sandalled feet along the corridor outside our cell.

“He comes!” I said to Ero Shan.

“Who?” he asked.

“The jailer with the face of a Gila monster.”

The key turned in the lock and the door swung in. The underdone face of the jailer was poked in. He held a torch above his head.

“I am still here,” I said. “If anyone has been chasing Morgas again, it was not I.”

“No one has been chasing Morgas again,” said the jailer, “but I think he has gone crazy.”

“How so?”

“He has given orders that you are to be set free. If I were Morgas, I would have your head lopped off. You are a very dangerous person.”

“You are not Morgas,” I reminded him. “What else did the vootogan order?” I knew, as I had given the orders myself; but I wanted to make certain that the fellow remembered them correctly.

“He ordered me to see that you and your companion and the woman, Vanaja, were put out of the castle immediately. The woman is waiting for you by the garden gate.”

“But suppose we don’t wish to go?” I asked.

He looked at me in surprise, and so did Ero Shan. I was not trying to be funny. I just wished to fix his determination to get us out of there. I knew his type of mind: a small mind which a little authority inflated. Nothing now could prevail upon him to let us remain.

“I have my orders,” he said, “I know what to do. If you do not go peaceably, you will be thrown out.”

“In that case we will go peaceably,” I said.

The jailer threw the door wide and stepped back. “Come!” he ordered.

We followed him up and out into the ballium. Vanaja was waiting at the garden gate. “You are going home,” I said to her.

“Yes,” she replied; “I know. Morgas came and told me.” That would have surprised Morgas.

We followed the jailer to the main gates, which he unbolted and threw open. There were no guards there, as I had guessed there would not be, for there had been none the morning that we had arrived at the stronghold. Morgas was very sure of his power.

“Now get out,” snapped the jailer, “and I hope that I never see your face again.”

“I have the same feeling about yours,” I assured him.

We three stepped out into the night and the gates closed behind us. We were free!

“It doesn’t seem possible,” said Vanaja. “I cannot yet understand why Morgas liberated us.”

“He will regret it in the morning,” I said, “and we shall be pursued.” Knowing that Morgas knew nothing of all this, I knew that in the morning he would be furious when he discovered the trick that had been played on him.

“I should not like to be in that jailer’s boots tomorrow morning,” said Ero Shan.

“Why?” asked Vanaja. “He was only carrying out Morgas’s orders.”

Ero Shan did not reply, and I thought it better not to explain. Had I, Vanaja would doubtless have immediately jumped to the conclusion that I was a wizard; and I had good reason to suspect that wizards might not be overly popular with the Pandar family.

As we proceeded down the valley in the direction of Tovar’s castle, a change came over Vanaja which increased apparently in direct ratio to the distance we covered from the stronghold of Morgas. It was as though the spell of his influence over her became more attenuated the farther she was removed from him. Presently she was chatting gaily of her past experiences and trying to visualize the surprise of her people when they should see her returned safely to them.

“They may have difficulty in believing that it is you,” I said.

“Why?” she asked. “I do not believe that I have changed that much since Morgas took me away.”

“It is not that,” I said. “They think you are still at home.”

“How could they?”

“They have a zaldar in a pen behind the castle, which Morgas has convinced them is you. It may be a shock to your mother to discover that she has been lavishing affection upon a zaldar in the belief that it was her daughter. Your mother is not entirely—well.”

“What is the matter with her?” demanded the girl. “She had never been ill a day in her life.”

“Lest you be shocked when you meet her, I might as well tell you now that her mind has evidently been affected—quite possibly by grief over your abduction and transformation into a zaldar. She really believes that zaldar is you.”

“That is not strange,” replied Vanaja. “Morgas has made hundreds of people believe the same thing. I believed it myself for a long time. Morgas can make people believe anything he wants them to believe.”

“He should be destroyed,” said Ero Shan.

“Yes,” said Vanaja. “He is a terrible man. Frightful things happen in his castle. He has convinced himself that he has changed human beings into zaldars. Now he cannot tell them apart; so often men or women are butchered and eaten; because Morgas insists that they are zaldars. Nearly everyone there is so confused and terrified that they eat the flesh in the hope that Morgas may be right. Yes, he should be destroyed; but that is impossible. Morgas cannot be killed. He will live forever. He has said so.”

There was a finality in her tone which discouraged argument. It was evident that the spell which Morgas had cast upon the girl’s mind and imagination had not been entirely cast out. It probably never would be while Morgas lived.

Our progress was very slow as we groped our way over the unfamiliar terrain through the darkness; and dawn caught us still far from Tovar’s castle, for we had become lost during the night and gone in a wrong direction. We found that we had crossed the valley; and feeling certain that we should be pursued, we dared not risk going on by daylight.

We finally decided to hide during the day in one of the numerous little canyons which cut the hills along the valley’s border; and after investigating a couple of them, we found one in which there was a little stream of pure water and a cave which we felt would afford a safe hiding place.

The canyon was a garden spot of trees, bushes, and flowers. We located and gathered a variety of edible nuts, fruits, and berries which we carried to our cave; then we settled down to pass away the daylight hours until darkness came again and we could continue our flight.

For safety’s sake, Ero Shan and I took turns keeping watch toward the mouth of the canyon. From the location of our cave, we could see up the valley a short distance in the direction of Morgas’s stronghold; and toward the middle of the morning Ero Shan announced that a party of mounted men was approaching.

Vanaja and I joined him, keeping ourselves well hidden behind a large boulder. Coming down the valley were some twenty-five or thirty warriors mounted on zorats, those amazing creatures that serve as horses upon Venus.

“There’s Morgas!” exclaimed Vanaja. “See? He’s riding at their head.”

It was indeed Morgas. I smiled to think of the fool’s errand he had embarked upon and how chagrined he would be could he ever know how close he had been to those he sought.

I smiled too soon. Just opposite the mouth of our canyon, just when I thought that they would ride by, Morgas turned his mount directly toward us; and the whole party rode straight in our direction.

Ten

I am never certain that I shall obtain results from the exercise of that strange power which Chand Kabi taught me. Sometimes it fails. This may be due partially to the fact that I use it so seldom and partially to my own lack of confidence in myself. Chand Kabi used to say to me, "You must *know*, my son, for knowledge is power." He meant that I must *know* that I should succeed whenever I brought into play the mysterious mental force that he had taught me to develop.

As I saw Morgas and his followers approaching our hiding place, I cautioned Ero Shan and Vanaja to crouch down out of sight and remain very quiet; then I mobilized all of my mental resources and directed them upon Morgas. I seemed to know that they were speeding across the lessening distance that separated me from the object of my attack, concentrating into a pinpoint of irresistible suggestive force which bred into the ganglia of his brain that motivated his ocular perceptions and his power of volition.

I did not question that I should succeed in influencing him. I knew! But Morgas continued to ride toward us. He was so close now that I could see his eyes. I was certain that he could not see me, as I had adopted an age-old camouflage of the Indians of that far Southwest of my native land. Only my head from my eyes up were above the boulder which hid the rest of my body, and this was hidden from Morgas by the leafy branch of a shrub which I held before it.

Had I permitted myself to doubt, I should have been quite certain by this time that I had failed and that, unarmed and helpless as we were, we should soon be recaptured. And just then Morgas turned his head and looked back. Instantly he drew rein (a figure of speech, as zorats are ridden without bridles, being guided and controlled by pulling upon their long, pendulous ears).

"There he goes!" shouted Morgas, pointing down the valley.

Wheeling his mount, he dashed away, followed by his entire band. I had won! The reaction left me a trifle limp, for it had been a close call.

"They have gone," I said to Ero Shan and Vanaja; "but I think that we should go farther into the hills, as they may return." I did not know how much longer I could lure Morgas upon that wild goose chase in which he thought that he saw me racing fleetly ahead of him. I grinned as I thought of his consternation as he contemplated my speed, which was swifter than that of his fastest zorat.

"What did he mean when he said, 'There he goes!'" asked Vanaja.

"He must have seen something," I said. "Perhaps he thought that he saw me." Ero Shan smiled.

We went far up the canyon and climbed to the summit of a wooded hill from which we had a good view of the valley from perfect concealment. We could see Morgas and his men racing madly in pursuit of a figment.

"What are they chasing?" demanded Vanaja. "I see nothing."

I shook my head. "Perhaps not," I said, "but Morgas sees something." Then I thought that I would have a little fun at the expense of the great wizard. I caused the figment to zig-zag. Morgas and his men chased wildly this way and that. I led them up a rocky hill, from the summit of which the figment leaped over a cliff to the floor of the valley. The pursuers

wheeled and dashed down again the way they had come. They found the figment sitting on a rock, waiting for them. I wish that I might have heard Morgas's remarks, but he was too far away.

As the party galloped toward the figment, it leaped to its feet and started across the valley, straight toward the river. I could see Morgas waving his arms and I knew that he was shouting commands to his men, for they suddenly spread out fan-wise in a pincer movement that would have the figment surrounded when it reached the river, which was, at this point, a couple of hundred feet wide and both deep and swift.

They were closing in on the figment when it leaped nimbly across the river! I guess that was too much for Morgas. He sat there with his men for a few minutes, staring at the quarry which had seated itself upon another rock across the river from them; then he turned and rode slowly back up the valley toward his stronghold. We watched them as they passed below our hill, puzzled and dejected.

"I don't understand it," said Vanaja.

"Neither does Morgas," said Ero Shan.

Although our recent pursuers no longer were a menace, we could not continue on toward the castle of Tovar, as Morgas's herdsmen were grazing their zaldars slowly down the valley. It would be necessary now to wait until night had fallen.

The remainder of the day dragged slowly for us. Late in the afternoon, we saw the herds returning up the valley; but we decided to wait until darkness had fallen before we ventured down from our hiding place. During the day, the spell of Morgas appeared to have entirely dissipated from Vanaja's mind. She became a normal and exceedingly likable girl, keenly interested in all that went on and quite courageous—a far cry from the fear ridden creature I had first met in the garden of Morgas. She continued to speculate with growing enthusiasm and excitement upon the reactions of her family when they realized that she was actually restored to them safe and unharmed. I, too, speculated upon this. I wondered what the reaction of the mad Noola would be. We had not long to wait.

Immediately darkness had fallen, we set out again for the castle of the Pandars. Within an hour we were pounding upon the massive gates. Presently a voice from within demanded to know who we were and what we wanted.

"Galahad returns with the beauteous princess," Ero Shan whispered to me.

"Together with Sir Gawain, from the grim castle of the mad wizard of Amtor," I added; and then, aloud: "Ero Shan and Carson of Venus have brought Vanaja home."

A head was protruding from an embrasure in one of the towers and a voice demanded: "What's that you say? Vanaja is there?" It was Tovar.

Then another voice and another head. "They lie! It is the wizards! Kill them!" That was Noola.

"It is I, mother," called Vanaja. "These two have brought me back safely from the castle of Morgas."

Noola's mad laughter rang out above us. "You think that you can deceive Noola, do you? Well, you can't. I know where Vanaja is—she's safe in her apartments behind the castle. I have talked with her within the hour. Get out, all of you, before I have you killed."

"But, mother, I am Vanaja," insisted the girl. "Let someone you trust come down and see me."

“I trust no one,” screamed the old woman. “Everyone is against me.”

“Then come down yourself and talk with me.”

Again that mad laughter. “You think to lure me into the clutches of those two wizards, but I am too smart for all of you. Now get out of here!”

We could now hear Tovar, Endar, and Yonda arguing and pleading with the woman, but she evidently remained adamant. Vanaja appealed to her father, but he replied that he must abide by the counsel of his wife. It was commencing to look hopeless.

“How about Chand Kabi?” asked Ero Shan in a low voice. “He worked perfectly on Morgas; why not on the old woman?”

“I can try,” I said. I concentrated upon the mad mind of Noola, and presently an amazing thing happened. That which I had willed Noola alone to hear, I heard myself. Every one there heard it. A thin, squeaky voice from the ballium beyond the wall called, “Noola! Noola!”

Those in the tower turned away from the embrasure. I knew that they had heard that voice and had crossed to the opposite side of the tower to look down into the ballium. Then I heard Noola’s voice: “Why, Vanaja! How did you get out of your apartments, you naughty girl?”

In a squeaky grunt the answer came faintly to us: “I am not Vanaja, you old fool. I am only a zaldar that Morgas sent here in order to deceive you. Vanaja is outside, waiting to get in.”

“Marvelous!” whispered Ero Shan. “I am beginning to be afraid of you, myself.”

The “old fool” got Noola. She was furious. “How dare you, you dirty little runt!” she screamed. “I have known all along that you were only a zaldar.” I had been certain that Noola would not relish being called an old fool.

It was only a matter of seconds before the gates were swung open and Vanaja was in the arms of her mother. With recognition and the return of her daughter, Noola’s madness seemed to have passed. She was even quite cordial to Ero Shan and me. Tovar, Endar, and Yonda were delighted with the turn of events: two of their loved ones had been returned to them whole and unharmed.

The greetings over, Noola spoke to one of the servants, all of whom had gathered in the ballium by this time. “Find that zaldar,” she said, “and return the thing to its pen.” Then we all went into the great hall, we to recount, they to listen to, our adventures.

In a few minutes a servant entered. “I could find the zaldar nowhere in the ballium,” he said; “so I looked in its pen, and there it was, fast asleep. The gate was still locked and the pen was nowhere broken down.”

“That is very strange,” said Noola. “We all distinctly saw her standing in the ballium and heard her speak to me, the impudent creature.”

“It is very strange,” I said.

“If she is going to act like that, I shall be afraid to have her around,” said Noola.

“Then why not have her butchered and eat her?” I suggested.

“That is an excellent idea,” said Tovar.

“Tomorrow we shall have zaldar steaks once more,” exclaimed Noola. The spell of Morgas had been broken—at least so far as the Pandar family was concerned. But there were those hundreds of other poor souls locked in his prison fortress, constantly filled with terror as they awaited death. There were the deserted castles and the stolen herds. There were these and

other wrongs that cried out for vengeance. And above all was the horrid fear that lay upon this entire beautiful valley, which should have been a scene of peace and happiness.

Once again Ero Shan and I were escorted to the room in which we had spent a night of danger. Now we anticipated sleep in this same room without a single thought of apprehension. As we were preparing for bed, Ero Shan said, "I have been thinking, Carson."

"Yes?" I inquired, sleepily courteous.

"Yes," he said. "I have been thinking that in rescuing one girl and uniting one family we have made but a beginning. Would Sir Galahad and Sir Gawain have stopped there? Didn't you tell me that the Knights of the Round Table dedicated their lives to the righting of the wrongs of the oppressed?"

"Well, something like that, I guess. But if I recall my reading correctly, a victim of oppression usually had to have considerable pulchritude to arouse the chivalry of the noble knights."

"Joking aside," insisted Ero Shan, "don't you think we should do something to rid the people of this valley of the terror that hangs over them?"

"I suppose you're right," I agreed, stifling a yawn.

"This is the first time that I ever knew you to be callous to the suffering of others," said Ero Shan a little curtly.

"I'm not," I assured him; "I'm just plain fagged out. Tomorrow morning, Sir Gawain and Sir Galahad will sally forth to right the wrongs of the whole world. Good night!"

Ero Shan mumbled something that sounded very much like words that might have been translated into English: Go to hell!

Eleven

Early the following morning I was up and out going over the anotar. There was no indication that it had been touched during our absence. Evidently my warning had been sufficient to protect it. I removed the compass and disassembled it, and much to my relief discovered that only a slight adjustment was necessary to correct the fault that had already cost us so dearly and might yet cost us infinitely more.

While I was replacing it, Ero Shan joined me. "I suppose that we shall be off for Sanara immediately after breakfast," he said.

"What?" I exclaimed, "and leave this valley in the clutches of a madman? Ero Shan! I am surprised."

He looked at me a moment, questioningly; then he shook his head. "I suppose that is an example of Earthly humor," he said. "You took not the slightest interest in the valley last night."

"On the contrary, I lay awake for fully an hour trying to plan how best to free those people whom Morgas has imprisoned."

"And you have a plan?"

"It would be simple to fly over and shoot up the place," I said, "but that wouldn't be sporting. It would come pretty close to being plain murder, as they have no firearms."

"And so—?" asked Ero Shan.

"Frankly, I have no plan that suits me. About the only thing I could think of was the spreading of a little propaganda among them to impress upon them the fact that Morgas is a fake; that he can't turn anyone into a zaldar and that what they should do is rise against him. After all, the people he has harmed are the ones who should bring him to justice. We could drop notes among them carrying our message. We could even fly low enough to exhort them by word of mouth."

"It will do no harm to try it," said Ero Shan; so we set to work writing out our messages, a task in which we enlisted the services of the Pandar family and several of their servants.

Shortly after noon we took off in the anotar and flew up the valley to Morgas's castle. As we circled above it, we could plainly see the consternation we were causing. Ero Shan was at the controls, and as he circled low above the castle grounds, I dropped out our messages, each weighted with a small stone.

I saw a few brave souls venture from the hiding into which they had gone, pick up the notes, and scurry back again. Later, some of them came out and waved to us: the propaganda was having effect. Morgas emerged from the castle and made passes at us with his long fingers, evidently attempting to hypnotize us; but he remained close to the doorway. I think that he must have been rather fearful of the huge bird circling above him.

Well he might have been, for the antics of the anotar were awe inspiring. As we had flown up the valley from Tovar's castle, we had tossed about considerably, as the air was rough. Now, over Morgas's stronghold, it was even worse. A down draft would drop us suddenly perhaps a hundred feet, and we would bring up with a thud, as though we had struck a solid substance; then we might as suddenly shoot upward. Nor was the ship often on an even keel. Ero Shan was constantly fighting with the controls.

I was leaning far out over the side of the cockpit, dropping our propaganda leaflets and watching Morgas when Ero Shan banked steeply. Simultaneously a freak gust of Wind caught the ship and turned it over. I fell out. I had neglected fastening my safety belt.

I have encountered numerous embarrassing moments in my career. This was another. Furthermore, in addition to being embarrassing, it might easily prove fatal. I was falling into the stronghold of a madman who probably felt that he had every reason to destroy me.

As I pulled the rip cord of my chute and floated gently down, I tried to plan against the immediate future after I had alighted. It was wasted effort. I could think of nothing, off hand, that might release me from my predicament. I didn't even have my r-ray pistol: it was in the plane with the rest of our armament.

Looking up, I could see Ero Shan circling overhead. I knew that he must be frantic. But what could he do? Glancing down, I saw that Morgas's retainers were scattering to give me a wide berth when I landed. Morgas was staying close to the doorway. It was evident that they held me in considerable respect. This gave me a ray of hope. Perhaps I could bluff my way out. Then a plan occurred to me. It did not seem like a very good plan, but it was the best that I could think of.

I alighted without falling. I was glad of that, as rolling about in the dirt would have added no dignity to my appearance and might have reduced my prestige. Peeking from doorways, windows, and around the corners of buildings and outhouses were the men and women whom Morgas held in thrall and his warriors. Unimpressed were a few score zaldars in the ballium. I was the only person there who knew whether they were zaldars or human beings. Even Morgas did not know, so thoroughly was his insane mind convinced of his power to transform human beings into beasts.

Turning my back on Morgas, I addressed the prisoners, or at least those whom I could see. "You may come out of hiding," I said. "You need fear nothing from me. I have come to release you. My power is greater than that of Morgas. That you must realize, for how else would I have dared come down alone and unarmed into his stronghold?"

This seemed to make an impression on them, for slowly they came out and approached me. Morgas shouted to his warriors to seize me, but they hesitated; then I turned upon him.

"You are an impostor," I accused. "You have no power, otherwise you would not call upon your warriors to seize an unarmed man. If you are not an impostor, meet me singlehanded."

"You are a zaldar!" he screamed at me, making his ridiculous passes.

"I am not a zaldar," I said, "nor are any of these people zaldars, nor are any of the zaldars human beings. You have not changed me into a zaldar; you cannot change me into a zaldar; you have never changed anyone into a zaldar." I shouted this so that all might hear. "Now I am going to show you what a real wizard can do." I concentrated my thoughts upon Morgas. "Look!" I shouted, pointing at the real zaldars which were huddled in a bunch at one side of the ballium. "These poor creatures which you have used to destroy others will now destroy you."

Presently Morgas's eyes went wide in horror. I alone knew what he thought he was seeing—that which I was willing him to see. He was seeing those harmless, foolish little zaldars gradually being metamorphosed before his eyes into fierce and hideous tharbans—the ferocious lions of Amtor. He saw them creep toward him with bared fangs; then he turned and fled. Into his castle he dashed; but always behind him, roaring and growling, he heard the terrible beasts.

They followed him up the circular stairway to the top of the castle's loftiest tower. I saw him emerge at the very summit. He turned and looked back, screaming in terror; then he ran to the edge and jumped.

His broken body lay at my feet. I turned to the prisoners and the warriors. "There is your wizard," I said. "He will never harm another. The prisoners are now free to return to their homes; and if any of Morgas's warriors think to prevent, I will cause his death as I have caused the death of his master."

It was then that I learned that the warriors hated Morgas as much as his prisoners had, and were only held in his service by fear. One and all, they gathered about me; and there were tears in the eyes of many as they thanked me. I looked aloft for Ero Shan, but the anotar was nowhere in sight. I feared that he might have lost control and crashed; so I hastened toward the gates that I might go out and search for him.

As the gates swung open, Ero Shan leaped through the gateway, an r-ray pistol in each hand. He had made a landing near the castle and was coming to my rescue.

That night at Tovar's castle we had delicious zaldar steaks for dinner, and the next morning we took off for Sanara.

THE END

I'm Julie, the woman who runs [Global Grey](#) - the website where this ebook was published. These are my own formatted editions, and I hope you enjoyed reading this particular one.

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