Elaine’s Tomb

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CHAPTER I

An Idea of Charles Weber’s

There was often more life in the small colleges of my early life than people generally realized. When I graduated from my state University and went down to teach at Wilmar College, I resigned myself to four or five inevitable years of boredom. The professors, I thought, would be provincial; the students would be country boys, rude and uninterested in any sort of intellectual existence. To some extent I was right. Yet the extraordinary adventure I must tell here would never have occurred if I had not gone, where it began, to Wilmar College,

My immediate superior among the members of the Faculty was a young man like myself, Charles Weber. Weber had been at Wilmar five years, and even there his genius had not been recognized. In the solitude and obscurity of a small school, he carried on his experiments with ideas so far-reaching and diverse in their implications that he could not himself entirely grasp them. He was too deeply and personally immured in his work to have achieved any publicity. He lectured to his classes twice a day. The students knew him as a pleasant young man, slightly (and conventionally) absent-minded. The rest of his time was free. He spent it in the way that he preferred, isolated in the small laboratory he had fitted up behind his house.

My future life was dictated, almost fortuitously, by this quiet man and by a girl, Elaine Stafford. It is nearly impossible to compare and measure her influence over my subsequent actions against that exercised by Weber. Subtle, intangible things sway a man in the more vivid movements of his life. I know that Elaine, unknown to either of us, made for me the decision that shaped my adventure. Perhaps, in some profoundly subsconscious way, she foresaw and determined, even, where it would end. There was no surprise in her face at the instant when, a long time afterward, she awoke and found me bending over her.

I don’t know when I became aware for the first time that I loved Elaine. The truly momentous occasions in our lives are usually forgotten—those which lead impenetrably to the sudden, remembered, inevitable climaxes about which stories are written. Elaine was a freshman student in my chemistry class. Certainly I must have noticed her the first time I met the class. I must have singled her out unconsciously from among the others. Within a few weeks, I know, I found myself considering her, somewhat bewilderedly, during the hours when there were no classes, and when I should have been at work.

Elaine Stafford was interesting and mysterious to me in a way that I can hardly explain. There was no actual suggestion of intrigue or of sensual mystery, such as we commonly associate with these words—she had certainly none of a courtesan's allure. Her charm, as I was aware of it, seemed to be something unknown to herself : a sort of inarticulate life within, that spoke mutely to me with an assurance that we had mutual desires, mutual understandings.

I used to watch for her when the bell on the campus stammered in its sleep and began to ring. She would always come promptly, walking on the alert soles of her tennis shoes. She always seemed to wear blue or white—sport clothes rather than gowns—with a beret over her smooth, slightly waving brown hair. I never tired of watching her. She was always silent and absorbed, a faint smile on her lips (thinking, perhaps, of beautiful things, and perhaps of nothing); and it always seemed to me that she was extraordinarily, miraculously clean.

For two whole years, and for part of a third, I used to lecture to her daily. Often my lectures were addressed almost personally to Elaine. Because of her presence, I tried to make them beautiful and imaginative in a manner that, before, I should not have thought chemistry could be. Because I wanted her to listen to me and understand me, I tried to render interesting lectures; and after awhile I discovered that my classes were growing popular among the students. They attended in growing numbers. They watched my face while I spoke, laughing readily and without restraint at my witticisms. But Elaine never seemed to notice what I was saying, and her eyes remained absently on the floor. I wondered in what way she always succeeded in making high grades; I wondered what suppressed emotion made her care for chemistry and go on with it, even after her requirements for a degree were satisfied.

All this while, I never spoke a single word to her on any subject except chemistry. What would I have said? I was a young man, but I was older than any of the boys she knew. I was a professor. I had no way of meeting her more intimately. Then, too, my life had been spent since childhood in the midst of work and speculation. I was a scientist, well bred but without any distinguished social graces. If Elaine had been accessible to me even as a friend, my shyness and reserve before youth would have isolated me from her understanding. I was afraid that she would see no further than the exterior, which in all earnest men is, in one way or another, slightly ridiculous.

But I had made a friend of Weber. I had been admitted to his laboratory and his work. We were engaged in some experiments together, although, I must admit, my part in them was slight enough. It was an inspiring thing for me to follow his fine imagination moving easily among ideas that awed and startled my own mind. Much of his work I could not grasp. Sometimes he was too absorbed with it to spare me an explanation. Sometimes it was eimply too complex for me.

One evening, when I called at his house, I found him weary and despondent. He had been working on an idea, of which I had received only vague hints from time to time over a period of six months. This was near the close of my third year at Wilmar College.

“Alan,” he said, lighting his pipe with a perplexed frown, “I’m not going to be able to come back here next fall.”

Startled, I said, “Not come back? Where are you going?”

“I’m going to Egypt,” Weber said.

For awhile I sat there and tried to puzzle out for myself why he should want to go to Egypt. I recalled something he had said once, but it was only a hazy impression. Finally I asked him, “What have you got to do in Egypt, Weber?”

He glanced at me in surprise.

“Haven’t I ever told you?” he said. I shook my head. “Why, the greatest of all my researches is connected with Egypt—with some temples there.”

“Tell me about it,” I said.

“There’s not much to tell—just now. While I was at Harvard, you know, I had a chance to go to Egypt with Lord Rayvon, and I took it. We found some unknown temples there, of the most remote antiquity, that suggested an idea to me. But Lord Rayvon, as you may recall, died suddenly, and I had to come back. I’ve kept the temples a secret, for fear they might be disturbed in my absence. And I’ve tried to work out that idea of mine over here, but I’m at a standstill. I’ll have to go hack.”

“But what’s the idea, Weber?” I insisted, moved by the atmosphere of mystery he had created.

“You’d laugh at it,” Weber said. “It’s a fantastic Idea. But I think there’s something in it.”

“Go on.”

“You are familiar with the work that has been done lately with glandular injections and other attempts to restore the life of people who have just died?”

“Yes, of course.”

“Well, I found these temples,” Weber said, “and as well as Rayvon and I could estimate, they belonged to a civilization in Egypt older than any that has so far been known to exist. Alan, they are incredibly old—perhaps sixty or seventy centuries before Christ. They antedate the Pharaohs by thousands of years.”

“Good Lord!” I muttered.

“But that wasn’t all. What amazed me was this: we found bodies there in a perfect state of preservation. It was not embalming of the sort that produces ordinary mummies such as we have found in Egypt. It was some process infinitely superior to embalming—a process of which embalming may have been merely the decadent survival handed down to later civilizations by the priests.”

“And is that,” I said, “what you have been trying to discover?”

“No—better than that. There were inscriptions, you see. They ware difficult to decipher—a language with peculiarities I had never encountered before—but they were alphabetical, not picture-writing. Rayvon knew all about inscriptions. He translated a few of them roughly. And Alan, they were the damnedest things you ever saw! They hinted at scientific knowledge absolutely unknown to us. They were only hints, of course, but they suggested amazing possibilities to me. I can’t begin to tell you everything about them; but what I seized on at once was the suggestion that those people knew a way to revive life in their dead kings.”

“But that’s absurd!” I exclaimed. “If they could revive their kings, what did they leave them in those temples for?”

“It’s not so absurd as it sounds,” Weber said. “That’s the interesting thing about it. It seems that the kings had been preserved before the process for reviving them was known. It was all linked up with a lot of mysterious religious ideas. Apparently, though, the kings were Messiahs of some sort; and the priests (who were the scientists too) expected to bring them back some day, in the midst of an expected crisis, to save the world.”

“I see,” I said thoughtfully. “And then the crisis came along, of course, and something happened so that they couldn’t revive the dead kings?”

“That’s the way Rayvon and I figured it,” Weber said. “Anyhow, what struck me at once was the possibility of making something out of those obscure hints about reviving life. That’s what I’ve been working on, whenever I could spare the time, ever since. But,” he added, “as I told you, I’m stopped. I can’t do any more without going back there and trying to decipher

some more of those inscriptions."

Weber told me a great many things that night about the temples in Egypt, and about his experiments. But, as you will shortly see, there is no need for me to repeat all that he said, because it came to nothing in the end. Nothing—that is—in the way that he expected. We sat up half the night, talking about Egypt. Weber was determined to go,

"They'll give you leave of absence for a year, you know," I told him. He nodded,

"Yes, I think they will."

Rising and struggling slowly into my coat, I murmured, "I wish I could go along with you. That's fascinating stuff you've been telling mc about."

Weber laughed.

"Why don't you come along?" he said. "I'll be glad enough to have you." I shook my head.

"I couldn't manage it," I said. "I haven't been here long enough,"

"I don't know . . , perhaps it could be arranged ..." Weber said thoughtfully.

I walked home in the spring darkness and the silence, my feet falling in a muffled sound on the hard earth of the road, my thoughts mingling chaotic visions of dead Egyptian kings with the tantalizing picture, never quite buried in my mind, of Elaine.

CHAPTER II

Temples in the Desert

Thanks to Weber's influence, I was able to go with him. When I left the President's office, realizing that I had before me a year of travel and leisure in Weber's company, at first I was incredibly happy. I walked across the campus, looking with a certain relief at the buildings and the old trees. Three years of them should have been enough for a little while.

Later, when I had grown used to the idea of my release, I began to wonder whether I cared so much about going. I had been physically content at Wilmar; I felt a sort of affection for its remoteness and for its unsophisticated people. I regretted that I should. have to go away

from my small house, with the woods near by and the old road in front that led to the river. And there was Elaine.

The last time I should see Elaine would be this morning, when I held my examination. I walked over to the building with slow steps, glancing around at the students on the walks. If I saw her now, perhaps I should be able to speak to her, and tell her. But Elaine was not among the students.

I went in. When the bell rang, I was writing my questions on the blackboard. I didn't see Elaine when she entered.

I spent that morning in my office near the class room. Every few moments a student would knock wearily and come in to ask me questions. I'm afraid I wasn't very helpful—I was preoccupied with other things. I was thinking of Elaine, who was writing her examination in the other room. With the greatest ease and dignity, I thought, I could go to the door and call her. The others would look up abstractedly, and go on writing. I could ask her to come into my office; then I could tell her. But of course, I wouldn't.

There was another knock on the door.

"Come in," I said. The door opened gently. Elaine was there. I looked up startled and a little guilty.

"Good morning" I said. "Won't you sit down?" I pointed out a chair.

Elaine smiled faintly, as she always seemed to smile, and said, "Thank you, sir."

"Is the examination hard?" I asked her anxiously. "Is it giving you trouble?"

"No, sir; it's not very hard. I wanted to ask you one question."

It occurred to me fleetingly (as if it mattered!) that this was the first time Elaine had ever questioned me about an examination.

"What is it?" I asked. For a moment we looked at each other intently, as if we each had something else we wanted to say. I was disturbed. But that might have been an illusion. I dropped my eyes, and drew aimless designs with a pencil, on my blotter.

She asked me about one of the problems, and I explained it briefly. She listened in silence, still watching me. Then I leaned back in my chair, and she stood up.

"Thank you, sir," she said. She was about to leave. I said—"Miss Stafford."

“Yes?”

“Are you going on in chemistry next year?” Elaine nodded.

“Yes, sir—if I get through all right.”

“I just wondered,” I said lamely. “You’re a good student … I won’t he here next year, you know.” I looked out of the window at the President’s office across the campus.

Elaine said slowly, “You won’t be here?”

“No. I’m going away on leave of absence.”

“We were both silent a moment. There was a knock at the door. Ignoring it, I waited until Elaine said:

“I’m sorry, sir. I’ve enjoyed your class.”

It was impossible. I couldn’t speak to her. I shrugged slightly, and looked at her with a smile.

“I’m sorry, too,” I murmured. “I’d like to be here.” I called abruptly, “Come in!” Elaine, turned away, while the door opened.

That was all. I didn’t see her again before I left with Weber in August.

I think Weber found me a dull companion during the trip across to Marseilles and Cairo. We had books with us. We would sit on deck during the day while Weber read and I looked at the sea, unable to read. Life held more zest for Weber than it did for me. He was capable of enjoying his holidays as completely as he enjoyed his work. In the evenings we would watch the people dancing inside; sometimes he made an acquaintance, and would walk about the deck for hours, talking to a young man, or to a girl. But I spent my time standing by the rail at night, looking at the water as it went by underneath, gurgling absently and mysteriously to itself. , Weber was worried and solicitous. One day, near the end of the voyage, he asked me whether I felt well. It was late in the evening, in the darkness on deck, and we could hear the orchestra playing distantly. I was tired of thinking about Elaine.

“Would you think me very much of a fool if I told you what’s the matter with me?”

Weber smiled, and said, “Probably. But tell me anyhow.”

So I told him. He listened quietly, smoking his pipe until I finished.

“And you said nothing to her?” he asked me finally.

“No.” I tapped my fingers on the chair, and frowned at the moon rising out of the water.

“But my dear fellow!” Weber said. “It sounds to me as if—just possibly—she may have been interested in you.”

“Do you think so?” I said. “But I couldn’t say anything. I’m a fool about things iike that.” Weber nodded.

“I know,” he murmured. “But she’ll be there when you go back.”

“No—this will be her last year. There’s nothing to be done.”

“Where’s she from?” Weber said.

“I don’t know. I don’t know anything about her. I never dared to talk to her.”

“Weber laughed softly, sym pathetically, in the darkness.

“You have been a fool, Alan,” he said. “But you’ll get over it. ”

“I doubt it,” I said.

“You can change your mind, if you’d rather, and go back?”

“It would do no good.” I shook my head morosely in the darkness.

“Well—wait till you see Egypt,” Weber suggested. “That will help you.”

We arrived in Cairo a few days later. Some day, when I write my book about those times, I will tell what I saw in Cairo. It was, to me, a strange, bewildering place, full of noise and heat and color, very different from the Cairo of today. But Cairo hardly enters into this story. During the week we spent there, Weber, who was an experienced traveler, guided me about among various officials, arranging the details of our expedition and fitting it out.

Early one morning, with our guide, we set out along the Nile. Even if I remembered it—which I don’t—there would be little enough to tell about that long, monotonous trip. I recall

best the miles of sand when finally we left the Nile and headed into the desert, days later. We were quite alone, in country where oases were rare. The temples were only a day's ride distant from the Nile; but they lay in a spot as empty and deserted as the moon.

We saw them first as we came to the top of a small rise. . They were not pyramids. There were three temples, grouped together about a central court. Bushes and weeds, and a few tired-looking trees grew about them and in the court. They stood massive and white against the long rays of the setting sun. They hardly resembled the sort of architecture we speak of as Egyptian. They seemed almost modern in design. To me, it seemed quite strange.

Our guide looked at them impassively and said nothing. Weber smiled faintly. He was relieved that he had been able to find them at all. Our two cars rolled gently down to the ruined court, and stopped.

"Here we are," Weber said carelessly. But we sat there awhile in silence, looking at them, oppressed with a feeling of awe before these buildings that had stood here in the desert, almost unvisited, for perhaps eighty centuries or more.

CHAPTER III

The Fever

Opening from the court were lofty halls and antechambers where men had worshipped once. Passages led away from them into other rooms, and downward into the crypts where the kings lay. We made our camp in one of the halls. It was cool and dark there, during the day, and the sun beat down blindingly on the court outside. At night the stars were visible from the place where we slept, a few brilliant stars between the distant hill top and the outline of high arches. The wind stirred restlessly along the floors and among the fallen stones of old altars.

On the day after our arrival, leaving our guide, we went down into the crypts. There were long, dark stairways winding down from the halls. They led finally to a low room in each building where piles of strange ornaments and treasures lay, covered with dust. They were the kings' possessions, undisturbed for thousands of years. Over the door of each of these rooms Weber pointed out to me an inscription in a strange alphabet.

"What do they mean?" I asked him.

“They are a warning. Rayvon translated them to me. I have forgotten the words; but they utter a curse on the head of any man who disturbs the rest of the kings before the appointed day. Whoever intrudes on the king’s sleep, they declare, or carries away his possessions, will sicken mysteriously and, at last, die.”

I shivered slightly.

“It doesn’t sound like a very great threat,” I said. Weber laughed.

“The natives take it quite seriously. You see? None of those treasures have been disturbed—except once, when Rayvon and I examined them. But we carried nothing away.”

I said thoughtfully, “Rayvon died ...”

We left the treasures untouched, and found the entrance to the king’s burial chamber. There was a secret door, cunningly concealed. Weber had been there before; he knew the secret. He pressed a portion of the wall above his head, and it swung inward, pivoting around a hidden hinge. An opening was revealed on either side of the massive door, large enough for a man to pass through crouching. I boosted Weber up; he gave me his hand and assisted me up behind him, We stood on a ledge about six feet thick—the depth of the wall—and darkness lay beyond us.

The crypt was ventilated meagerly in some fashion which we could not at once discover; the air was musty, but apparently pure. Weber leaped down to the floor within, his torch lighted, and I followed him. Together, we found the bronze lamps he had predicted we should find. We poured oil into them, and lit them.

The room, in the lamplight, was simple and small. The walls and floor—even the ceiling—were covered with inscriptions in small letters of the strange alphabet I had seen before, carved into the stone with delicate precision. Before us, a series of broad, low steps led up to a platform. At first I couldn’t see the body; but when I ascended the steps, I found it. The body lay in a depression on the platform, surrounded by a soft, fine dust that might once have been clothes or cushions. The dust rose gently and hovered over the body in the draft of air we had created.

Weber said softly, “This is Tomen-Ashto.”

I nodded silently, examining the still figure at our feet. It was a startling picture. The body lay naked, not swathed in the coverings of the Pharaohs; its hands were at its sides; it was quiet and calm. There was no color in the skin. It hardly seemed the body of a sleeping man, yet it hardly seemed quite dead. It was the body of a man composed for rest, caught in the moment between life and death. I touched his fiesh hesitantly : it was cold, but it yielded to

my fingers. Gradually the skin rose again, after I brought my hand away, and it remained white,

“You see,” Weber said, “—it’s death.”

“Yes,” I muttered, smiling faintly.

“And yet the body has been here for eighty centuries… He might have died only five minutes ago.” That is how the king looked.

I seated myself on the steps, staring curiously at the body, while Weber brought out his notebook and a pen. I waited awhile, immersed in my own thoughts; Weber copied down page after page of the endless inscriptions. Before long, the atmosphere of the place seemed to grow oppressive. I rose.

“Do you mind if I wait for you in the other room?” I asked. “If you don’t need me just now?”

Weber nodded absently.

“Go ahead,” he said.

I climbed up to the doorway again, and crept over into the room beyond. The treasures were there, thousands of delicate jewels and vessels of gold and silver. I spent hours examining them while I waited for Weber. They were so old that even their value hardly impressed me. They wrought in my imagination vivid pictures of the ancient world over which Tomen-Ashto had ruled, a world of which there remained no record, no memory, no legend—nothing, except the still body lying beyond the heavy door and the faint whisper of old inscriptions.

Weber stirred finally, and came back through the small doorway, closing it carefully behind him. I said slowly, rousing myself from a deep lethargy, “What have you discovered?”

“I don’t know yet,” Weber said. “I’ll have to work on them with Rayvon’s code.”

Our voices sounded muffled and distant; I tottered a little, dizzily, as we climbed the stairs, and my forehead felt cold and damp.

Daily, for a week, I worked with Weber in the temple of Tomen-Ashto. Overcoming the obscure feeling that troubled me in the crypt, I spent hours there copying long inscriptions

while Weber, seated near the body, laboriously translated them into English from Rayvon's code. Often there were passages of which Weber could make nothing—Rayvon had not lived long enough to complete his notes. Many of the inscriptions were unimportant—endless praises of the king and of the gods, long histories of forgotten wars. Once in awhile, however, Weber would stumble on something that seemed to give him a hint of what he wanted. An exclamation would come softly to his lips; he would go on impatiently until the passage ended or wandered off into other fields.

The sensation of strangeness never left me—it increased as the days went on. Gradually, while I worked, I would fall into a dream-like state, copying down the lines mechanically, while dim visions moved slowly through the silence of my brain, full of a significance that eluded me, forgotten as soon as they were conceived.

In the evenings, while Weber put his ideas together and tried to formulate into a clear meaning the scattered sentences he had found important, I rested in the court yard, listening to the sound of our guide's voice singing mournful songs softly in the darkness. Or I wandered languidly about the desert, my bare feet sinking into the sands still warm and sensuous from the pressing of the sunlight over them all day. I was tired. My mind was like an empty hall, stirring with the distant echoes of momentous events. And I had forgotten Elaine.

One morning, when I awoke, I was unable to rise. My limbs were heavy and weak; my body was covered with a slight perspiration. I had tossed all night in the midst of nightmares I could not remember. I refused breakfast, unable even to taste it.

Weber examined me solicitously. At first he thought of carrying me back to the village on the Nile, where I could find some sort of medical aid; but I seemed very weak, and he thought it was only a touch of fever that would go away as soon as I had rested and dosed myself with quinine. He left me in the guide's care, and went down to the crypt again.

There is nothing clear in my recollection of the days after that. My consciousness faded gradually, until I remember only long periods of time when I lay, nearly lifeless, on my pallet, while chaotic dreams pursued each other through my brain. There were long moments, at rare intervals, when my eyes would open and I would see clearly the dim, high hall around me, and the brilliant white sunlight of the court, the guide's hunched figure sitting motionless between two columns. The pictures would be fixed and interminable, without life. I would see them for awhile impersonally, as if they had no interest or significance for me. Then my eyes would close again, and the dreams come back.

Once or twice I wakened suddenly in the night to find Weber bowed over me, his face twisted and distorted by the flaring light of a lamp. I had forgotten him. My eyes opened wide and stared at him, startled, filled with horror, while I struggled to understand

something whose meaning I had lost. Then his face blurred and faded into darkness, and I slept again.

One night, a little while before dawn, sleep dropped away from me suddenly, as water drops away from a body when it rises from the sea. I opened my eyes upon the dim length of the hall. Weber worked under a lamp at the far end. Shadows moved fitfully about the hall, as the flame of the lamp turned and bent with the wind. My head was clear.

“Weber,” I called. My voice carried across the cool floor steadily and strong.

Weber looked up, startled, and stared at me for a moment. Then, with an inarticulate cry, he jumped to his feet.

“Are you awake, Alan?” he said.

“Yes.”

He came swiftly toward me down the hall and stood over my body, immensely tall in the lamplight,

“What is it?” he said. “Are you better?”

“Yes. I think so. But it won’t last.”

“You know that, too?” Weber said, frowning.,

“I’ve just found it out,” I answered.

For a few moments we said nothing, as if the approach of death had rendered speech no longer important.

“Weber,” I said at last, “do you remember Elaine?”

“Yes.”

“Say something to her, will you? Anything will do.”

Weber stood motionless for an instant. Then his body moved, heaved into an intenser life, and he said, “Alan! I’ve something to tell you.”

“What?”

“I’ve discovered something.”

“Your secret?” I said. “How to bring back life ”

“No—not that. ”

“What, then?”

“Alan,” he said, “I was working over those inscriptions a few nights ago, trying to understand them. I found a formula, an obscure method, written in unfamiliar terms. I don’t know what it is—whether it’s science of a sort we’ve never known or whether it’s magic. But I think I see what it means, what it will do.”

“Is it important to me?” I asked, with the deep egotism of death.

“Alan, it’s the secret of suspended animation. It will take your body and preserve it, as these kings are preserved—if it works.”

I thought for awhile without interest, picturing myself a body like the body of Tomen-Ashto, lying dead in the stillness of a dark crypt.

“What does it matter, Weber?” I said finally.

Weber laughed nervously.

“Matter?” he said. “Why, it means that I can keep your body as it will be at the moment of death and preserve it here for years, if necessary, while I work out the secrets of these people. Alan, I’m sure that I’ll find what I’m looking for, sooner or later. I’ll find it soon ! I’ll be able to bring you back to life.”

“And then?”

“You’ll have Elaine,”

“Elaine ...” I muttered her name restlessly in the silence. “Yes—that would be worth it.” Weber knelt at my side.

“Alan!” he said. “You depend on me to do this. You’re going to die—yes. But at the very moment of death I’ll take your body and treat it as those Egyptians treated their kings. And then, as soon as I find what I’m looking for, you can trust me to bring you back again.”

I nodded, and glanced at his face.

“Yes, I’ll trust you.” I said. He seized my hand and shook it nervously.

I looked away, out through the columns to the court yard, and beyond that to the desert. Dawn was coming. A faint, cold, silver light was rising stealthily out of the ground.

I closed my eyes.

“All right,” I muttered.

Velvet curtains fell, rustling, about my head.

CHAPTER IV

The Garden of Istal

Voices murmured for a long while, growing louder. I was cold, but warmth came sluggishly into my body. There was a tingling, itching sensation in my skin. One of the voices said: “That’s enough.” I opened my eyes.

Two men stood over me. They were not old men. They wore white tunics, falling from the shoulders to the knees, belted at the waist. One of them rubbed my arms vigorously with a lotion that had a pungent, penetrating smell. The other removed from my legs two metal bands, from which wires went to a small cabinet on the floor. The room was lighted with a huge electric torch on the wall that gave out a diffuse, soft glow.

I murmured mechanically, “Where’s Weber?”

“Weber?” The man at my side examined me impenetrably, and shook his head. He dried his hands on a towel; the lotion evaporated slowly from my body.

After awhile I said, “Isn’t Weber here?”

“No,” the man said, pondering. “Weber isn’t here.”

“Where is he?”

“You don’t understand,” the man said. “Who was Weber?”

I considered his question carefully. I was confused. Instead of answering, I said, “Have I been here long? ”

“Yes. You’ve been here a long time. ”

“How long?” I said.

The man looked at his companion, puzzled, and asked, “How would you say? ”

“A long time,” the other said, “a very long time.”

I rested awhile. Then I asked, “What year is it?”

Neither of the men answered. I looked from one to the other, waiting. A vague alarm began to trouble me. I said again, “What year is it?”

The men said nothing, watching me. Finally the man at my aide asked politely, “Would you like to get up? Here is a suit for you.” He held out a tunic similar to the one he wore.

Very suddenly I was awake. A suspicion entered my head, surrounded by confused memories of my existence. I stood up, and grasped the man’s arm. I said, “I must know what year it is.”

But the men looked helplessly at each other and at me.

“We don’t understand,” they said.

I released the man’s arm. I took the garment he offered me and slipped it over my head slowly, considering. The matter was not yet quite clear. There was an odd difficulty . . .

The room was the small room under the Temple where Weber and I had worked. One of the men leaped up on the ledge by the door and lowered his hand to me. The other man gave my feet a lift, and then followed me. We crawled through to the other side, and leaped down into the room where the treasures had been. The treasures were all gone. The men led me toward the stairs. One of them said, “What is your name?”

“My name? Alan Frazer.”

“My name is Istal,” the man said who had been at my side.

The other added, “I am Dras.”

We climbed the stairs in silence. The stairs were crumbling away.

The roof of the Temple had fallen in. When we came to the end of the stairs, we clambered up over loose rocks, through a jagged opening, to the light of a late afternoon. It was not very bright. A small breath of wind, blowing through the ruined walls, penetrated my slight tunic, and I shivered.

“Are you cold?” Istal asked.

“Not very cold,” I said.

I looked up at the sun. It was a small globe, tinted with red and resembling a full moon, hanging in the sky. The sun wore a questioning look.

Frightened, unwilling to understand, I said:

“Has it been a very long time?” I pointed to the sun. Dras and Istal followed my finger, glancing up. Dras said, “You mean the sun has changed?”

“Yes.”

The two men nodded, a look of comprehension in their eyes. They showed no surprise.

“It must have been a long time,” Dras said. “But how long?” I insisted. “How many years?” Dras shrugged.

The desert was gone, A tall, sickly sort of grass grew all about where the desert had been, like the grass that springs up along the shore, close to the sea. It waved gently in the wind, rustling, more desolate than the sand had ever been. When I saw the grass, I began to understand.

Near the ruins of the old buildings, half hidden in the grass, stood a small, light machine. Dras and Istal led me toward it. On a smooth, narrow platform of metal, it held three low seats. The men beckoned me to the center seat, and took the others themselves. Istal, in front of me, made a motion with his hands, which were concealed from me. There was a low humming under the floor. Without wings or propeller, the machine rose quietly from the ground and swerved up into the sky.

I leaned forward, touching Istal on the shoulder.

“How does it run?” I said. Istal smiled.

“I don’t know.” I glanced at Draa.

Dras said, “Maybe someone can tell you later.”

The machine fiew swiftly, but not so swiftly as it was able to fly—something I would learn in time. The men were in no hurry. Our faces were shielded from the wind by low, eloping panes of glass. I rested in my chair, trying to think clearly. I could feel nothing but a sort of deep terror. I understood that centuries had passed, perhaps thousands of years. The sun had changed . . . perhaps millions of years. But the men spoke English.

The grass altered gradually under us, grew more green, and passed imperceptibly into a thickening stretch of woods. When the woods ended, we flew over cultivated land. There were houses at intervals, glittering, fragile structures of an unfamiliar metal. We passed over some people from time to time. They strolled about in a leisurely fashion along walks of the same metal, talking. They were dressed, like my companions, in light tunies.

We came to a wide canal, flowing with mathematical precision obliquely across our course. Beyond the canal, our machine dipped down, and headed toward one of the metallic houses that stood near the water, under a group of trees. We landed gently on a lawn, close to the doorway, Draa and Istal stepped down, I followed them.

“This is the house,” Istal said. The words sounded oddly like an old sentence from a child’s French Grammar.

We entered the house. Dras went on down a long hall to an open doorway through which I saw the cool shade of the garden behind the house. Istal took me up by a moving escalator to the second story. The inner walls and floors were also of metal, and the house had no doors, Metal curtains hung in all the doorways, latal took me to some empty rooms.

“You shall bathe and put on another suit,” he said. “Then we shall have food for you in the garden.”

The rooms and the bath were not unlike those I had known before. I refused to think during the short while I needed to bathe. Later, after my breakfast, I would think.

The meal was served in the garden. There were three people seated at a table when we arrived. One was Dras; the others Istal presented as hia sister. Talis, and his father, Laati. Lasti was a vigorous old man who examined me with keen eyes and said little at first. Talis, a handsome girl dressed in a tunic like the men, because of nothing but her sex, reminded

me suddenly of Elaine. I paused, and dropped unsteadily into a chair. The memory was too overwhelming for me at that moment.

For the first time that afternoon, I understood what a limited mechanism the human mind must be. Perhaps, fortunately, there are situations which, as ideas, affect powerfully a man's emotions; but when he finds himself involved in them as experiences they press down quietly on his mind, and he is unable to comprehend them. Certain changes, certain losses, are so transmuting and great that they leave only a vacancy behind them, a feeble stirring of unrecognized despair.

I ate my meal calmly while the others talked. At first I tried to find some mental perspective in which to view what had happened to me, but that was impossible. Through the lethargy that possessed my faculties, I understood nothing, except that I had outlived my time by centuries—that Weber was dead, and that he had never found, after all, the method for which he was searching. I had lain suspended between life and death, while the world changed utterly. This world was profoundly different from mine in its very bases: although we spoke the same language, Istal and I could not converse because of some unbridged chasm between our minds.

When I had finished, I leaned back in my chair, fumbling unconsciously in imaginary pockets for a cigarette.

"What is it you want, my son?" Istal's father asked me. I answered in confusion. "Why—I was looking for a cigarette."

He said, "What is a cigarette?"

"A white tube of paper filled with tobacco. Don't you ever smoke tobacco here?"

Lasti shook his head.

"No. I think I have read somewhere of tobacco. But I have never seen it."

I followed for a few moments a vagrant idea—if I must live among these people, would I be able to cultivate tobacco on their soil? Istal roused me with a remark.

"My father," he said, "is a wise man. I am not wise, and I could not answer any of your questions. But my father may understand them."

Lasti nodded.

"Ask me what you like, my son. Perhaps I can help you a little."

I looked at Lasti eagerly, and said, “Can you tell me what year it is, then—how long I have been dead ?” Lasti pondered for awhile, and answered finally: “My son, you speak of something which is unknown to me. You apeak of time and of years. There are a few philosophers among us who have studied what time is, and none of them has agreed whether it exists or whether it was a notion peculiar to the ancients. When I was younger, I read some of the books of the ancients; they spoke continually of time. The words which we now use, that have no metaphysical significance, they used as a sort of measure, whereby they thought they could attach themselves to the dead, to that which is gone and done with. But the dead are dead, and they exist no more. We do not understand any difference between things that are dead; we do not understand what you mean when you speak of time.”

I said, “Do you not count the days, the mouths, and the years?”

“We do not count them. Perhaps today you are in Cairo; perhaps you are in Assouan tomorrow. When both these days are behind us, does it matter which day found you in Cairo and which in Assouan? The days go on, one after another, and they are not in themselves very different from each other. We remember the things we have done; but does it matter on what day we have done them?”

“Surely, sir,” I protested, “you must measure the hours of the day ? If not, how could you keep a meeting in any distant place?”

“We keep the hours, my son; but is that time? What, then, do you call time? The earth moves about the sun, and that is a physical movement through space. Perhaps I am to meet you in Cairo at the fourth hour of the day. Before that hour a hundred things may happen to me while you are performing one act, but the sun will be in a certain portion of the sky, when I come to Cairo and in the same place when you arrive there. If that is what you eall time, I do not understand it.”

“But if your machines and clocks,” I said, “move as the sun moves, an equal distance while you are living your hundred acts and I my one, doesn’t that prove the time is measured rightly?”

“How, my son? It proves that the nature of machines is to move in a certain way, as it is the nature of the earth to move through apace; and we can learn, if we wish, to move our bodies with the machines. But time, I thought, was something more than that.” He shook hie head gravely. “It is a strange subject my son. We cannot hope to understand it, if our philosophers cannot agree.”

“And your crops,” I said, “can you know when to gather them, without counting the days?”

Lasti smiled.

“They are gathered by the machines,” he said, “and the machines know.”

“Who sets the machines?”

“Sets them? The machines need nothing hut their oil, and sometimes their repairs. If they are broken, we repair them with other machines. We have always had the machines. We do not quite understand them,” he added, with a puzzled frown, “but they work for us—they are very good machines.”

I considered helplessly awhile, wondering how I could find myself in time, and whether, after all, it mattered.

“Have you no histories?” I asked. “Do you not study the ancient civilizations, and ask yourselves when they flourished?”

“We have books about the dead times,” Lasti said. “We read them. Perhaps they are fairy tales, perhaps they are true—it doesn’t matter, if they are pleasing. Here we are,” he said, “—those others exist no longer, any more than the countries on the moon, of which we also read in old books, or the people at the earth’s core. Why should we care, if they amuse us? How can we measure the truth of those things which do not exist, or measure the distance between them?”

“They did exist,” I said.

“Perhaps. But we have no memories of them.”

I had a vision in that moment, of these people ending the career of man on earth. I think that for an instant I understood them. They had their machines, their knowledge of the physical properties of the universe. Perhaps, like the Greeks, they had clean and clear minds; but they had no understanding of time. Their life, without perspectives, was perfected and simple. They lived for the moment, and for the pleasures of life. Their civilization might endure for years or for thousands of years without change, until an unforeseen catastrophe ended it. Deprived of hardship and struggle, they had lost the deep, bewildered curiosity of my people; and their attitude, although it was alien to me, had even then a certain fascination, a certain sublimity.

After awhile, I said: “Lasti, if I should tell you about one of those old civilizations—the one

in which I was born—would you be interested?"

"Surely," Lasti said. "I am always pleased by these tales. You shall tell me one day; and I will tell you the things of which I have read." He was incurious.

Later, when the afternoon was nearly over, I asked Lasti to tell me something about the world as I would find it hereafter.

"The world," he said, "is a very interesting place, if you care to study it. Some day, if you like, we shall travel together. I will show you the people who live on the other side of the world. They have some curious customs and strange machines. Perhaps, even, you would find them interested in time, as you are."

"You see little of them?"

"We seldom leave the country where we are born," Lasti said. "We have all that we need here. Sometimes, if we are studying, or for curiosity, we travel. I have traveled a little. I spent a few months once in the North."

"The North," I said. "I wanted to ask you about the North. Is there still a nation called the United States? Does New York still exist?"

Lasti shook his head.

"I have never heard of them," he said. "There is nothing in the North. It is cold and barren, like the far South. There are a few barbarous natives living among the ruins of old cities. The rest is ice and snow, when you go very far beyond the Sea of Cairo and the Mexican Sea."

I nodded somberly, and said: "There are glaciers, I suppose? The earth must be very old now."

"Were you ever in the North?" Lasti said.

"I was born there, in a place called Virginia. It was hundreds of miles north of Mexico."

"It would be almost deserted now."

"Of course. We loved it very much. . . ."

The sun had set. A strange, penetrating crimson glow lingered in the sky, more disturbing than any sunset I had ever seen.

“We must go in, Father,” Istal said, “before the cold comes down into our own garden.”

Lasti nodded. We all rose and wandered back toward the house.

I turned to Ista, and said: “Tell me, sir—why did you trouble to wake me? Surely it meant nothing to you that I had lived among the ancients ? It was not curiosity?”

“I saw you there one day,” Istal said, “when I was walking among the ruins, and dreaming. I found you by accident. So I took Dras to see you, and Dras is curious about these things. We thought that you might care to be alive again. We brought the machines down from Cairo. Soon, maybe, we shall wake the other man who sleeps across from you.”

“Another man?”

“He is different from you—his skin is dark, and his nose curves, like this. . . .” It was not Weber; it was the ancient king.

“You did it for pleasure?” I said. “It was a sort of lark?”

Istal shrugged, smiling.

“We thought you would not have been there,” he said, “unless you meant to wake again some day.”

I walked for a moment in silence. Then I said: “And the other temple—the third? Who sleeps there?”

“The other temple is empty,” Istal said.

Elaine? . . .

CHAPTER V

A Tomb in the North

In the morning, when I rose and put on another of the clean white tunics, I went down into the garden and found Talis, the sister of Istal. “Good morning,” she said, smiling at me in

the sunlight. She was having her breakfast on the table under the trees.

“Good morning,” I said.

She beckoned me to a chair, and said: “Will you have some breakfast?”

“Thanks.” I sat down by her, and she gave me breakfast from a silver dish on the table.

I was troubled about Istal’s hospitality. I didn’t know whether he cared to have me long as his guest, or whether he could afford it. I knew nothing of the economic conditions of this civilization. In any case, I was anxious to be independent, to find some work I could do in order to live. I wondered whether I should find any work left in the world that I was able to do.

“What do people do here all day, Talis?” I asked the girl. “How do they spend their time?”

“We amuse ourselves,” she said, smiling still. “Sometimes we read, sometimes we walk among the fields and gardens, or fly about the country. Are you bored so soon?”

“Oh, no! But I wasn’t used to idleness in my world. We were always doing things, working. That is how we managed to live. Is there no work here?”

“A few people work,” Talis said, a faint note of scorn for them in her voice, “when they can’t amuse themselves.”

“But how do people make money?” I asked. “Where do they get food?”

She looked at me in astonishment.

“I’ve never heard of money. And as for food—why, there’s food everywhere. That’s what the machines are for. They make food and clothes and houses.” She said incredulously, “People don’t have to do those things.”

“You see,” I explained slowly, “I wanted to know whether I couldn’t do something for myself. I can’t live on your brother’s hospitality.”

“I don’t know what you mean,” Talis said, with a questioning look. “If you don’t like my brother—“

“Of course I like him!”

“If you don’t want to live here with us, there are other houses. You can go wherever you

please."

"I don't want to go," I said hastily. She watched me with inquisitive eyes, as if I were a strange creature of some sort.

Finally she said: "I wish you would say things I could understand. Are you lonely here?"

I reddened.

"No," I said, "not that, exactly. But I'd like to have my people with me, too."

"We like you," Talis said. "We'll all be kind to you. If you want to, you can be my lover."

"Thanks—that is very kind of you," I said, smiling in an embarrassed fashion.

Talis laughed, and said: "You're nice."

"The trouble is," I added soberly, "that I was in love with a girl before my—death. It's hard to forget about her."

"Oh, I'm sorry," Talis said. "But she's dead now, isn't she? "

"Yes."

"Were you very fond of her?" Her voice was kind and sympathetic, as if she spoke to a child. "What was her name?"

"Her name was Elaine."

"That's a good name." Talis thought about the name for awhile. "I've heard of a name like that somewhere."

"Have you?" I had a vague and fantastic suspicion, for just a moment, that she might have known Elaine. Then I smiled at myself, somewhat bitterly.

"I read it in a book once," Talis said.

Puzzled, I asked: "An old book?"

"I don't know—it's a book of my brother's. Maybe I could show it to you."

Still troubled with that curious intuitive suspicion, I said: "I'd like to see it."

Talis stood up.

“I’ll find it for you,” she said. “I think I know where it is.”

She went toward the house. Again, as I had done the night before, I fumbled intently at the sides of my tunic, looking for a cigarette. I remembered that there were no cigarettes any more. Half eager, half listless, I waited for Talis.

After awhile she came back, a book in her hands. She held it open, turning the leaves as she approached. I stood up, trembling, and watched her eagerly and with impatience.

“This is it,” she said. “It’s a book about the North. Here—”

She held it out, and I seized it awkwardly The book was called *Wonders of the North*. It was like the books I had always known, except that the binding was metal, and the pages were thin sheets that might also have been metal. The letters were faintly exotic.

The passage Talis pointed out to me read:

Among these ruins is a building of white stone that stands on a hill. The savages worship it. They have a legend that their Queen is buried there, and that she will some day rise from the dead, shattering the heavy walls, and come forth again bringing with her the secret of making their country warm. There is no door into this tomb. The walls are smooth and spotless everywhere, except on one side where there is an inscription in tall letters,

THE TOMB OF ELAINE

and the building rests on solid rock. It is a silent and mysterious place. . . .

I stared for awhile at the page. There was no more about the tomb. The author went on to describe ruined cities and the curious customs of the savages. In the one paragraph that had any significance for me lay a hint so feeble and remote that it was almost madness to follow it. Yet there was a pointed atmosphere about the matter, as if it had been intended by a beneficent god for my eyes, as if I had been expected to read a meaning between the lines.

I gave the book back, while Talis watched me curiously.

“What is it?” she asked solicitously, seeing my agitation.

I said; “It might be the same Elaine. ”

“Was your Elaine a queen?”

“She could have become a queen,” I said, “and I should not have known the difference.”

Istal and his father came toward us from the house.

“You have had breakfast?” Istal said. I nodded, my mind still on the book. Lasti noticed my excitement, and he said: “What is it, my son? Has the little Talis upset you?”

“No, sir. It’s a book I have been examining—“

“About the North?”

“Yes. There is something in the North I must go to see.”

Talis said, patting me on the arm: “It’s his girl, father. He thinks she is buried there.”

“But if she is dead, my son—?” Lasti asked.

“She may have been left half dead, as I was left. And, even if she is dead, I should want to see her.”

Lasti nodded.

“Then you must go,” he said.

“It will be a long journey,” Istal said, “and you will be very cold.”

“I shall stand the cold,” I answered. “When I lived before, there were long, cold winters through which we always managed to survive. It can’t be much colder than that.”

Lasti said: “You will see, my son.”

They sat down to their breakfast, and I wandered away through the garden with Talis.

CHAPTER VI

Elaine

I flew westward in a closed ship. I left one morning, circling over Istal's house while the family waved goodbye, and I headed for what had been the Canary Islands. Dras had taught me to pilot the narrow, graceful machine. It was easy to handle. Dras had found me another of the instruments with which he had given life back to my body, and taught me how to use it. The ship was stored with heavy clothes and with food. I carried maps and compasses and books.

During the day, there was no excitement in the trip. Underneath lay always the same miles of cultivated land—fields, woods, canals—that I had seen before. There was a certain exhilaration in the mere feeling of lightness and grace that the ship lent me, and in the whistling of the wind along its sides.

The craft made, for these times, no great speed. I made an average of about three hundred miles an hour. It was five o'clock by the chronometer on the ship when I came to the Canaries; by the solar chronometer (which adjusted itself by the sun wherever I went) the time was about three. I continued a westerly course, a little to the south, that would bring me to Mexico City by the following afternoon.

A profound peace and stillness lay around me. The sea was calm, moving in long, slow swells under the ship. The sun had overtaken me—it dipped slowly down the sky over the unbroken horizon ahead.

Night came. The sun went down, large, vague and red among low clouds and mist. My cabin became a tiny cubicle of light in the mystery of endless darkness. My instruments guided me. After awhile, I turned off my lights, leaving only the dim glitter of the luminous dials, and watched the stars swinging down the sky overhead. Faint lines of phosphorescence moved like ghosts on the water, and the rising wind reminded me of lonely winter nights in my boyhood, when I had lain awake in dark rooms, hearing the wind whistling around house corners and rattling the cold windowpanes.

There was a storm some time before midnight. It grew rapidly in intensity for nearly an hour. While it lasted, the sea twisted and struggled under me in high waves whipped by the wind; dark masses of cloud obscured the stars; and foam spattered thinly from time to time across the windows of my cabin. But the ship rode securely, unanswerable to the storm. The wind and the sea went down rapidly. The clouds drifted away, and the stars appeared again.

It was still dark when I came in sight of Cuba, a low, dark mass looming up along the horizon. By the chronometer it was after nine in the morning—I had been gone about twenty-five hours—but it was hardly three by the invisible sun. I had five more hours to go.

An hour before dawn, the moon appeared suddenly behind a jagged rent in the clouds along the horizon. A pale silver light spread over the water, diluting the sky with gray as dawn approached. Just as the sun snapped a long, brilliant cord of red over the sea behind me, I saw the coast of Mexico. I crossed above a long beach of white sand, and approached Mexico City over fields that were much like the fields I had left behind me in Africa. There were fewer houses here, but the buildings were immensely large, like compact, miniature towns set in the midst of long miles of field. These gave way again to the waters of the Gulf of Campeche, and finally the coast appeared once more.

Half an hour later Mexico City, a glittering mass of blue, metallic towers, rose up before me. I made for a tall building in the center of the city. Dras had described it to me—it was the Tower of Science. I lowered my ship gently to its roof, and stepped out. A small group of men stood negligently at the roof's edge, leaning on a balustrade and watching the glitter of the sun on a white, snow-capped peak in the distance. I accosted them.

"Gentlemen," I said. They turned. "Are you the members of the Science Club?"

They nodded gravely. They wore the simple, childlike air that Greek philosophers must have worn. They were not such scientists as the people of my time had been. Science was their hobby; they studied it for the pleasure it gave them. There were no more scientists of Charles Weber's sort left in the world.

"I am traveling toward the North," I told them. "I have learned about an old building there that I want to see. I thought perhaps you could give me some directions."

A little surprised, but without incredulity, one of them said:

"There are many strange things in the North, my friend. I went there once, as far as I could safely go. What is it that you want to find?"

I showed him Istal's book, *Wonders of the North*.

"Have you ever read this?" I said.

"My father wrote it. My family has always been curious about those barbaric places."

"There is a passage here," I said, opening the book at the page I had marked. "I wonder if

you have ever seen this building?”

He took the volume, and read the paragraph slowly, frowning a little. When he had finished, he thought awhile, glancing up at the sky. Finally he handed the book back, and said:

“I have seen the place, but I don’t recall where it is. Perhaps I could find more about it from my books.”

“Would you be so kind?”

“Why not?” he said. “It’s an interesting place, that tomb, and I have often wondered about it myself. Have you learned something about it?”

“Nothing yet, sir,” I said.

“It has always been a temptation to me to open it. . . . Well, come to breakfast with me, and I will look through my books.”

I breakfasted with Kivro, the scientist. We piled hundreds of volumes on the floor about the table and searched their pages while we ate. They were remarkable books, all describing the marvelous people, country, and legends of the North. But all of them, like the book I had brought with me, were vague about the details that a true scientist would have fixed first. They neglected to describe the location of the places they mentioned, and they were careless about all matters of chronology. Many of them contradicted each other.

In the end, after hours of searching, we found what I wanted. In one small book there was a footnote, in small type, buried near the end of a chapter about one of the places Kivro had visited.

Near this town (the footnote read) stands the Tomb of Elaine, about which many travelers have written. It can be seen clearly from the ruins of the central square, nearly hidden by the trees and the broken walls.

“Of course!” Kivra exclaimed. “I remember the town now—a vast, ruined place, which the natives called Shika. It is remarkable for the little group of evergreens about the hill where the tomb stands. The natives live among the old walls at the foot of the hill.”

I rubbed my tired eyes with a gesture of relief.

“Thank God,” I said. Kivro glanced at me curiously.

“You are very eager to know?” he said.

“Very eager. If I find what I am looking for, when I come back, I will show you why it is so important to me.”

Kivro nodded, and I thanked him hastily. Refusing his offer of a place to rest, I went back to the roof, shook his hand gratefully, and climbed into my ship. When I rose this time, the city flashing under me in the sunlight, I turned almost back on my former course, heading north and east, this time, toward the Gulf of Mexico. It was surprising how rapidly the cold increased. Long before I reached Louisiana, the air had begun to grow chilly, I shivered in my slight tunic, and finally turned on the heat in the cabin. Near sunset I came to the small town that stood on the site of Baton Rouge. A light fall of snow was on the ground. I descended there, without disturbing the inhabitants, and slept a few miles away, in my ship. I was very tired.

All the next afternoon, after resting until ten o’clock in the morning, I followed the Mississippi northward. Shika, the town for which I was searching, was the native name for what remained of Chicago. It would not be difficult to find. The cold, however, had a definite effect on the mechanism of the ship, cutting down its speed more and more as I went on. It took me seven hours to reach Chicago.

I had put on the heavy clothes, but in spite of them I was cold. The heat in my cabin decreased proportionately with the ship’s speed. I was glad that I had more resistance to cold weather than Istal and his people, but even for me the discomfort was difficult to endure.

All along my route, now, the earth was covered first with snow and later with sheets of ice. The wind was vicious during the afternoon, and from time to time there were flurries of thick snow through which my instruments had to guide me. The country, when I could see it, was unrecognizable. The centuries and ages during which I had been dead had changed the contours of the earth. The ice lay over everything, sweeping down in long glaciers from the hills to the banks of the river. Even the river, further north, was frozen solid.

I branched off from the Mississippi late in the afternoon, and followed the Illinois. Once there had been a canal from Joliet to Chicago, forty miles away, but there remained no trace either of the canal or of the city. I left the river and headed northeast toward Chicago. Just before the day ended, the blinding, low rays of the sun pointed it out.

Very little remained of Chicago. Most of the buildings had crumbled away long ago under the grinding weight of the ice. Here and there, perched grotesquely on the hills, stood isolated groups of walls, deep in snow. I had never before been to Chicago, but I had never thought of it as a hilly city. There were hills now. The ice had created them, or perhaps some previous ice age had created them—I had no way of knowing. They were there.

I found immediately the hill for which I was searching. It overtopped all the others, regular and rounded like an artificial hill. On its southern side, sheltered in a sort of natural amphitheatre from the wind, grew most of the bleak trees of which Kivro had spoken. Here, too, built against the jagged shelter of broken walls, stood rude, cave-like huts of stone and ice. Thin lines of smoke drifted up from them until, caught suddenly in the wind, they lifted and disappeared in the gray air.

Where the natives lived seemed a logical place to land my ship. I brought it down in a small open space among the huts. Snow had begun to fall again in thick gusts, blotting out the last of the twilight. I had seen no natives yet—they were all within their huts, apparently, for the night. I thought longingly of their warm fires and suppers, but I hesitated to reveal myself. I was uncertain how I should be received; and I hated the thought, when I was so tired, of having to make interminable explanations. I could endure my cabin. I satisfied myself with the food I had brought, and, muffled in heavy clothes, lay down to sleep in the cabin. I slept fitfully during the night, thinking numbly of Elaine and of my fantastic surroundings.

As soon as dawn came, I was awake. The snow had stopped falling, and none of the natives were about yet. In spite of the smoke from their huts, I half doubted whether any natives existed. So much was fantastic and unreal in my life during those weeks that I had lost my standard of values in realities; sometimes I believed in the impossible, and more often I doubted the truth. Nothing was real, nothing was false—I lived in a state of continual bewilderment, through which I moved mechanically, directed only by the obscure habits of my past life.

Wincing at the contact of unbelievably cold air, I pushed open the door of my cabin and stepped out. The instruments I would need were not heavy. I lifted them out beside me, in two metal cases, and locked the door. Buckled to my belt was the long tube, like a flashlight, that would disintegrate the walls of the tomb.

I moved quietly through the snow toward the trees, past the native houses. The snow was deep, but heavily packed. I struggled slowly up the hill until I reached the trees. There the path was easier. I minded the cold less, now that I was exposed to it; it was bracing, in a way, and my activity rendered it bearable.

It took a long while to climb the hill, but finally I reached the top. A blast of cold wind

swooped down on me at the summit, but I ducked under the shelter of the tomb, where the tall letters, cut deep into the stone, told me that Elaine—some Elaine—was buried here.

Removing the metal tube from my belt with awkward fingers, I pushed the button that turned on its power. I had to handle it carefully—it was a dangerous machine. It cut into the walls with an invisible ray, grinding them to a fine dust as if they had been attacked by a chisel. In about ten minutes I had made a circular opening large enough for my body to pass through. I leaped aside as the heavy portion of the wall I had cut out broke away and rolled heavily into the snow.

I lifted the instruments through first, and followed them hastily. I found myself in a small room, lit dimly by the opening in the wall. The room appeared to be bare. I examined the walls and the floor; there were various inscriptions on the wall, but it was too dark to read them. A metal ring in one of the inner walls disclosed a door. I tugged at it, and after a moment of resistance it came reluctantly open, on rusty hinges.

Too excited and too numb from the cold to care for any precautions, I stepped through into another room which sounded, by the echo of my movements, larger than the first. Here the darkness was profound. Again I explored with my fingers. This time I discovered a number of large metal boxes, none of them large enough, however, to be Elaine's coffin. The room contained nothing else.

Cursing myself for not having thought to bring a light, I examined the wall on either aide of the door through which I had come. There should be at least two small rooms adjoining the antechamber I had first entered. But the walls seemed to be blank.

Disappointed, I felt my way nervously back to the metal boxes. I felt several of them thoroughly with my fingers, and they were apparently sealed. I was afraid to use my disintegrating tube—I might injure their contents. Nervously, I seated myself on the cold floor and wondered what to do.

It is possible that I was not quite rational at that moment. I had worked so far with the mechanical ingenuity of a robot or a madman. The intense cold and the strangeness of the whole adventure had deadened my faculties. I felt very little true emotion just then—indeed, I had been stunned beyond a capacity for emotion, ever sinee my awakening.

In any case, I think that I must have lost consciousness briefly. Dozens of faint dreams and impressions floated before my eyes in a condition between fantasy and reality. Suddenly, however, I found myself recalling the moment when Weber and I had first penetrated into the tomb of Tomen-Ashto. Clearly, and with a sort of startled fixity, I saw Weber push at the wall in the subterranean room, and saw the wall yield and turn on its hidden hinges. I was aware of a feeling of compulsion in this picture, as if someone had held it before me and

said:

“Look!”

I stood up, a little weak, and groped my way back to the wall beside the door. Raising my arms, I pushed vigorously against it in all directions, but without success. Then I crossed to the other side of the door, and tried the wall there. After a moment, it seemed to stir gently beneath my fingers. I pushed harder, and it yielded. The wall swung inward, like a door.

And suddenly, as it opened, I jumped back with a startled cry. The whole room had burst into a blaze of light, and a light came through the door from the room beyond, blinding my eyes after the intense darkness. Frightened, as if by an invisible presence, I crouched back against the wall and stared about me. The stillness was unbroken. Nobody appeared; nothing happened.

I grew accustomed to the light, and my nerves became quiet again. I knew now that I should find Elaine. This was not an ordinary tomb. I was too confused to question the lights, or to wonder how they had survived the passage of innumerable centuries; but I knew that they had not been left here merely to divert intruders. Nor were they for the use of the dead.

With a brief glance about the room, I turned my attention again to the door I had just opened. It came down to the floor, unlike the door in Tomen-Ashto’s tomb, and it gave upon a stairway leading down under the floor. There was a warm current of air rising through the doorway.

I went to the antechamber and found my instruments. Then, shutting the two doors behind me against the cold outside, I came back to the stairway and descended. It was not a long stairway. It led to a room directly under the first floor of the tomb. As I entered this room, I gasped with surprise, and stood transfixed, staring into it.

It was a low, warm chamber, decorated with wood and plaster like the rooms I had known before my death. The wood seemed oddly fragile, as if it would crumble under my touch, and I was afraid to disturb it. There were chairs, tables, and all the other furnishings of a bedroom. The cloth covers of the chairs had long ago beeome tattered and crumbled into dust, leaving the bare wood and the springs exposed; and the rug on the floor fell apart, rising in fine particles of dust about my feet, wherever I touched it. But the combs and brushes, the bottles and boxes and jars, still remained intact on the dressing table.

There was an old iron bed in the corner. Elaine lay there.

I crossed the room slowly, and looked down at her. The bedclothes and her gown, like the covers of the chairs, were dust. She Jay there, beautiful and immobile, as if suspended

between life and death. Her eyes were closed. She lay with her hands at her side, quiet and calm, a girl composed for rest. The centuries had not changed her. A faint, mysterious smile rested on her lips.

“Elaine,” I said wonderingly, lost in the miracle of my love and of her life. I dropped on my knees beside her bed, and rested my head wearily on my arms, I think that I cried. I was afraid to touch her body.

CHAPTER VII

The Little Men of Shika

When the little hand on the dial reached ninety-eight, I turned off the switch and waited. Under the furs that I had thrown over her, I thought I saw Elaine move slightly. I bent down and touched her cheek with trembling fingers; it was warm again, and flushed with a soft color.

Her eyelids fluttered. I knelt beside her again, removing the metal bands from her wrists and from her ankles. Her eyes opened a little, and glanced at me gravely. Her lips lifted in a brief smile. “Mr. Frazer.. . . .” she murmured, “Elaine!”

She examined my face with languid attentiveness, and asked: “Are we all right? ”

“All right, Elaine,” I said. “What time is it, Mr. Frazer?”

I didn’t know. I had no watch—only the chronometers on the ship. And it was ironic that, at the end of so many centuries, Elaine should ask first for the time. But I said carelessly: “Eleven o’clock.”

She closed her eyes awhile, and frowned slightly, thinking.

“Do you feel better?” I said.

“Yes, sir. But—“ She opened her. eyes again suddenly—wide. “Why,” she said, “where are we?”

I didn’t know how to tell her,

“Don’t you know, Elaine?” I asked.

“I think—“ She was puzzled. “I thought you were—“ And then her memory wakened. She raised herself a little and stared at me.

“Alan!” she said,

I smiled at her (she had called me by my name!), and took her in my arms, trembling.

“Why, that’s all right, Elaine,” I said. “Weber was right.”

She glanced all about the room, and then back at my face,

“But this place,” she said. “Has it been long?”

“It’s been a long time.”

“How long, Alan?”

“Years,” I said. “You’ll see.”

She closed her eyes, and rested in my arms. With my hand I smoothed the hair on her forehead. She said, glancing at my eyes, “You love me?”

“Yes.”

I kissed her lips gently.

I said: “Elaine. What happened? How did you get here ?”

“Charles Weber told me about your death. I loved you, too.”

“You did? All the time?”

“Yes. And when he told me, I made him promise to leave me here with you.”

“Here?”

“Yes. And then I—did this.” She pointed out to me a scar on her wrist. “Honey!”

“That wasn’t very hard. I was afraid I might grow old and—ugly, while you were sleeping.”

After awhile, I said: “But, Elaine, we’re in Chicago now. And Weber left me in Egypt.”

“In Chicago?”

“Yes. Who brought you here? And what happened to Weber?”

“I don’t know. Isn’t Weber here?” Elaine said. “Didn’t he wake you?”

“Weber’s dead. He died a long time ago. All the people we knew are dead, Elaine.”

A look of fear came into her eyes. She stared at me.

“What do you mean, Alan? What year is it?”

“I don’t know, honey. Everything has changed—it’s been a long time.”

Slowly she said: “And Weber didn’t wake you up?”

“Weber is dead. Strange people woke me up, and you weren’t there. But I looked for you, and found this place.”

“How did you know?”

“I didn’t. I had to guess.”

Elaine lifted her hands and touched my hair.

“I’m glad,” she said,

“We’ll be happy, Elaine. Together.”

“Yes.”

Her body atirred restlessly under the covers. She said: “Shall I get up now, and come with you?”

“Are you strong enough?”

“I’m well now. I can go anywhere.”

“You must take those clothes of mine. Your clothes are gone.”

Elaine smiled, and said: “I won’t need so much.”

“It’s cold, Elaine. You’ll need them.” I took off the heavy shoes I had worn to the tomb. “Take these, too. There’s snow on the ground.”

“But Alan! What’ll you do?”

I smiled, shivering a little in my light tunic.

“I’ll be all right,” I said. “It isn’t far to the ship.”

I kissed her again, and rose. I left the instruments where they were. They would be in the way if I carried them.

“I’ll wait for you upstairs, Elaine,” I said. . . . She came very soon, wrapped ponderously in the awkward clothes I had given her. “Do I look all right?” she said. “You look beautiful.”

I closed the door behind her. Immediately the lights flashed off. They had been growing dim. I wondered absently how they had been contrived, and how they had been able to survive the centuries; but it was one of the forgotten things we should never learn to know.

“Come,” I said, “maybe we’d better hurry, honey. ”

“Are we going somewhere?”

“We’re going home. There are strange people here. We’re going back to Egypt—that’s our home now.” I led her, in the darkness, to the antechamber, where the gaping hole I had made in the wall revealed the waste of snow and ice outside. Elaine gasped with surprise when she saw the bare, deserted hillside, with its lonely evergreens towering against the sky.

“Where are we, Alan?” she cried.

“Chicago,” I said shivering painfully in the cold air. “At least, it was Chicago once.”

Without saying any more, I helped her through the wall and followed hastily, leaping with a shock down into the snow. The snow burned my bare feet like a blanket of white fire.

“We’ll have to hurry,” I panted. “I can’t stand much of this.”

We ran down the hill-side, sliding and stumbling through the snow. My tunic was no protection against the cold. I was afraid to pause; I waved my aims and legs wildly to keep the circulation going.

We burst out of the woods, into the little gathering of huts. I saw the ship lying black and immobile against the snow in the clearing. A crowd of little stunted, dwarf-like figures was gathered around it. They heard the sound of our thrashing in the snow, and turned. For a few moments they stood transfixed, while we approached. Then they fell back a few steps beyond the ship. One of them waited at its door.

We reached the ship. The little man who had waited stood by helplessly while I unlocked the door. As I was about to open it, however, he laid his hand on my arm.

“What are you doing?” he asked in a strange dialect, but in English, “Who are you?”

I paused a moment, wondering what to tell him, and saw the rest of the little people watching us a few yards away.

“I’ve come from the South,” I said. “Now I must go back.”

“And the woman,” he insisted, “who is she? Where did you find her?”

I said impatiently, without thinking:

“I found her up on the hill. That’s what I came for, and now I’ve got to go.”

But the little man startled me with a loud cry.

“The Queen!” he shouted. “She is the Queen!”

Elaine and I looked at him in surprise, and then at the others. I remembered now the old legend in Istai’s book, that Elaine would some day rise and come forth out of her tomb to rule over the natives. All the little people had fallen on their faces, prostrating themselves in the snow. The man by the door knelt in front of Elaine.

“Our Queen!” he said breathlessly. “You have come back to us. I am your priest. You have come to give us back the Great Fire.”

Elaine touched his head, muffled in heavy fur, with a gesture of pity. I shivered, stamping my frozen feet in the snow.

“Poor fellow,” Elaine said, “he really believes I am his queen.”

“I know,” I said with difficulty, “but on the other hand, I’m nearly frozen. We haven’t time to explain things to him.” Elaine nodded and smiled. “Jump in,” I added, pulling open the door, “and I’ll follow you.”

Elaine climbed into the cahin, resting on my arm. I unbuckled the disintegrating tube from my belt.

“Wait,” the little priest cried in a frightened voice, “you can’t!” He turned to the other little men. “He’s carrying away the .Queen!”

He moved as if to leap upon me, but I pressed the button of the tube, pointing it at the ground between us. The snow melted with a hissing sound under his feet, and steam rose about his legs. He leaped back with another cry.

“You can’t stop me,” I said. “Maybe, before long, we’ll come back again. But we’ve got to go now.”

“No! She’s our Queen!” the little man insisted, frightened and unbelieving. “You can’t carry her away.”

“I’m sorry,” I said, turning toward the door.

Suddenly, his hands before hia face, in fear and desperation, the priest leaped at me with a cry. I glanced quickly at the others. They were standing back, afraid to move.

I didn’t want to hurt the little man. I had meant to use the tube, but it was a sickening weapon—I was afraid of it myself. While I hesitated, the priest bore down on me and seized my arm, twisting it madly upward. He was amazingly strong. Before I understood what was happening, the tube had fallen from my hand. I heard Elaine crying:

“Quick, Alan! Hurry!”

With all my strength, I crashed my free fist into the priest’s face. His grip loosened, and he fell back into the snow. The other little men were running toward us.

Leaping into the cabin, I slammed the door behind me and pressed the rising button. The ship rose sluggishly, and one of the little men, clinging to the side, fell back in the snow. I sank into my chair, weak with cold and exhaustion. Elaine threw her arms about me.

“Alan!” she said. “Are you all right? Can you guide the ship?”

I nodded, and pointed to the rear of the cabin.

“There are more clothes back there,” I panted. “Get them for me.”

Rousing myself, I leaned forward and moved the controls. The ship moved ahead, swinging west and south toward the Illinois river. Then I glanced down at the village we were leaving. The little men stood in a dejected group, staring after us with sorrowful faces. The priest was bending over, pieking up some small object from the snow. While I watched, he examined it carefully, made a motion with his hands, and lifted it. It was the disintegrating tube. He pointed it at us from the ground. I could not see the ray.

I must explain the tube I had carried. It was small and comparatively weak. Designed originally for use as a weapon, it was powerful enough to cut through stone and metal—not suddenly and cleanly, like a knife, but gradually, like a chisel. Its chief virtue was its great range and its narrow, concentrated ray.

The priest was not adept with it. And, too, the ship by that time was hardly a good target. After a few minutes, during which the priest waved the tube clumsily in ragged circles, I heard a soft, searing sound along the bottom of the ship. It lasted a moment, then it went away. After awhile it came back. For some minutes, while we left the village further and further behind, I heard the sound. Finally it ceased.

I had no way of judging whether the tube had damaged the ship materially. The bottom was made of a strong metal, but I was unfanriliar with its design. The ship went on moving forward.

Elaine brought me the clothes, and I put them on. It was getting dark outside, and beginning to snow again. I didn’t turn on the lights or the heat; I wanted the ship to use all its power in taking us south as soon as possible. Already the cold and the darkness of the North were wearing on my nerves. Elaine sat in my chair, and I sat beside her on the floor, my arms about her and my head resting on her knees. I was very tired, but I had begun to recover somewhat from my recent exposure.

It must have been well over an hour before Elaine or I moved, except once, when we came to the Illinois and I changed the course. We had said nothing, but waited in silence, content to be together. The snow increased until it was swirling violently about the windows, obscuring all trace of the earth. We were nearly in darkness, in a sort of long twilight, and pondering on the things we should do together.

There was, suddenly, a sort of grinding sound along the bottom of the ship. We both stiffened, listening. It came again. I jumped up, and glanced at the instrument board. Our height was fixed by the automatic stabilizer at a hundred feet. That meant that we should be following the contour of the country (and Illinois was a flat country), rising and falling with it at a continual mean level of a hundred feet above its general outlines.

The sound went away. My heart beating violently, I raised the ship another hundred feet, and fixed it there. We had no instrument for measuring the actual height. The stabilizer was not expected to fail. I peered out through the windows at the snow, trying to penetrate it. I could see nothing.

“Are we all right, do you think?” Elaine said.

“I don’t know, honey, I suppose so.”

We listened anxiously. Nothing happened for, perhaps, twenty minutes. Then the scraping began again, very slowly and sluggishly. I looked at the speedometer. Our speed had decreased until the finger on the dial stood almost at zero. I was perplexed. I glanced through the windows again, and at that moment the snow lifted for a brief instant, and I saw the earth. We were barely creeping along, almost on the surface of the ice.

“Elaine!” I said. “Something has happened! ”

“What is it?”

“The power must be going dead.” We looked at each other silently. There was nothing to be done.

Within another ten minutes the ship had come to rest on the ice. I knew nothing about its mechanism. An attempt to repair it would be useless. The priest had managed somehow to damage it with my disintegrating tube.

For a long while we waited in the twilight of the cabin, wondering what we could do. Gradually the storm cleared away again. It was late in the afternoon. I said finally:

“There used to be towns and cities along this river, everywhere south of Chicago, Elaine. There were hundreds of them.” Elaine looked at me, her eyes deep and mysterious as I loved to see them.

“Yes?” she said.

“Do you suppose we could reach one of them on foot?” There are a few natives in all those

cities, living among the ruins. And the storm has cleared."

"Do you want to try?" Elaine said.

"It might be better than sitting here, waiting for our food to give out. Nobody will come for us. We could be doing something."

"I'll go with you," Elaine said. I kissed her quickly, forebodingly. "Of course, we won't make it," she said.

"Of course not," I rejoined.

I pushed open the cabin door. Our pockets were filled with concentrated food. I leaped down. We rested on the ice-covered surface of the river, by good fortune. The snow was not very deep—most of it had blown up into great drifts along the banks. I helped Elaine out.

We said nothing more. In a situation of that sort, what could there be to say that we didn't understand already? Words could only burlesque our deep consciousness of love, and our willingness to die so long as we were together. For, even if that is a foolish and romantic notion, when a man and a woman have to die, they can do it somewhat more easily if they carry such an illusion with them.

Darkness came soon enough. The sky cleared for a little while just after sunset. The stars came out. Later on, there was a frigid, pale moon hanging over the low hills. We stumbled along through the dark, walking with difficulty in our heavy clothes, hand in hand. We were very cold.

We kept on, more and more slowly, until nearly midnight. Elaine was easily fatigued—she had risen literally from her death-bed—and I was already nearly worn out. Elaine stumbled at last, and went down on her knees. I caught her in my arms, and held her tired head up with my hand.

"Can't you go on any longer, Elaine?" I muttered. She shook her head weakly. Her face was very white in the moonlight; her eyes looked at me under long lashes beaded with ice. Her lips were unable to smile. She whispered, "No, honey."

"Then, we'll rest. . . .

I laid her down in the snow. She was unconscious. I took off one of my coats and made a pillow for her head. The other I spread over her. I lay down, sheltered by her body from the wind, holding her tightly in my arms, my face close to her face. But she could not protect me from the cold. I had only my tunic again, and my shoes and gloves. I closed my eyes very

soon, and forgot.

Once—it may have been only a few minutes later—I heard Elaine's voice, but I could not tell what she was saying. Opening my eyes, I saw her face dimly in the shadow. Her mouth was speaking to me, close to my ear. I kissed her weakly, once more, and then my eyes closed again. Darkness gathered in my head, even before our lips parted.

CHAPTER VIII

Conclusion

When I awoke, there were voices about me. A man said: "How are you now, my children?" Elaine's voice answered : "Better now, sir." Without surprise, I looked up and saw the man tending over me. It was Kivro, the Mexican explorer. He smiled with a touch of irony and a touch of tenderness. There were other men in the room. Kivro touched my forehead, and said: "He's all right."

"I'm glad," Elaine said. I turned my head. She was lying at my side, fair and beautiful, her brown hair tumbled on a pillow. Our hands touched, under the covers. I whispered: "Darling. . . ."

"We'll go away now," Kirvo said, his smile fading discreetly. "There are other things to do."

We looked up at him, unable to speak, while he joined the other men at the door and went away, closing the door gently behind him. We were silent for a little while. Then I said : "How did he find us, darling?"

"He was curious," Elaine murmured. "He wondered what you were after, so he followed you." She turned her head to me, with a smile, and added, "It was for the honor of his family."

"Where are we now?"

"On his ship. It's a big ship."

"Yes."

Elaine said: "There's nobody but ourselves left anywhere in the world?"

“Nobody,” I said. “Nobody like ourselves. But people are kind.”

“And we shall always bo alone?”

“Yes. And there will be nothing to do, ever, except live—and be happy.”

“That’s enough,” Elaine said,

“Quite enough.”

“It’s like being a child again.”

I nodded. The walls and floor of the little room hummed faintly, as if powerful engines turned behind them. I thought of Egypt. The wind whistled beyond a high window over our heads. It was late afternoon; a warm red square of sunlight hung suspended on the ceiling.

I whispered, “And you love me? ”

“Yes,” Elaine said.

THE END